

Staged for Life

2016 Report



*“Being unemployed for so long I retreated from society. This has got me back into things - reintegrating. I feel like myself again. There have been so many **positive** things....it’s been a very, very good idea to get involved.” - Mike, 2016 project participant*



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1. Introduction - *what is Staged for Life?*

Established in 2015, Staged for Life is an **employability** project that provides free, accredited training courses for young unemployed people to learn skills in how to operate sound and lighting equipment for live events. Supported work placements at various Edinburgh Festival Fringe venues are offered to all project participants who complete the course, in order for them to gain **meaningful industry experience** within the world's largest arts festival.

Youth unemployment is a significant, and ongoing, problem in Scotland. Amid increasingly **clear evidence** that this social issue requires urgent attention, the Scottish Government recently pledged to cut youth unemployment in Scotland by **40%** by 2021. The severity of this problem was further highlighted when Sir Ian Wood's Commission for Developing Scotland's Young Workforce concluded that Scotland was not satisfactorily preparing or equipping its young people for work.



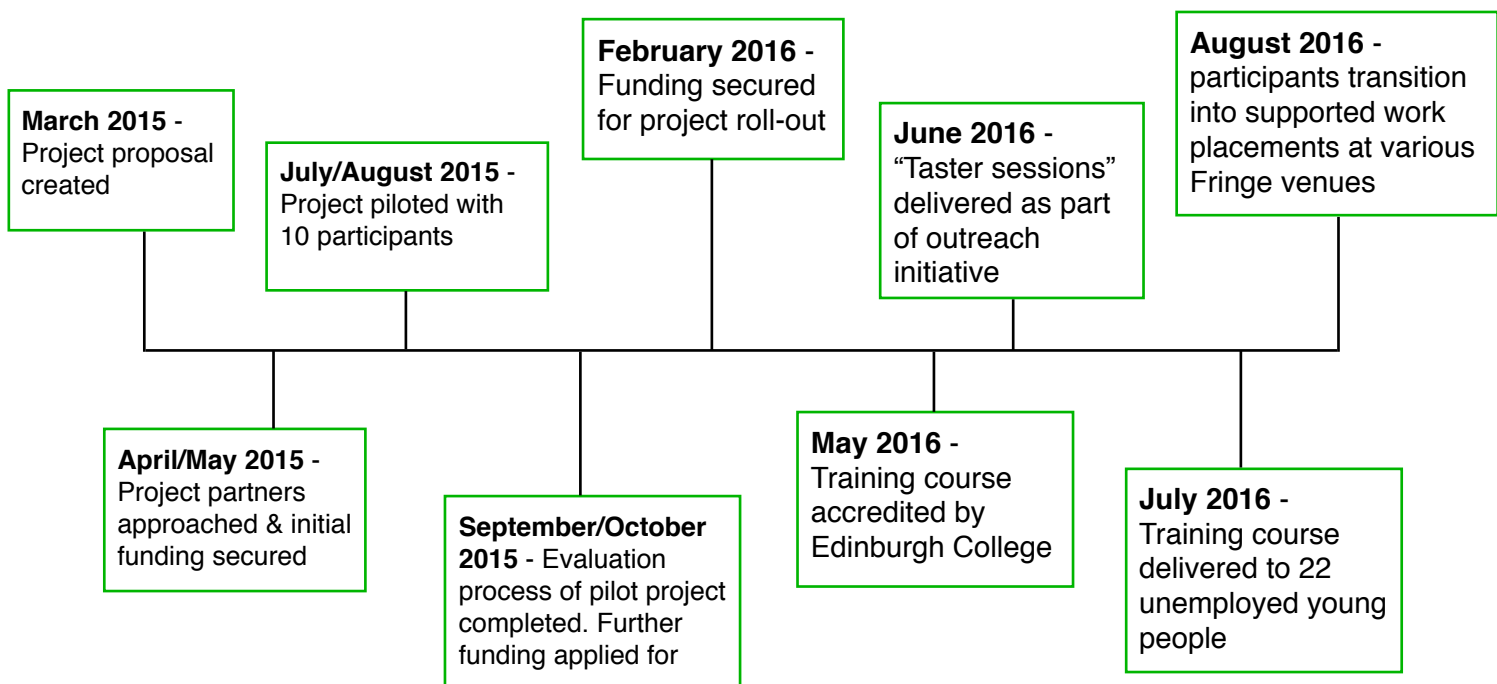
Participants learning how to programme lights during the training course

This initiative not only provides the young people involved with relevant skills and work experience in the rapidly growing industry of live events, but also facilitates **personal development** through exposure to art, culture, social dialogue and team-work. Staged for Life strengthens links between the Edinburgh Festival Fringe and local communities, allowing a positive legacy to be left after each year's festival.

