



DaDa

40 Years of Disability Arts Activism 2024/2025 Impact

DaDaFest.co.uk



Supported using public funding by
**ARTS COUNCIL
ENGLAND**



**Liverpool
City Council**



Introduction

40 Years of disability arts activism

Working with disabled, Deaf and neurodivergent artists since 1984.

DaDa is an award-winning and pioneering disability arts organisation based in Liverpool with international reach and impact. Founded in 1984, we were one of the first disability-led arts organisations in the UK and an integral part of the campaign for greater equality and access for disabled artists across the arts sector. This report shows the true impact of our work across 2024/2025, our 40th anniversary year.

DaDa



Our Vision

Is for 'Equity and Excellence in the Cultural Landscape'.

Our Values

We strive to be :

- Radical
- Empowering
- Inclusive
- Respectful
- Ambitious
- Inventive

Disability: Social Model

Systemic barriers, negative attitudes and exclusion by society is what needs to change, not disabled people.

Artist Development

148

disabled artists worked with us during 2024/2025.

36

workshops were facilitated by DaDa and our associates.

19

digital projects were delivered.

9

short films premiered with us.



DaDa is committed to working with disabled artists to develop their practice. We do this through running projects with experienced partners such as Alder Hey, Liverpool Philharmonic and others, as well as supporting artists to connect with other organisations and opportunities that may help them to progress and realise their artistic ambition.

We embed access into our work and encourage and guide our artists to do the same.

Artist Development



DaDa collaborated with Liverpool Philharmonic Youth Company to deliver 'DaDa Makes Music', our young ensemble project.

Over the course of ten workshops, Liverpool Philharmonic musicians Georgina Aasgaard and Jon Hering and DaDa freelance musicians David Kelly and George Jenkins have mentored five Liverpool Philharmonic Youth Company musicians, five DaDa Ensemble members and one trainee lead musician to help create exciting and innovative new compositions.

This project built on a decade of similar work creating much-needed inclusive music sessions to the city region and showcasing what young disabled musicians can achieve.

Eva, participant in 'DaDa Makes Music' told us:

"I enjoyed making more music with the rest of the gang, and playing new chords every week. And why is that? Because it teaches me new chords. So then for future music, I know what I'm doing."

Artist Development



Having started to learn guitar from the age of 9, Joshua Henderson is a talented musician also playing piano and drums.

Josh was one of the earliest members of DaDa's Young Ensemble project, working with producers and musicians to develop and perform original compositions.

Through this project, Josh's talent and musical ambition shone, and in 2021 DaDa supported Josh to apply for funding from Youth Music to **record his first solo album 'Songs of Liverpool for Friends'**. Josh worked with the DaDa team through our artist development programme to create, rehearse and record his debut tracks.

In 2024, DaDa worked with Josh to launch his album at The Bluecoat during learning disability awareness week, working in partnership with Mersey Ferries to promote the launch by playing his tracks to commuters on the morning ferry.

In 2025 HMV Liverpool stocked Josh's album, and Josh joined Film @ FACT night during DDFI40 to share his journey through ensemble to recording artist.



Dave Kelly, musician who supported the recording of Josh's album said:

"Having worked with Josh for around 5 years I've been able to see him develop as a musician, and as a young person, into becoming an independent musician working on his own album. The project has inspired me in my own creative work a lot. Working with Josh inspires you to trust your artistic instinct."

"I've learned a lot from Josh as an artist, because Josh works a lot on what his instinct is, his creative instinct, and he goes with it. It's helped me understand to trust that more as an artist, but also as a coordinator and working on the project. It's, really, to listen closely to what the person is saying, and as a mentor, listening so closely and taking all of what Josh says really seriously, because he's a serious young artist, and he deserves that respect."

Josh said of his journey:

" I think DaDa was the best time for me."

Artist Development



Alder Experiences, a project commissioned by DaDa working with Alder Hey, offered children receiving care at the hospital opportunity to work with disabled-led Liverpool film company, Twin Vision, to create an animated film.

The animation documented realistic features of a child's experience of visiting the hospital, along with elements of fantasy, to allow the young animators an opportunity to get creative. One participant's parents told us:

"She had low self-esteem, and that was when she was invited to DaDaFest. It was just, I think, a brilliant opportunity for her."

