



2023 - 25 IMPACT REPORT

#MTFF #MANSFIELDLOVESFILM



Prepared by

Jay Martin
(Festival Director)

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Introduction By Jay Martin



Since our launch in 2023, Mansfield Town Film Festival (MTFF) has grown into Nottinghamshire's largest film festival.

Showcasing over 350 films from across the globe, from over 760 submissions, but with a heart firmly rooted in our local community.

What began as a bold idea to put Mansfield on the filmmaking map while championing working-class voices, has now become a cultural fixture in our region.

These first three years have been defined by growth, resilience, and impact.

We've welcomed hundreds of audience members, attracted filmmakers from across the UK and internationally, and provided a platform for female, neurodiverse and disabled, working-class and queer filmmakers whose stories so often go unheard.

At its core, MTFF embodies the vision of our primary funder Arts Council England's 'Let's Create' strategy: enabling creative people, building cultural communities, and contributing to a creative and cultural country.

This report highlights our successes, the challenges we have faced, and the future opportunities we must seize if MTFF is to continue playing its vital role in Mansfield's cultural life.

350+ SHORT FILMS SCREENED

1000+ INDIVIDUAL AUDIENCE MEMBERS

75+ FIVE-STAR FILMMAKER REVIEWS

768 FILM SUBMISSIONS RECEIVED

Our Vision, Mission and Values



Vision

Change the cultural perception of Mansfield Town through promoting working-class talent, fostering cultural enrichment, creativity, and community unity, to make a lasting contribution to the cultural legacy of Mansfield Town and beyond.

Mission

To create a dynamic platform that showcases diverse voices, with a special emphasis on promoting and uplifting working-class talent. By championing inclusivity, accessibility, artistic excellence, and supporting emerging filmmakers, we will enrich the cultural tapestry of Mansfield Town and beyond.

Values

- Resilience
- Passion
- Authenticity
- Community

Team Culture Values

- Teamwork
- Communication
- Professionalism
- Dedication

Strategic Priorities

- Support diverse emerging filmmakers.
- Develop and build upon a broad range of partnerships.
- Engage proactively with communities to increase diversity.
- Develop a robust and professional organisation.
- Develop and establish a sustainable business model.

Festival Overview '23

The inaugural Mansfield Town Film Festival took place over three days from July 14 - 16 2023 at the historic Mansfield Palace Theatre, marking a bold new cultural chapter for the town.

The festival was officially endorsed by acclaimed filmmaker Ken Loach, whose support signalled the significance of launching a platform for working-class voices in cinema. Loach's words underlined MTFFF's mission to put Mansfield on the cultural map while giving space to underrepresented filmmakers.

In its first year, MTFFF screened 106 films drawn from local, regional, national and international submissions. The programming focused on diversity and inclusion from the outset, with dedicated strands for Working-Class Voices, LGBTQIA+ Voices, Women's Voices, Documentaries, Animations, and locally-made films from West Nottinghamshire College.

Beyond the screenings, the festival introduced breakout sessions, panel discussions, and networking events, such as our Inclusive Coffee Morning run by the internationally-recognised team behind the Women X Film Festival, creating an environment where filmmakers and audiences could engage in dialogue. The Mansfield Film Awards celebrated outstanding talent, with prizes recognising not only technical achievement but also authentic storytelling rooted in working-class life.

Audience response to the inaugural festival was strong and enthusiastic with local press praising the festival as an ambitious and much-needed addition to Mansfield's cultural offering.

The first edition also laid the groundwork for MTFFF's strive for affordability, inclusivity, and accessibility: tickets were set at just £10 per day, and £25 for the full festival, ensuring that cost would not be a barrier to participation.

By the end of its debut year, MTFFF had achieved what many thought impossible: it had established Mansfield as a new home for independent film, proven the appetite for cinema in the town, and set the stage for growth in the years ahead.