2. This report

This report provides a review of the 2016 project, includes background information and highlights key stages of project planning, programme delivery and post-delivery evaluation. Also included in this report are plans for project development.

3. Project Timeline



4. Aims of this Project

The scale of recent growth within the UK events sector has been extraordinary. It is forecast to contribute £48.4 billion to the economy by 2020. In order for events to operate, creative technical support is required, which is the **key area of skills-transfer** on this project. The number of creative jobs in the UK rose by 66,000 to 2.62m in 2013 as creative roles grew faster than the rest of the economy. One in 12 UK roles is now a creative job.

Having discussed this project with a wide variety of organisations and institutions, it has been concluded that **no other** such employability initiatives are currently in operation - certainly within Scotland. Developing a unique training course, that links work experience with the world's largest arts festival, has been an **exciting opportunity**, and one that has attracted support from a wide range of organisations.



Participants on their festival supported work placements

The 2016 Edinburgh Festival Fringe had an **incredible variety** of events taking place across **294** venues - the large majority requiring sound and lighting technicians. This situation presents a perfect opportunity for young people to develop a range of new skills. Those in the events industry understand the importance of having recognised

experience and qualifications on CVs in order to gain employment, but yet young people consistently find difficulty affording training and obtaining meaningful work experience.

The core aims of Staged for Life:

- Create accessible opportunities for young people to develop new, practical skills
- Provide clear paths to positive destinations - full-time employment and education
- Increase the general employability of young people involved with the project
- Promote the development of social interaction and team working skills
- Ensure opportunities for marginalised, “hard to reach” young people
- Increase the self-confidence and communication skills of participants
- Provide sense of achievement through facilitating meaningful work experience
- Raise awareness of other cultures, traditions and art-forms
- Support the events industry through identifying and nurturing talent

5. Planning & Development Process

Staged for Life was founded by John Grieve in 2015, with support from Edinburgh-based charity Just Festival. After an initial project proposal was created and distributed, outlining the needs for such an initiative, funding was secured in May 2015 to pilot the concept. A core team was recruited, and the proposal came to life.

The structure and content of the Staged for Life sound and lighting training course, together with the course workbook, was originally developed and delivered in 2015 by two highly-respected sound and lighting specialists, Chris Aberdeen and Thom Hall, along with John Grieve. Additional support and advice was provided by David McFarlane (founder of Black Dingo Productions). The course was designed to be as practical, accessible and interactive as possible, allowing a variety of transferrable skills to be learnt and put into practice.

2016 core team



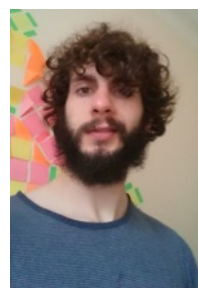
Chris Aberdeen



Thom Hall



David McFarlane



Adam Bowers



John Grieve

10 young people were selected for the pilot, **8** of whom completed the course and **7** transitioned into supported work placements with Just Festival during August 2015. Once the pilot was completed, a steering group was set up by several of the project participants. Over the following months the group met every few weeks and discussed how the project could be developed. A report was written in October 2015 and funding applications submitted. Funding was awarded in early 2016 from Young Start, Ernst Cook Trust and Dr Guthrie's Association, allowing the initiative to be rolled out.

Although the steering group were clear that they wanted the project to remain largely the same, several recommendations were made to enhance the initiative.

Key areas of project development outlined for 2016 were:

- Increasing scale of summer training course to accommodate 22 participants
- Officially accrediting the training course through Edinburgh College
- Promoting and advertising Staged for Life to raise exposure
- Setting up a Facebook page, linking with relevant individuals and organisations
- Delivering “taster” sessions as part of an outreach programme
- Developing new partnerships with a variety of Edinburgh Fringe venues, to host a greater variety of supported work placements
- Producing a short film about the project