"They opened the door to her and she seemed to find different aspects of art. They encouraged it and it seemed to, like, spread out. She's come on amazingly. The art has helped her again with her mental health. It's gave her that focus, something to focus on when she is feeling really quite overwhelmed quite quickly, and that's when she will go to her art. "

Artist Development

7

exhibitions curated showcasing disability arts and activism.

5

podcasts recorded and released adding access to artist work.

3

theatre shows hosted.

1

debut album released.



Our artist development work has enabled us to collaborate with expert partners, creating programmes with local, national and international reach.

Our partnerships create space for us to influence the sector on access and visibility of disabled artists and their work.

This year we've had some firsts in our delivery including a new podcast and an album release.

DaDaFest



100%

of the artists commissioned identify as disabled.

DaDaFest is the largest and longest-running disability arts festival in the UK.

As DaDa turned 40 in 2024, DaDaFest International 2025 became a huge 40th birthday celebration.

90%

of events held for DDFI40 were free to attend.

The theme 'Rage: A Quiet Riot' was co-created with our community reflecting frustration that gaps in society are widening and how we are still far from equity and representation at all levels.

47%

of our audience identify as disabled.

DDFI40 showcased work by disabled artists capturing all shapes and sides of rage. From the internal quiet frustrations and righteous rage, to overt injustice and activism.

Our Audience



561,234

total estimated footfall.

“The launch was so fun, refreshing and joyful. To be with disabled people who understand. Disabled people’s lives should be full of happiness, compassion, love and kindness not just struggles and frustration.”

- Audience Member

29,600

total engagement figure across our events.

“Access is something we have just taken for granted. Never really thought that so many disabled people don't have it until we saw this exhibition.”

- Audience Member

DaDaFest International



Faith first became involved with DaDa in 2016, when, as part of DaDaFest, she created new sculptures for her exhibition 'Balancing Act' which was developed into a tour of the work across city venues. Faith was also on the advisory board of DaDaFest for about a year in the early days of the festival, returning for DDFI40 in 2025. Faith said:

"I was delighted to be commissioned to create a new artwork for the DDI40 festival 'RAGE: A Quiet Riot', collaborating with Janet Price to produce 'Pimp My Wheelchair' an exhibition of a collection of new sculptures inspired by plants defence mechanisms, launched with a live event at Sefton Park Palm House, March 2025."

"Confirming the Palm House as the venue hosting was a big moment, as it was the ideal setting for the theme of the work. When the Pimp My Wheelchair March/procession started it was so exciting to see all the wearable sculptures come together and being worn/used by a lovely group of people who volunteered. It was good to work with Janet Price - another disabled artist learning to work collaboratively, exploring ideas, sharing the making and preparations."



With access and inclusion at the heart of DaDa's work, Faith said she worked with the team to improve communication with her as an artist and worked with the organisation to include new access measures into her work:

"The online audio description of each sculpture facilitated by DaDaFest (with QR codes on exhibit labels to offer other points of access) was a new access measure for my practice. I was pleased to have DaDa's support to provide this and would definitely like to provide that for any future exhibitions."

Faith believes it would be good for other organisations to work towards improving their access offer to mirror the practice of DaDa.

"The breadth and range of access support on offer, thoughtfully tailored to suit each individual artist or project participant is something for all organisations to strive for or work towards."

Organisations that support artist development for disabled artists are still important, according to Faith, "because we still need to battle for our rights in a creative way." It's important to be "seen and be 'seen' together. DaDa generates opportunities that I would never have had otherwise, to create new work with other disabled artists." Faith is keen to see disabled artists intrinsically integrated into mainstream arts and culture saying: "I would like it to be less of a special separate thing."



DaDaFest

97%

thought DDFI40 was good or excellent.

The first DaDaFest was held in 2001. And since then the impact has been huge. We surveyed our audiences at DDFI40 along with our artists to capture the impact reflected here.

92%

thought accessibility at DDFI40 was good or excellent.

“Fantastic production support and liaison with the council and venue partners, strong confidence in the artwork.

Would love to work with DaDa again, a wonderful team and fantastic partners, lots of ways to grow and learn from this year's experience. Thank you for making us part of this special anniversary event.”

76%

said attending increased their understanding of disability as a social issue.

Cathy Mager, Artist
Hand Ships Sail

72%

said the event they attended exceeded their expectation.

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Partnership & Influencing



Liverpool
Biennial

DaDa has a long-standing relationship with Liverpool Biennial, and this year we collaborated to co-commission work by international artist Amy Claire Mills, a disabled and neurodivergent artist whose work delves into themes of advocacy, identity, and resistance.