→ Films Screened

106

→ Total Submissions

234

→ Audience Attendance

292

→ Curated Strands

13

→ Breakout Sessions

7

→ Awards Presented

16



Rob Sharp

Good Grief

Ignore that this was their first rodeo, because this team put on an event like they were in their 10th year!

A monstrous level of work clearly went into every stage of the festival and I salute Jay especially, for his drive and passion to bring this to life.

100% would recommend and I'll definitely be submitting again in the future.

Great job guys and congratulations on your success.



Claire Heather Molloy

Borne

I was so happy to screen my short at the first ever Mansfield Town Film Festival!

I even got interviewed by the BBC. I can't wait to watch this festival's progression over the coming years.

I think it's really important that working class film makers and films have a voice here.



Chris Miggels

Stone Giant

The first ever Mansfield Town Film Festival was an extraordinary accomplishment by Jay the Festival Director and his incredible team.

The venue was the town's magnificent Palace Theatre, dating back to 1910, which lent the festival a warm and nostalgic atmosphere.

The material selected was of a tremendously high quality across the board, yet diverse enough to include a fascinating variety of creativity from many different backgrounds.

There was a real energetic buzz about the whole town for this festival.

Attending as an artist, the networking element was fantastic.

I was able to meet many like-minded individuals and forge great new friendships within the industry who had come to attend from far and wide.

The local media and even national news television picked up on all the excitement and covered the cultural movement that this festival has started, and I can't wait to see where it goes from here.

I have no doubt that this will be a renowned event for generations to come.

Congratulations and best wishes.

Case Study

Jasper and Manny Banerjee - A Family Inspiring Change



At the inaugural Mansfield Town Film Festival in 2023, audiences were introduced to two remarkable filmmakers: Jasper and Manny Banerjee. Jasper's short film 'I Will Stay With You Until Morning' and Manny's participatory documentary 'Our Superpowers' were both selected for screening, each offering a deeply personal and emotive perspective on storytelling, identity, and difference.

It wasn't until the brothers arrived in Mansfield, accompanied by their parents, that the team realised the family connection between them. Over the course of the weekend, the Banerjees became a fixture at screenings and events, their enthusiasm and openness perfectly embodying the spirit of the festival. What began as two individual film entries quickly became something far more meaningful - a shared experience between artists, audiences, and organisers that would leave a lasting legacy.

During a conversation at the festival, Manny - who is neurodiverse - asked a simple but powerful question: why wasn't there a dedicated strand for filmmakers like him? The question wasn't a criticism but an act of curiosity and kindness, a moment that sparked reflection among the MTFF team. The exchange opened up a wider dialogue about representation, accessibility, and the barriers that neurodiverse and disabled filmmakers continue to face in getting their stories seen and celebrated.

In the weeks that followed, Festival Director Jay Martin held further discussions with Unanima, a local organisation supporting people with learning disabilities, autism, and neurodiversity. Their insight, combined with Manny's thoughtful question, helped shape the creation of a brand-new programming strand for the 2024 edition: Neurodiverse and Disabled Voices.

The introduction of this strand marked a major milestone for MTFF, expanding the festival's commitment to inclusion and ensuring that filmmakers with lived experience of disability and neurodiversity have a visible and celebrated place in Mansfield's cultural landscape.

The Banerjee brothers' story stands as a testament to the power of human connection, how one family's weekend at MTFF inspired lasting change, and how the festival continues to grow not through policy or pressure, but through empathy, conversation, and community.



Festival Overview '24

MTFF returned for its second edition across three days from July 26 - 28 2024, building on the strong foundations of its launch year and expanding in scale, scope, and ambition.

Responding directly to feedback from 2023, the festival introduced 30-minute comfort breaks between screenings, giving audiences space to relax and socialise. These breaks also enabled spontaneous conversations and impromptu Q&As with attending filmmakers in Groucho's Bar, creating a more informal and communal environment.

The programme expanded with the introduction of the Neurodiverse/Disabled Voices strand, ensuring greater representation and visibility for underrepresented filmmakers.