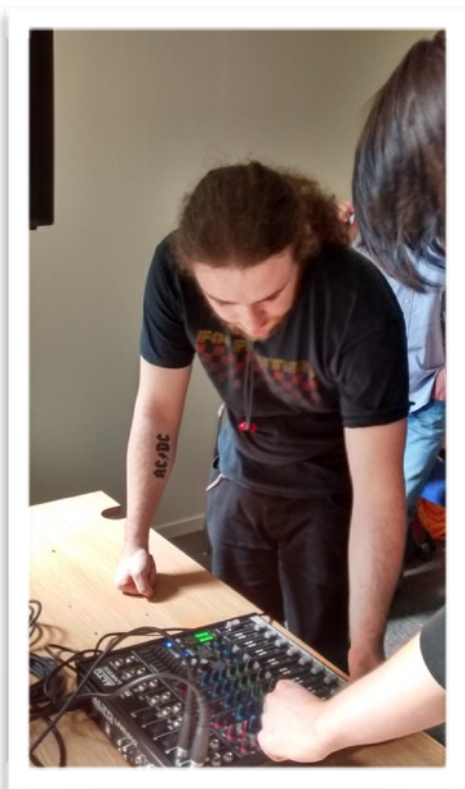
6. Participant recruitment

A total of **165 applications** were received for the 2016 Staged for Life training course, in the space of just three weeks. The Jobcentre Plus, Edinburgh City Council (through the Edinburgh Guarantee) and Access to Industry were key organisations that supported this process. They assisted with the creation of an advert for the opportunity, and distributed it throughout their networks.

The application process was designed to be very similar to that of a paid job, in order that everyone applying would gain experience of submitting a cover letter and CV. Three days of interviews took place, leading to **22 young people** being short-listed for a place on the 2016 training course. No previous experience was required - selection was based on the candidates' work ethic and enthusiasm to learn new skills.

“Taster” sessions took place in several community settings, allowing groups of marginalised 16 - 24 year-olds to engage in practical two-hour workshops to learn more about the project, and the events industry. These sessions led to six successful applications from young people involved.

Information about the initiative featured on various organisations’ websites, including the Edinburgh Festival Fringe Society, Creative Scotland, Young Scot, Youthlink, Joined up for Jobs and the Scottish Music Centre. Adverts were also placed on the “training” section within Gumtree and Indeed during June. Applications were received from **all over Scotland** and even extended to England, Wales, France, Italy, Spain, Norway, South Africa and USA.

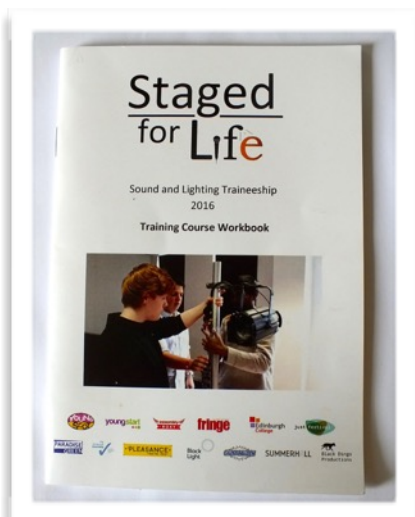


“Taster” sessions taking place in community settings throughout Edinburgh, June 2016

The volume of interest, and number of applications received, is a reflection of the current enthusiasm that many young people have for learning technical skills and gaining experience within the events industry.

7. Project Content

<p>Training course week 1</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Working safely in the events industry • Introduction to lighting equipment • Introduction to live sound equipment • Rigging • Hanging drapes • Operating projectors and building screens • Setting up for a corporate conference • Talk from Rachel Sanger about the Edinburgh Festival Fringe • Operating sound and lights for a live band • Operating sound and lighting for a puppeteer
<p>Training course week 2</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Operating advanced sound and lighting equipment • Trouble-shooting • Equipment maintenance • Principles of stage management • Communicating effectively with performers, event organisers and team members • Working with a script • Meeting director and performers for “showcase” event • Technical rehearsals • Delivering “showcase” event
<p>Supported work placement</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attending venue inductions • Meeting venue teams • Assisting with installation of sound and lighting equipment • Testing equipment • Meeting performers and discussing shows • Supporting technical rehearsals • Assisting with the delivery of a variety of events • Taking on more responsibilities as placement progresses