During DDFI40, Amy presented 'Sweat the System', a disability-led movement workshop facilitated by Amy Claire Mills and Bedelia Lowrenčev. This online workshop invited participants to move and shake their bodies through sweat and play. It was not about fitness, but about liberation, using movement as a tool for self-expression, catharsis, and collective joy.

Developing from this work, Amy Claire Mills and her collaborators created an exciting pool party at Liverpool Aquatics Centre for an event supported by DaDa as part of Liverpool Biennial.

DaDa introduced Amy to local artists Amina Atiq, Natalia Bedkowska and Jordon Connerty who created a pool party inspired by the movements and exercises used in hydrotherapy. This event helped to promote Amy's exhibition during Liverpool Biennial's 'Bedrock' programme titled 'Deep End', an immersive sensory installation that invites exploration through touch, sight, and sound. The project explored the concept of accessible and adaptive 'third spaces'.

We interviewed the Biennial team. Here is what they said:

What have you implemented as a result of working with DaDa?

Additional understanding of lived experience from the perspectives of DaDa staff, Board and artists. The development of a network of access provider/coordinators/facilitators. Additional disability awareness training. Shared skills in Easy Read using an example from Not Your Circus Dog. Added knowledge of screen reader technology for the development of web pages, online forms and other web-based content.

Has working with DaDa changed your perception of disability? Yes.

Every new partnership with disabled people gives new insight into lived experience. This is because every person's experience is unique and more opportunities to work with new people enriches and expands our perception of the barriers people face and enables us to find new ways of removing them and becoming more inclusive.

Is your organisation now more likely to work with disabled people?

And, if so, what has made it more likely?

Yes. Every experience of working with disabled artists gives us new ways of working and developing our understanding. This is really valuable to us and we want to continue expanding our networks to make them more inclusive and to ensure diverse, lived experience is represented in our work.

What made you decide to work with DaDa?

“DaDa is one of the most respected disabled-led local organisations with years of experience and a very wide network of artists. We wanted to share experience and develop new work, confident that we would receive good advice and a diverse range of experience.”

What was best about working with DaDa?

Receiving confident and constructive advice and guidance and access to networks.

**Liverpool
Biennial**





DaDa worked with over 70 disabled artists through DaDaFest International 40.

We reached out to all of the artists who took part after the festival to capture their experience and feedback.

These stats reflect their thoughts.

We asked: "What did you find best about working with DaDa during DDFI40?"

"Support, creative nurturing, warm and friendly, and vision."

Dolly Sen, Artist
Please Rage Generously

5/5

was their rating for their overall experience of working with DaDa.

5/5

was their rating for how much they were able to develop their creative practice.

4/5

was their rating for how much they felt supported in their work by DaDa.



Partnerships are central to our festival delivery, and enable us to share our expertise around access and disability arts with the wider cultural sector.

“Working with the Festival has made me more aware of what people living with disability are dealing with on a daily basis. It increased my awareness of what people with disability face, as this covers so many individual circumstances which I was aware of, but working with DaDa has increased my awareness.”

Sefton Park Palm House

We gained a **“great understanding of what is a disability and in the case of the gallery, who can see Neon Light.”**

Williamson Art Gallery

1 in 3

partners have implemented new access and inclusion measures as a direct result.

100%

said working with DaDa has changed their perception of disability.

100%

are more likely to work with disabled artists as a result of our partnership.

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DaDaFest



Our Goals

Ambition & Quality

We will continue to work with ambitious disabled artists, creating opportunities for them to develop and hone their practice. Through DaDaFest we will seek to attract and exhibit quality work from exceptional disabled artists both locally, nationally and internationally.

Dynamism

We will invest in skills development for our team, and work with external experts to further our knowledge of emerging technologies that both enhance artistic practice, and support disabled access.

Environmental Responsibility

We will connect with artists and organisations who understand that the climate crisis disproportionately effects disabled people. We will create conversations that will shed light on this, and commission work that responds to the themes raised.

Inclusivity & Relevance

We will share our expertise with others to widen access and inclusion in arts and cultural spaces. Through our festival we'll encourage widening participation in the arts and deepen our understanding of intersectionality within disability arts.

Please note, some quotes used have been slightly amended to help with readability, but the integrity of the statements remain the same.



With huge thanks to:



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