2024 also saw the launch of MTFF Presents, a new season of curated screenings using films from the inaugural programme, that began in March and ran through to July, building momentum towards the main festival. The season opened in partnership with Mansfield-based community group Art Power to mark International Women's Month, followed by an LGBTQIA+ Voices screening for Pride Month in June, which brought Mansfield's queer community together to celebrate cinema.

It also featured a Working Class Voices event and a special Best of MTFF23, showcasing the previous year's award-winning films. These screenings were enriched by Q&As with filmmakers, some in person and others joining remotely from around the world, giving participants and audiences alike another chance to connect with the creative voices behind the work.

MTFF also partnered with Inspire Culture to take the Best of MTFF23 on tour to three libraries across Nottinghamshire and Nottingham city. These events introduced the festival to new communities and expanded its reach beyond Mansfield, building connections with audiences who might not otherwise access independent cinema.



MTFF also strengthened its ties to local culture and businesses. In partnership with The Garrison, the festival brewed its very own festival beer 'Reel Ale' which became a popular symbol of community pride throughout the weekend.

New sponsorship support was secured from Unite the Union, Mansfield Building Society, and West Nottinghamshire College, ensuring the festival's sustainability and cementing its role as a collaborative cultural project.

MTFF also hosted the BFI's Art of Action season in October, bringing classic and contemporary action cinema to Mansfield and further embedding the town within a national film culture initiative.

Audience response to the second edition confirmed MTFF's momentum. Attendance grew, engagement was high, and local press hailed the festival as a significant and growing force for culture in the region.

By the close of its second year, MTFF had proven that its debut success was not a one-off. Instead, it had become a fixture in Mansfield's cultural calendar, developing new strands, expanding year-round programming, deepening community partnerships, and refining the audience experience in ways that set the stage for an even bigger 2025.

→ **Films Screened**

114

→ **Total Submissions** **267**

→ **Audience Attendance**

343

→ **Curated Strands** **13**



Tom Paul Martin

Where Are All the Gay Superheroes?

This festival is premium quality without a hint of pretentiousness.

Communication was excellent from the jump, lots of interaction and buzz ahead of the festival. Throughout the weekend, there was a great mix of screenings, talks and networking events which felt really organic.

After our film screened, there was a Q&A hosted by Assistant Festival Director Ciaran which was really thoughtful and segued into discussion with the other filmmakers in our slot.



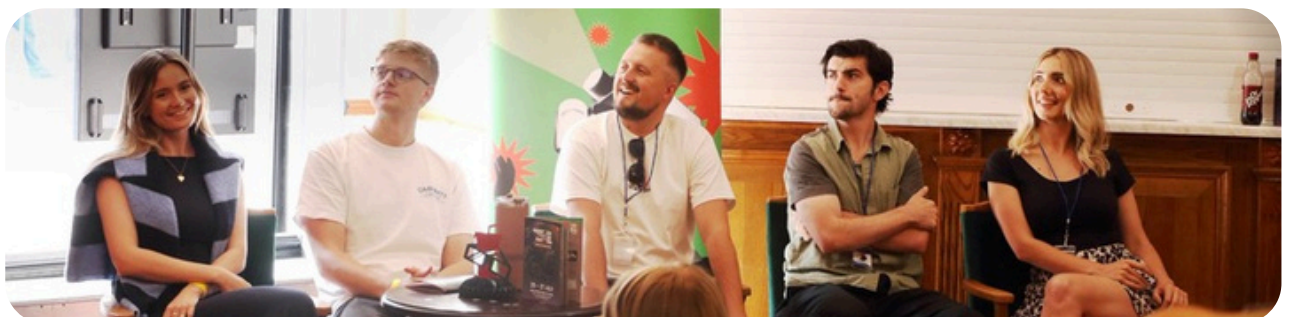
Emma Stansfield

Exchange Rate

I was so impressed by the passion, dedication and attention to detail that the MTFF team have shown, you can really tell how much they love film and really care about putting Mansfield on the cultural map.

Such a diverse and exciting programme of excellent films shown over the course of the festival, it was an honour to see my film screened alongside so many excellent shorts.