Example pages from the workbook that accompanied the course

8. Course Delivery

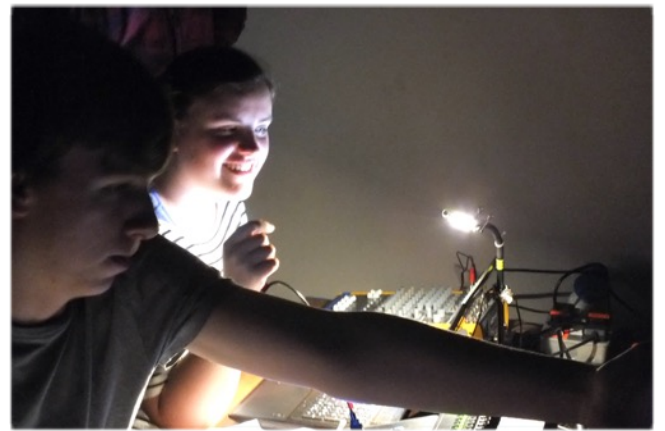
Chris Aberdeen and Thom Hall once again led the delivery of the 2016 training course - their extensive industry experience allowing them to transfer many skills to the participants. In order to support the process of training a larger number of participants (over double that of 2015) Adam Bowers joined the team in the role of Assistant Tutor. Adam was a participant during the 2015 project, and was able to contribute a **unique perspective** throughout the planning and delivery phases of the course.

The 2016 course was held in the Assembly Roxy - an established year-round events venue that has three large performance spaces and an **excellent range of technical facilities**. Additional industry-standard equipment was kindly supplied, for the duration of the course, by Edinburgh College, Black Light, MCL Create and Production Bureau.

On the first day, each participant was presented with an Edinburgh Festival Fringe goodie bag, a course workbook and a pair of steel toe-capped boots. Throughout the two weeks participants were split up into small groups to take part in **practical workshops**, covering a variety of key topics (see project content table).



The group being introduced to a sound desk



Hannah & Tom learning to operate a lighting desk

Also featuring in the course was a talk about the Edinburgh Festival Fringe from Rachel Sanger, a visit from the Ekobirds (an emerging local band) and a workshop with Tania Czajka (a leading Edinburgh-based puppeteer).

The course concluded with a **“showcase” event**. This involved the participants working closely together to plan and deliver technical support for the performance of three short plays. Friends, family, project partners and members of the public were invited to attend this event and witness the participants utilising their newly-learnt skills. This unique

experience provided each young person involved with a **profound sense of achievement** and a genuine taste of working within the events industry.

17 out of the 22 participants successfully completed the training course, creating a **77%** pass rate. This is a very similar pass rate to the pilot project in 2015, building a consistent picture of how the young people respond to the course

9. Supported Work Placements

A key aim for 2016 was to develop partnerships with a variety of Edinburgh Festival Fringe venues, to host a greater variety of supported work placements. With support from the Edinburgh Festival Fringe Society, a presentation about Staged for Life was delivered at a venue managers meeting in Oct' 2015, receiving **positive responses**.

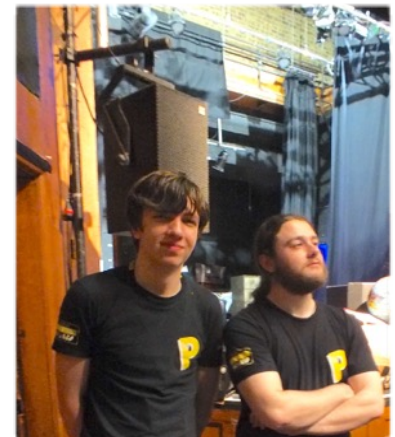
The Pleasance, Gilded Balloon and Paradise Green joined Just Festival in hosting supported work placements during 2016. A total of **14 participants** took part in placements within a range of venues, from some of the smallest in the festival, to some of the largest. Tasks included assisting with equipment load-ins and testing, technical rehearsals and rigging, all under the supervision of venue managers.



