

Lancaster Library Fun Palaces

In 2014, we were approached to host the Fun Palace by a small group of local community enthusiasts who'd read about Fun Palaces online and loved the idea of creating a free, friendly, fun DIY Art & Science festival in Lancaster. We had almost no funding so in the first year, everyone begged, borrowed and schmoozed wildly with every conceivable local artist and scientist we could find and they all amazingly gave their time, knowledge and expertise for free. It was a fantastic two days full of unexpected gems such as mass participation in a ukulele orchestra and laid the foundations for the next two years.

2016 saw the third annual fantastic Fun Palace event at Lancaster Library. Each year gets bigger and better.

2015 and 2016 have seen more local partners joining the organising committee which now consists of people from theatre directors, actors, graphic designers, local artists, members of the Friends of the Library and library staff. Everyone gives their time for free and work throughout the weekend coordinating, organising and ensuring the success of the festival. We are getting better at fundraising and have had amazing support from our County Councillors which has allowed us to think even bigger.

In 2015, we welcomed artists from across Lancashire as well as home-grown talent. Our community could try everything from geometric maths designs, jelly printing, archaeological activities, Bollywood folk dance, acting workshops and so much more.

This year saw our busiest festival yet with every room in the building involved alongside library users. In Lancaster, it's relatively easy to find amazing artists but we worked hard to offer more science activities. There were so many standout experiences including Meccano workshops, glass painting, 'build a bug', chocolate creation (all the way from bean to bar), Bridge classes, language cafes, flexible shapes and hyper cubes workshop.

The event has evolved over the three years and has the commitment and support of many local partners including LitFest, 'Light Up Lancaster', Lancaster University, ELART productions, all of whom have been involved in all three festivals. It has to be said that our library users are very patient, just roll up their sleeves and join in but equally other library users can be spotted reading a book in the midst of a Ukulele orchestra performance. This year we put up a feedback board for the public. Their responses were unequivocal - they love the festival, they have come back each year, they loved that the activities on offer were age inclusive and the range of experiences were amazing

The benefits for the community are multiple. The festival is free, accessible to all ages, it presents learning opportunities as fun and pleasurable and can appeal to people who may not see themselves as academic or "arty". It enables local creative people to develop their work within our community whilst giving the community access to experimental arts and science that is both surprising and inspiring. The library benefits from a festival which compliments and promotes the principles of

Lancashire libraries - making a difference through reading learning and information. In difficult times, it positions the library as a central focal space for the community to work together for the benefit of community.