*Thankyou for the selection!
I can see this event going from strength to strength, definitely one to watch!*



Festival Overview '25



Mansfield Town Film Festival returned for its third edition in 2025 from July 25 - 27, transforming the Mansfield Palace Theatre back into a hub of creativity and community for its most ambitious programme to date.



Across three packed days, the festival showcased over 120 short films across 16 strands, making it the largest programme in the festival's history. A key innovation this year was a new curatorial approach: instead of grouping films strictly by their submission categories, the programming team curated bespoke strands around particular themes, allowing films to speak to each other in fresh and surprising ways. This shift was very well received by audiences and filmmakers alike, and it also marked an important step forward in developing the team's experience and confidence as curators.



For the first time, MTFF introduced a second screening venue - the Directors Lounge in the Palace Theatre's Leeming Lounge. This allowed even more films to be programmed and created a new, intimate setting for networking and discussion. The festival also embraced new technology with the launch of a VR Cinema at Groucho's, delivered in partnership with award-winning storytellers MBD. Open and free of charge across the weekend, the VR programme gave audiences and practitioners a taste of the future of filmmaking.



Another major innovation was the launch of Pitch Up!, MTFF's first live pitching competition. Backed by Mansfield's Mayor and District Councillors, the event gave filmmakers five minutes to pitch their projects to a panel of industry professionals and local leaders. The winning filmmaker, Euan Foulis, received a £1,020 prize fund to support the development of a new film, with the promise of a premiere at MTFF26.



MTFF25 also expanded its focus on youth and emerging talent development through a partnership with Voice Magazine. Four young reviewers were embedded into the festival, each covering different strands and publishing their reviews online throughout the weekend. This initiative provided vital opportunities for 16-25-year-olds to gain professional cultural journalism experience, while also diversifying the ways in which the festival was documented and shared.



Audience response to the third edition was exceptional, with record-breaking attendance across the weekend. The combination of expanded programming, innovative new initiatives, and affordable ticketing (£4 per session, with free entry to the Gala and Awards) confirmed MTFF's place not just as a local highlight but as a rising fixture on the UK's independent film festival circuit.



By the end of its third year, MTFF had grown from a bold new idea into a confident, nationally-recognised cultural event. Its mixture of grassroots accessibility, creative ambition, and commitment to underrepresented voices ensured that Mansfield was firmly established on the cultural map of the East Midlands and beyond.

→ Films Screened

120

→ Total Submissions 267

→ Audience Attendance

460

→ Curated Strands 16

→ Voice Young Reviewers

4

→ VR Cinema Attendees

50



Alexis Bicât

Romchyk

I must have been to nearly fifty film festivals. Choosing them is still a minefield.

Lately Festival Formula's Katie Bignell has become my sage therein, but when she vouched for Mansfield Town Film Festival it raised an eyebrow.

A nascent festival in its third year? Not yet BAFTA qualifying, not yet BIFA qualifying, and in a part of England ravaged by the deconstruction of UK manufacturing?

Then I went. I spent three days, in up to six blocks of shorts screenings per day. I must have watched over a hundred films.

At any festival you usually feel at least once or even twice per block, "What the Hell is this short doing in a film festival?!" I never felt that way at MTFF.

Festivals stand and fall on their curation. And if my experience is anything to go by, MTFF is already a serious force to be reckoned with.

Long live MTFF!



Simon Haines

Senior Consultant

Total honour to screen at MTFF in a selection of exceptional films.

The quality of films is extraordinarily high - the best of local and international. And everything around the screenings is superb: iconic venue, filmmaker Q&As, talks, events, pitching competition, film quizzes, parties.

MTFF is a fest born out of genuine passion for film and for the local community.

It has so much heart and truly inclusive values, with categories and awards for working class voices, LGBTQIA+, disabled/neurodiverse voices. Jay, Ciaran and the team of wonderful volunteers (Holly, Molly, Jacob, Kinley to name just a few) put their all into making this friendly, grounded festival excel and be an amazing experience both for filmmakers and audiences.