Garry at the Gilded Balloon



Hannah at Just Festival

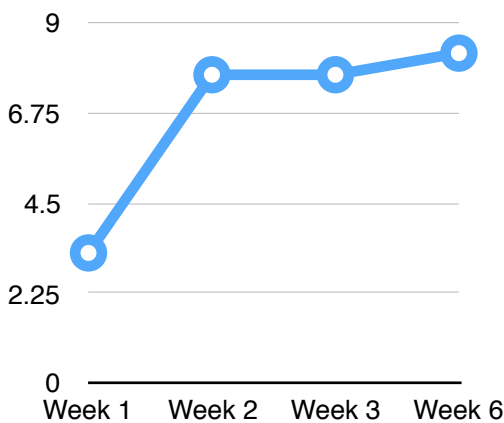


Tom and Mike at the Pleasance

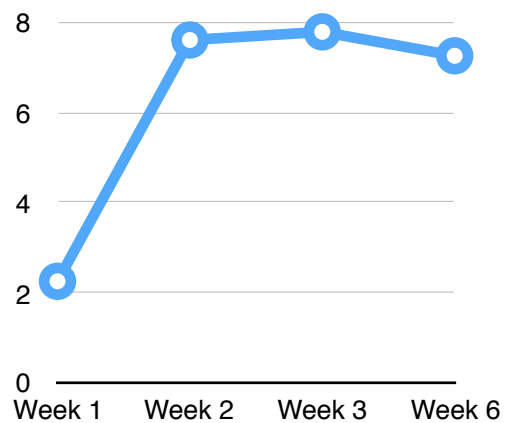
During the festival participants helped to deliver a diverse range of events, operating sound and lighting equipment at a professional level. As the festival progressed, the young people involved were offered opportunities to take on more responsibility for certain performances. Support was always available but participants appeared to thrive with additional responsibility, heightening their levels of **confidence and satisfaction**.

10. Monitoring and Evaluation

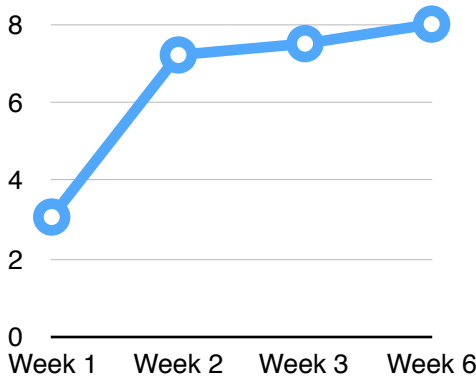
A **comprehensive** monitoring and evaluation process was implemented throughout the project, involving participants, tutors and venue staff providing quantitative and qualitative information. All participants completed a series of questions, on a sliding scale (**0 = very low, 10 = very high**) at different stages of the training course, and at the end of the placements. The results (averages taken) are displayed below:



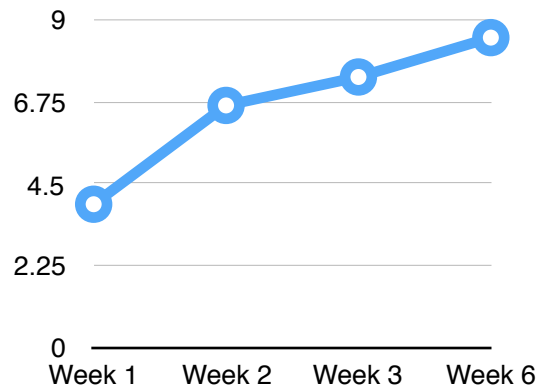
How confident are you in operating sound equipment?



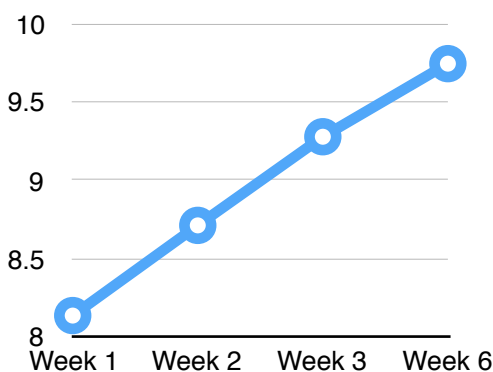
How confident are you in operating lighting equipment?



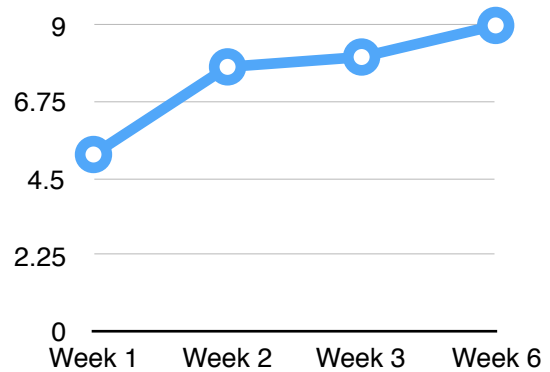
How confident are you in applying for jobs in the sound and lighting industry?



