DUMFRIES LIVING ADVENT 2015

TO PROMOTE INCLUSION, PARTICIPATION AND INVOLVEMENT

A Magical Christmas Moment Every Day!

The Living Advent was an idea suggested by one of our volunteers, a singer and singing teacher, called Donna Winter. The idea was to have 24 short performances, one a day, every day, from the 1st to the 24th of December, thereby mimicing an actiual advent calendar that w all know and love. Donna was keen to showcase the huge variety of local talent in Dumfries. So Donna brought the idea to The Usual Place team who developed the idea into one which promotes inclusion, involvement, participation and citizenship for all our young trainees, our volunteers, our staff team and our whole community.

Donna volunteered to be the Living Advent Coordinator ably supported and assisted by Michael Sullivan and The Usual Place Team. They worked tirelesly to promote the idea to local organisations and to get a variety of people and events signed up.

We were lucky enough to have been supported by our local authority, Dumfries and Galloway Council who kindly donated the use of the Plainstanes and helped us to promote the whole concept of a Living Advent.

**Day 1** – Lockerbie Youth Group launched our advent with their brilliant singing! This group of youngsters came to us through Community Learning and Development and were a real joy to have involved. They dressed in their Peter Pan costumes and sang their socks off and really launched us with gusto and enthusiasm.

**Day 2** – the inimitable James Napper gave us a show stopper of a performance as Jessica Rabbit from Brigend Theatres, Alice in Wonderland production. A truly magical and memorable performance and he had the High Street rocking.

**Day 3** – Was scheduled to be a showcase of a local singer/song writer Darcy DaSilva, sadly for us the weather got the better of Darcy and she was unable to make it so we had an off the cuff performance of the 12 Days of Christmas from the Living Advent Team.

**Day 4** – The Oasis Youth Centre brought us their young singing group, including some trainees from The Usual Place, and they gave us a really energetic performance of both pop songs and traditional Christmas songs. A really amazing performance from this group of young singers and they drew quite a crowd.

**Day 5** – saw the Living Advent team pull off a performance of Burns poetry and songs at The Globe in Dumfries. We would like to point out this was in the midst of Storm Desmond at the time and it was definitely a groovy, windswept and interesting performance!

**Day 6** – again saw out intrepid Living Adventeers think on their feet. A cupcake decorating competition had been scheduled, however Storm Desmond was not allowing us to to decorate cupcakes, we were blown off the stage! So the Great Cupcake Giveaway took place instead! We have to say it’s the first time we have ever given away Christmas cupcakes in a windstorm!

**Day 7** – was Christmas Storytelling in our newly created Elf’s Workshop on the High Street. The fire was glowing, the tree was beautifully decorated and an abundance of chocolate coins were available for all.

**Day 8** – was the Lockerbie Ladies Singing Group, these ladies were just amazing, they sang a variety of modern and traditional Christmas songs, had a gentle flirt with the audience and were christened by Santa (who attended), ‘The Lockerbie Rockers’! The ladies then gave a second advent performance at The Usual Place later that evening.

**Day 9** – this saw another last minute change of plan as The White Rabbit felt unwell and was unable to make it. So the Adventeers and Santa offered ‘Santa Selfies’ in the Elf’s Workshop and Santa gave a once in a lifetime dance routine too!

**Day 10** – was over to Viridian Sky’s for an all day exhibition of their stunning astrophotography. These young entrepreneurs have taken some truly remarkable shots of our night sky’s and they offered prints as well as workshops.

**Day 11** – saw the return of the Lockerbie Youth Group to reprise their Peter Pan performance. They braved the wind and rain to sing their socks off a second time!

**Day 12** – this was the day the weather won! At least for a brief time. We had scheduled Africadabra to showcase their incredible drumming skills, however it was raining to almost biblical proportions and this meant the drummers couldn’t drum as the damp affects the resonance. They recorded us a session instead and this was posted on our Facebook page.

**Day 13** – The truly remarkable Dumfries Town Band took to the stage and had the whole High Street singing and dancing along to Christmas songs. They were even taking requests and locals and visitors alike thoroughly enjoyed their performance.

**Day 14** – The amazing team at the Burns Theatre took over for the day and offered Free Christmas Movies! This was in the centre of town at the Midsteeple and the movies came with Santa hats, chocolate, mince pies and shortbread as well as colouring activities for our younger guests

**Day 15** – The award winning Mostly Ghostly team came along to the Elf’s Workshop today to tell us the story of JM Barrie’s The Ghost of Christmas Eve and entertain us with tales of the eerie happenings they have seen locally. We were also lucky enough to host the People’s Poet who popped into the Elf’s Workshop to give us a reading.