It's a rare delight to see a festival with such a great relationship with their local audience and filmmakers.

Very highly recommended!

Case Study

Hayden McLean (The Last Dance)

In 2025, film director and writer Hayden McLean won MTFF's Working Class Voices Award for his powerful short *The Last Dance*, a compelling, 16-minute tribute to Fox's "LA Bar," a cornerstone of Caribbean community life in 1990s East London, imperilled by gentrification and forced displacement.

The film's emotional strength and cultural resonance were recognised beyond Mansfield: it also won Best Narrative Short at the RiverRun International Film Festival and Best Essex Film at the Essex International Film Festival, and received multiple nominations including Best in Festival and Best Director at MTFF, as well as Raindance Film Festival selection.

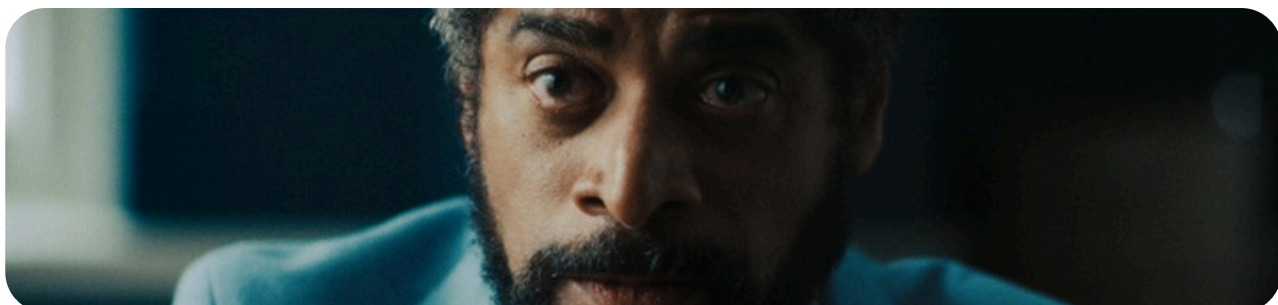
During his acceptance speech, McLean shared a moment of profound honesty: he spoke about the absence of people like him and his community on screen, explaining how growing up with no representation shaped his drive not just to tell stories, but to tell them truthfully.

He refused to let Caribbean lives be reduced to stereotypes or one-dimensional portrayals, and his award speech became one of the most deeply moving moments in MTFF's history.

MTFF's recognition of *The Last Dance* did more than honour a film, it provided Hayden with visibility, validation, and a platform at a national level. The festival's live Q&A and professional mentoring elements connected him to peers and industry voices, forging opportunities for creative collaboration and wider distribution.

This moment was emblematic of MTFF's mission: it demonstrated how the festival can amplify working-class and diverse creators, giving them not just a voice on screen but also presence in cultural conversation, confidence in their artistry, and pathways toward broader recognition.

Hayden's story shines as a testament to what MTFF does best: nurturing artists to create with authenticity, belong with pride, and leave a lasting impression on both their audiences and their creative journeys.



Key Successes & Milestones

In just three years, Mansfield Town Film Festival has grown from a bold new idea into a recognised cultural fixture, achieving milestones that demonstrate both rapid growth and deep community impact.

Now the biggest film festival in Nottinghamshire.

Each year has brought new innovations, partnerships, and opportunities for practitioners, while maintaining a strong commitment to affordability, inclusivity, and representation.

From Ken Loach's endorsement of our inaugural festival in 2023, to the launch of new strands and year-round programming in 2024, and our record-breaking third edition in 2025 featuring VR cinema, thematic curation, and the Pitch Up! competition, MTFF has consistently pushed forward with ambition and purpose.