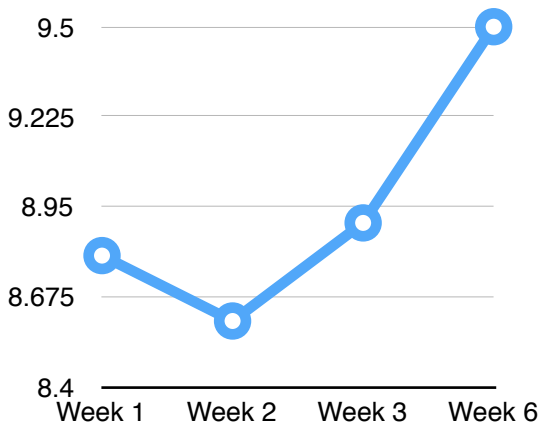
What is your level of knowledge about the events industry?



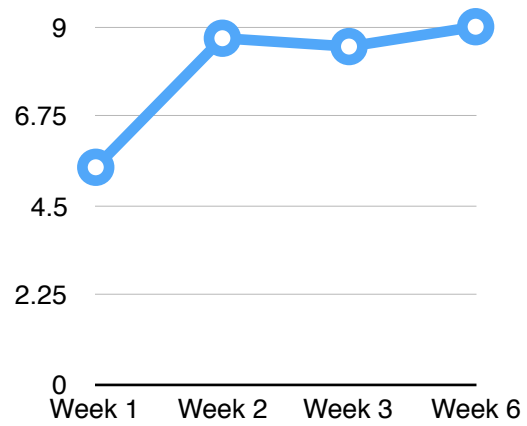
How confident are you in your ability to work as part of a team?



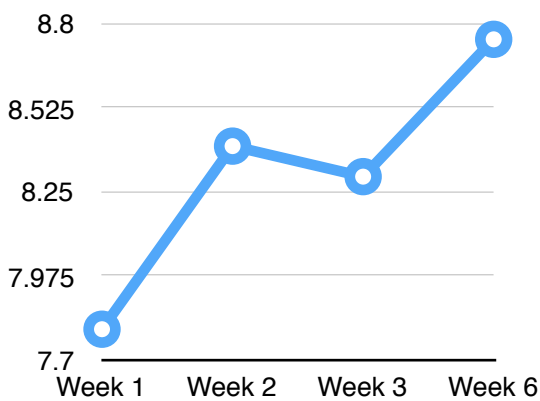
What is your level of knowledge about the Edinburgh Festival Fringe?



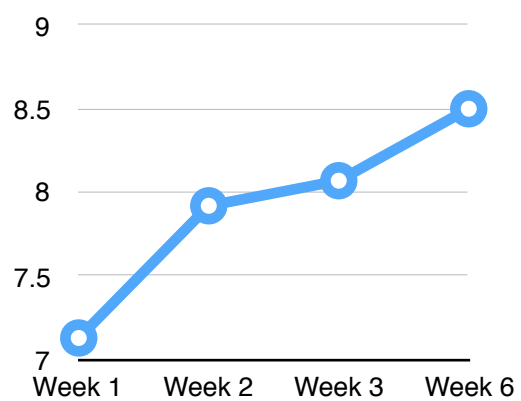
How important is art in your life?



What is your level of knowledge about working safely in the events industry?



How confident are you in your communication skills?



How confident are you in a general job application process?

A final evaluation form was completed by all of the participants, to get a general sense of how they found the experience. The following series of yes/no questions were asked:

- Were the training facilities adequate for the 2 week course? Yes - 100%
- If you were involved in a work placement placement, did you utilise skills learnt from the course? Yes - 100%
- Did you find the work placement beneficial? Yes - 100%
- Was there adequate support throughout the process? Yes - 100%
- Were the facilities adequate at the work placement? Yes - 100%
- Do you feel more confident in finding employment by taking part in this process? Yes - 100%

Further comments were requested, some of which feature below:

*“The placements gave me valuable experience in a real working environment. I feel more confident as I now feel I have employable skills”
- Claire*

“It was great!! It definitely made me more confident”- Caitlin

“I suffer from anxiety and it was really good for my mental health problems. It was a safe environment and it helped me come out of my shell. I am much more confident now” - James

“Staged for Life was 100% practical and I really appreciated that.” - Mike

“Wouldn’t change anything. The way it was taught felt the right way to do it. I was able to learn more about the industry and get 1st hand experience. I have lots of ‘real life’ experience now that I can use in the future.” - Tom

