



Canopy was set up to deliver a programme of biannual arts festivals, walks and talks across the Forest of Dean. Its aim is to bring together arts organisations, creative people, artists and communities to exchange and develop creative ideas, practical skills and an awareness of the diverse artistic resource on their doorstep. All for free.

This year has pretty much gone to – our ambitious – plan. In the last year Canopy has increased its turnover and activities by 200%.

Admittedly we did know that this was going to happen as at this time last year we knew we had won an Arts Council England Award that would enable us to proceed with the activities we had planned.

So here are some of this year's stats:

- Over 3500 attendees
- 9 art drop-in workshops during festivals providing approx 54 sessions
- 14 community workshops during festival preparatory period
- 2 youth group sessions
- 4 parades
- 6 artist talks
- 13 art walks
- 15 performances
- Approx 20 artists employed
- Approx 120 school children and preschoolers worked with
- Over 18 local venues used
- 40 wonderful volunteers

For more details with pictures please see our 2024 report.

I'd like to mention three other activities that we hadn't planned but are squeezing into the programme:

At short notice we also helped out with the Coleford Christmas Lights Switch On on 30<sup>th</sup> November 2024, where we ran 4 arts workshops in two schools to create lanterns for a parade. It was a great success thanks to Becky Hoar who stepped in at the last moment to make this happen. We think that over 3000 people attended!

Part of Canopy's programme over the last 4 years has been to develop Creative Walks in Nature offering one per month. As a result we know there is a demand for routes suitable for people with mobility difficulties and parents/carers and toddlers. Through funding from the Forest of Dean District Council's Active Travel Scheme, Canopy was commissioned to design three walks and make maps to cater for this group. Alex Sore has been engaged to coordinate this project and local illustrator Becky Embling will be designing the maps. The maps will be completed by the middle of March 2025 and we will have a launch at Soudley Village Hall on Sunday 16<sup>th</sup> March from 2.00pm - 3.30pm. All welcome.

We are working with Wyldwood Arts on their fringe festival again. Last year they helped us create a travelling exhibition that showed images of our Creative Walks in Nature. This year Wyldwood will support a Creative Walk in Nature with a food twist! Also on the Sunday 16<sup>th</sup> March, 10.30am to 12.30pm.

I would like to say that none of this could have been achieved without the amazing work done by Katie Sanderson our project manager, who has worked for us for almost a year now, Charlotte Keating on Comms and Alex who has just taken over this role. We have also had great support from loads of volunteers I'd like to mention, Penny Bellinger who has helped at many events supporting artists, Jenny Fisher who also gave up her time to help the team navigate an away day to review our mission statement, her husband Julian who gave his helpful insight too. Joanne Holmes who continues to support us and to whom I'm sure we will be approaching to assist with future funding bids. Adele and Lisa who have helped on many workshops, Melanie and Brian who offer us their first aid support. Mel, Jules, Robyn, David, Lou and all those who marshall and show up early to set up, and stay late to pack down. There are in fact too many of you to mention here, but we hope our thank you event back in October went some way towards showing you how grateful we are.

In 2025 we will be running two major events, one at Cinderford - Cinderford artsFEST on Saturday 17th May and then later in the year at Newent for Newent artsFEST which we expect to be in October, and increasing our profile in the Coleford Christmas Lights Switch On. In 2026 we will be running two further events in Bream and Lydney.

As usual we will be running all our regular activities alongside and in support of these events.

So an active busy 2024, with great plans for 2025. However, we are looking further ahead. Currently our business plan is simple: 50% national funding, 50% local funding. However it has become apparent that this model will need to change. Local town and parish councils are under increasing pressure and the arts are competing with many other things for a diminishing resource pot. So from 2026 we need to change and adapt. Our core activities will always be the same but our funding model will develop.

Consequently we are now focussing on developing projects with existing and new partners, who have a similar approach and mission to us. The Forestry Commission and Gloucestershire College are both on board already, and we are actively engaging with other organisations to enable Canopy to be more sustainable and equipped for the future.