2023

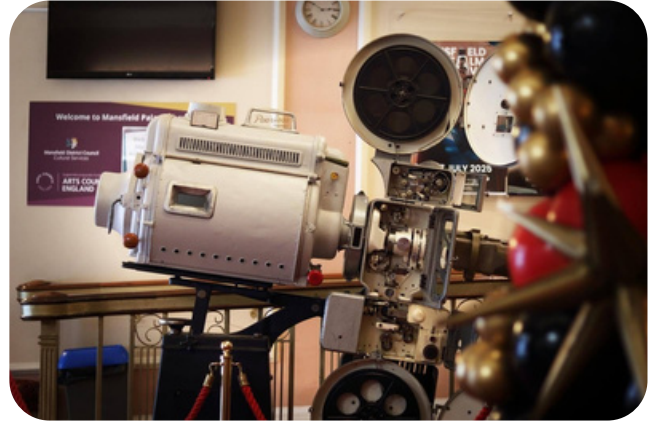
- Launched the inaugural Mansfield Town Film Festival, establishing Mansfield as the home of the film festival.
- Screened 100+ short films from local, regional, national, and international filmmakers.
- Received official endorsement from Ken Loach, highlighting MTFF's mission to champion working-class voices.
- Introduced dedicated programming strands for Working Class Voices, Women's Voices, LGBTQIA+ Voices, Documentary, Animation, and International Shorts.
- Delivered an opening night Gala at the Palace Theatre.
- Secured widespread local press coverage, including BBC Radio Nottingham, the Nottingham Post, Mansfield Chad, BBC and ITV news.
- Partnered with West Nottinghamshire College to showcase students' locally-made films, resulting in a sold-out showcase.

2024

- Expanded to 110+ films, strengthening representation across all strands and launching our Neurodiverse/Disabled Voices strand.
- Responded to audience feedback by adding 30-minute comfort breaks between screenings, enabling impromptu filmmaker Q&As at Groucho's Bar.
- Built strong community partnerships, securing sponsorships from Unite the Union, Mansfield Building Society, and Vision West Notts College.
- Partnered with The Garrison to brew the official festival beer, Reel Ale, deepening ties with local business and audiences.
- Launched MTFF Presents, a season of curated screenings in the Leeming Lounge (Mar–Jul 2024).
- Partnered with Inspire Culture, Learning & Libraries to tour Best of MTFF23 to three libraries across Nottinghamshire and Nottingham city.
- Hosted the BFI's Art of Action season in October 2024.

2025

- Delivered MTFF's biggest programme yet: over 120 films across 16 bespoke thematic strands.
- Introduced a new curatorial approach, moving away from strict category-based programming to thematic curation, which was highly praised by audiences and filmmakers.
- Launched the Director's Lounge, a second screening venue at the Palace Theatre's Leeming Lounge.
- Partnered with MBD to introduce MTFF's first VR Cinema, giving audiences free access to cutting-edge immersive storytelling.
- Debuted Pitch Up!, a live pitching competition backed by the Mayor and local councillors, awarding £1,020 to winning filmmaker Euan Foulis.
- Expanded youth engagement through a partnership with Voice Magazine, embedding four young reviewers into the festival to cover strands and publish reviews.
- Achieved record-breaking attendance, cementing MTFF's reputation as a significant cultural event in the East Midlands.



Jack Dixon

The Lump

I had a great experience with MTFF, even though I wasn't able to attend due to illness.

Communication was fantastic and, as a disabled person, I really appreciate the separate categories for underrepresented voices.

Wish I could've been there - social media coverage looked fantastic - and I plan to go to next year if I'm well enough!

Alignment With 'Let's Create' Strategy

From the outset, Mansfield Town Film Festival has been shaped by the principles of Arts Council England's 'Let's Create' strategy. Rather than simply programming films, MTFF has sought to remove barriers, nurture creativity, and embed culture into the life of Mansfield. The impact of our work across 2023–2025 can be understood through the strategy's three pillars:

1. Creative People

MTFF has empowered over 300 filmmakers to present their work to new audiences, many for the first time.

For working-class, LGBTQIA+, disabled, neurodiverse, and female filmmakers, the opportunity to be programmed in dedicated strands has offered not only visibility but validation in an industry where their voices are often overlooked.