“I have had a wonderful time, met wonderful people - learnt lots of new skills and led to me wanting to pursue this as a career. It’s been incredibly beneficially. Got me away from doing my usual routine and boring life. Got me up doing something I’ve found fun. Brilliant.” - Craig

“I thought it was a really great experience. Fun, interesting, and hard work in equal measures” - Livy

“Knowing that I’ve successfully completed the course and placement (especially during the Fringe) means I feel I’ve got abilities that employers will now recognise” - Gabriel

Recurring comments were captured from participants when asked how the project could be improved, and are as follows:

- Slightly fewer numbers of participants on the training course, or an additional tutor, to allow more one-on-one time
- A digital version of the workbook, with links to relevant youtube tutorials, would be useful for during and after the training course
- A follow-up advanced training course would allow participants to continue their learning, and further develop their skills

Feedback was also received from the venues who hosted supported work placements during the Edinburgh Festival Fringe, all of whom stated they would like to host again:

*“The GB production team thoroughly embraced the opportunity to host Staged for Life placements.....we all hoped they would seize the opportunity with both hands and do their absolute best. We feel confident they did and the whole experience has left us feeling rather **warm and fuzzy.**”*

“I think this programme is a great opportunity for young people to gain entry into an industry that has a lot of job satisfaction and an industry in which you can make friends for life.”

- Siobhan Biggs, Production Manager, Gilded Balloon

11. Next Steps

- Regular steering group meetings will continue to take place, in order for the young people who have been involved with the initiative to shape the future of the project
- Year round events/workshops will be organised, such as a “events industry CV masterclass”, alongside ongoing mentorship and dissemination of employment, training and volunteering opportunities within the events sector
- A training course in Jan’/Feb’ 2017 (with supported work placements at ESAF - Edinburgh Student Arts Festival) is currently being explored, in addition to the summer programme
- Further “taster” sessions will be organised in conjunction with community-based organisations as part of ongoing outreach work

- Links will be made with Fringe Festivals in other countries, with the goal of creating an exchange programme
- Project participants will provide regular updates of their circumstances, in order to gauge the long-term impact of the project
- Funding sources must be identified and secured to ensure the project continues beyond 2017
- Develop the Staged for Life Facebook page to become a hub of information



Post-festival steering group meeting

12. Conclusion

Having only piloted in 2015, Staged for Life has made **significant developments** since its inception. Receiving such large numbers of applications for this year's project was a reassuring sign of how relevant this initiative is for young people, both in Scotland and internationally.

Information captured from the monitoring and evaluation process reveals the scale of impact this project has had on the young people involved. Participants reported an **increase in confidence** within a range of areas; from abilities in operating technical equipment, to communicating and working effectively in teams. An increase in confidence with approaching general job applications was also reported. This is significant because although not every participant will decide to pursue a career in events, their involvement with this project has certainly equipped them with tools to find employment in a variety of other fields. **General employability** has been increased, which is a core aim of this initiative.

Adjusting the 2016 training course to allow greater numbers of young people, from a more **diverse range of backgrounds**, to get involved was undoubtedly a positive step but also presented challenges. Feedback from participants regarding an additional course tutor will be taken into consideration to ensure enough individual attention is available.

Having the training course accredited has allowed a **clearer pathway** into full-time education for participants. Indeed, **3** young people have transitioned onto an HNC Technical Theatre course at Edinburgh College directly due to their involvement with Staged for Life in 2016. In addition, the 14 individuals who undertook supported work placements now have experience that will be recognised across a range of industries, especially within the events sector.

Support received from so many organisations reflects the need for Staged for Life to exist. It is a focus of the Edinburgh Festival Fringe Society to make the festival more **accessible**, while the events sector understand the need to nurture new talent to meet it's industries growth. Barriers remain in place for young people (especially those who are marginalised) to access education, training, work experience and the arts. High levels of youth unemployment persist, and will require pro-active input from all employment sectors to tackle this social problem.



“He is by far the best tech I have worked with in my eight years of live performance ...his attention to detail was impeccable and he was totally unflappable when something occasionally went awry. I hope for the sake of anxious performers he continues on his current career path...”

Amy Howerska (award winning Comedian, Actress, Writer), providing feedback on working with Gabriel - a 2016 participant of Staged for Life

This report was written and compiled by John Grieve, Sept' 2016. To get more information or to pledge support, please contact John via email: john@just-festival.org