**Day 16** – saw the Elf’s workshop open all day offering time with Santa, an opportunity to write to Santa and have your letter sent by Elf Express, an appearance by Peter Pan who kept Santa company and a visit from the truly talented Stref. Stref is an illustrator of childrens books (and ‘Pan’ in particular) and was offering personalised illustrations for all our younger visitors!

**Day 17** – a real hit with the Living Advent Team and every single person on the High Street, today saw St Ninians School Choir take centre stage and charm and delight us all with their singing. Although only young this choir filled the entire town centre with the Spirit of Christmas. Their singing was just incredible and brought a tear to many an eye.

**Day 18** – DG Cheer took to the stage to perform amazing acrobatic stunts, rousing cheers and gravity defying feats that took our breath away. We were lucky enough to have the junior squad and they braved the wind and rain to show us all how to cheer!

**Day 19** – saw The Music Room take over the stage for the afternoon and showcased us an incredible amount of local talent. Singers, dancers and bands were all featured and all very warmly received.

**Day 20** – Aaron Shepherd took the stage today and offered us his own unique choreography and dance. Aaron uses dance to express himself, to express song lyrics and to express emotion. A very talented young man indeed!

**Day 21** – saw the arrival of Paragon Theatre who spent the day giving an inclusive singing and music workshop and then a live performance from The Stove. We were mesmerised! They achieved a truly remarkable performance based on the particpants own thoughts on what Christmas means to them.

**Day 22** – saw Uisge Beatha offer us a full-on Singing Kettle extravaganza! People from every age particpated and enjoyed the sight, sounds and scent of Christmas and childhood that they gave us.

**Day 23** – saw the intrepid adventeers thinking on their feet again. The arrival of Storm Eva put an end to the proposed Peter Pan in the Park. This was replaced with The Great Chocolate Giveaway which saw the Adventeers offer chocolate to everyone they met in the High Street. Ho Ho Ho!

**Day 24** – The last day of advent saw us all get together at The Usual Place for a Christmas sing-song. Some of The Usual Place trainees and volunteers helped us to create this event and in doing so achieved their Dynamic Youth Award.

What makes The Living Advent so truly remarkable is the fact that it has been thought of, planned, lead, rehearsed and delivered by Volunteers. Every single particpant, front of house, frontstage, backstage and the support team volunteered their time, their skills, their energy, their positivity and their vision.

So The Living Advent 2015 was a first for The Usual Place, a first for Dumfries and a first for all our particpants! A truly amazing thing to have accomplished and which evidenced particpation, involvement and inclusion beyond our wildest dreams. Check out the Facebook Page ‘Dumfries Living Advent 2015’ for some amazing pictures!

So now for the big ‘THANK YOU’ In no particular order;

Donna Winter, and Ian, Jasmine and Rowan Winter for their help and support and the loan of Donna!

Michael Sullivan, the best Santa ever!

Dumfries and Galloway Council for their help and support, especially Ian Barr and Atlanta Mason, Community Learning and Development in both Lockerbie and Dumfries.

John Dinning for sound and lighting.

The Holywood Trust for helping us gather oversized decorations for the stage and Helen Turner for the loan of the BEST storytelling chair ever!

Katrina Galligan, The Theatre Royal, the Guild of Players, The Moat Brae Trust, Brigend Theatre, Oasis Youth Centre, Lockerbie Youth Group, James Napper, The Globe, Simone Tyrie, The Burns Theatre, The Midsteeple, Alex Murray, Dumfries and Galloway Life, Dumfries and Galloway Whats Going on, Dumfries and Galloway Standard, Dr Elaine Murray MSP, Russell Brown, The Town Band, Viridian Sky’s, Lockerbie Ladies Singers, St Ninian’s Primary School, Africadabra, Tim Jones, Mostly Ghostly, Stref, Pierluigi Angelini, DG Cheer, The Music Room, Paragon Music, Sara Redden, Aaron Shepherd, John and Rona Carson, the Stove, Brian Keachie, Turning Point Access Art, everyone who came and watched and supported us and our brilliant local community.

The entire team of trainees, volunteers and staff at The Usual Place – you inspired us to dare to dream we could do this!