Through initiatives such as Pitch Up! (2025), which invested directly in new creative work, and the partnership with Voice Magazine, which trained young reviewers in professional criticism, MTFF has built clear pathways for emerging creatives.

These opportunities extended beyond the screenings themselves, helping practitioners develop confidence, connections, and ambition for their future practice.

Creative People We've Reached (Submission Categories)

→ International Shorts	152	→ Women's Voices	145
→ Narrative Shorts	102	→ Working-Class Voices	77
→ Student Shorts	61	→ Music Videos	57
→ LGBTQIA+ Voices	56	→ Disabled/Neurodiverse Voices	53
→ Animated Shorts	33	→ Documentary Shorts	29

2. Cultural Communities

Accessibility has been central to MTFF.

Low ticket prices and free-to-attend gala events ensured that Mansfield audiences, many from working-class backgrounds, could participate fully without financial barriers.

The festival created safe spaces for underrepresented communities to see themselves reflected on screen, whether through LGBTQIA+ Voices during Pride Month or Working Class Voices in the Palace Theatre.

By touring the 'Best of MTFF' to libraries and hosting themed community screenings in partnership with groups such as Art Power, MTFF extended its reach far beyond the theatre walls.

These projects embedded film into everyday community spaces, turning culture into something familiar and accessible rather than distant or elite.



Joe Rider

The Case Of The Dirty Dishes

I had an amazing time at Mansfield Town Film Festival! The team there are lovely, positive and supportive.

I felt very welcome and I am honoured to have had my film shown there.

They have a range of great activities and screenings that were all very fun. I will definitely be going to and submitting to MTFF again!

3. Creative & Cultural Country

MTFF has placed Mansfield on the cultural map, attracting national and international filmmakers to a town rarely associated with cinema.

Importantly, this has been achieved without abandoning local identity. Innovations such as curating bespoke thematic strands and commissioning the community-brewed Reel Ale rooted the festival in Mansfield's own culture and history while engaging with the wider world.

The introduction of a free VR cinema in 2025 exposed local audiences to cutting-edge digital storytelling, ensuring that Mansfield was not left behind in cultural innovation.

Partnerships with the BFI (Art of Action) and Inspire Culture positioned the town within national and regional cultural networks, demonstrating that Mansfield has both the appetite and the infrastructure to play a role in the UK's creative future.



Lauren McPoland

GrIhood

Such a fantastic festival.

As a filmmaker I felt so appreciated and involved with not just the festival but the wonderful community itself!

So many great people make up MTFF, you can really tell they love what they do.

Thank you for having me.

Audience Impact

Since its launch in 2023, MTFF has grown its audience year-on-year, reaching both regular cultural consumers and those entirely new to the arts.

In our first year, 47% of respondents said MTFF was their very first cultural event, proving we are activating new cultural participation rather than simply reaching the existing arts audience. This pattern continued into our strand programming, with the Women's Voices event in March 2024 attracting many first-time attendees to the Palace Theatre, confirming MTFF's role as a gateway to the wider cultural offer.

Audience profiling shows MTFF successfully connects across generations, with strong engagement from both 20–24-year-olds and those aged 55–59.

Motivations for attending are split between discovery and affirmation with many citing “to do something new or out of the ordinary” while others said “the arts are an important part of who I am.” Attendance data also show that 26% of audience members come alone, well above local averages, demonstrating MTFF's reputation as a welcoming and safe cultural space.

Digital marketing is a key driver of attendance, with over 53% of 2024 bookings made online and most respondents citing Facebook or Instagram as their route to discovering MTFF. Word-of-mouth and community sharing also play an important role, highlighting that MTFF is becoming embedded in Mansfield's social fabric.

Accessibility remains central: 75% of neurodivergent respondents and all disabled respondents rated MTFF's access provision as “very good.” The introduction of the Disabled & Neurodiverse Voices strand in 2024 strengthened this commitment by putting representation on screen as well as in the audience experience.

Audience feedback has shaped MTFF's evolution: in 2025, we introduced bespoke thematic curation and 30-minute comfort breaks between screenings, which allowed for impromptu Q&As and longer dwell time. This has increased audience satisfaction, boosted secondary spend at the theatre bar, and encouraged weekend-long attendance.

Together, this evidence paints a picture of MTFF as more than a film festival: it is a driver of participation, a builder of civic pride, and a space where Mansfield residents see their own stories reflected - creating lasting cultural impact.

References:

Customer Behaviour Analysis – MTFF 2023 (MDC Cultural Services)
Customer Behaviour Analysis – MTFF 2024 (MDC Cultural Services)
MTFF23 Film Festival Insights (Survey Data & Audience Profile)
Women's Voice Event - Audience Feedback Report (March 2024)

47%

of respondents said MTFF was the first cultural event they had attended.



Captured data shows strong engagement from age ranges

20-24, 55-59



75%

of neurodivergent respondents rated MTFF's access provision as “very good.”



Case Study

Ciaran Shea: From Volunteer to Assistant Festival Director



When Nottinghamshire-born filmmaker Ciaran Shea reached out to the MTFF team just weeks before the inaugural festival in 2023, he had no idea how quickly it would shape his creative journey. Then a film student at De Montfort University in Leicester, Ciaran had spotted the buzz surrounding Mansfield Town Film Festival on social media and wanted to get involved.

Volunteering as Artist Liaison for the first edition, Ciaran quickly became an invaluable part of the team, supporting across multiple areas of delivery and working closely with Festival Director Jay Martin. His professionalism, enthusiasm, and passion for independent film set the tone for the festival's collaborative spirit.

During an interview at the 2023 festival, Ciaran shared his experience: "It's unlike anything else. I do a lot of film festivals, I love it and I love working them, but the atmosphere here just feels so exciting. It's like it's my first ever festival again, and I've been to some of the big ones, you know. It just feels different and everyone seems so happy to be here - I've never had that before."

Following MTFF23, Ciaran was offered a paid role as Assistant Festival Director, responsible for building connections with filmmakers and leading the team of screeners who review submissions.

Over the next two editions, his responsibilities grew alongside the festival itself, shaping programming decisions, liaising with creatives from across the world, and representing MTFF at industry events.

Ciaran's journey through MTFF has since opened doors across the UK film festival circuit. He now serves as Head of Programming for the 2026 edition of BIFA-qualifying Beeston Film Festival and has secured compering roles at other major independent festivals, including the also BIFA-qualifying Exit 6 Film Festival.

Ciaran's story embodies what MTFF stands for, a platform where emerging filmmakers, volunteers, and creatives can gain real industry experience, grow their professional networks, and turn passion into opportunity. From volunteer to festival leader, his progression represents the festival's commitment to nurturing home-grown talent and strengthening the region's creative workforce.



Filmmaker Development Opportunities



The UK film sector has long been criticised for its lack of working-class representation: just 8% of film industry workers identify as coming from working-class backgrounds (Screen Daily, 2024).

At the same time, routes into the industry for diverse and minority filmmakers have been steadily narrowing (Guardian, 2024).

Within this national picture, MTFF has developed into an important regional bridge, helping emerging filmmakers – particularly those from underrepresented backgrounds – to find visibility, confidence, and networks.

Pathways Created by MTFF

Visibility for Diverse Filmmakers

MTFF's dedicated strands for Working Class Voices, Women's Voices, LGBTQIA+ Voices, and Disabled/Neurodiverse Voices have given visibility to filmmakers who might otherwise remain unseen.

In 2025, Hayden McLean's 'The Last Dance' won the Working Class Voices Award, with his acceptance speech powerfully underlining the importance of not letting his culture be "a monolith."

Practical Development

In 2025, the festival launched Pitch Up!, Mansfield's first live pitching competition, with a £1,020 prize fund supported by the Mayor and local councillors.

Winner Euan Foulis credited the opportunity with giving him both vital financial support and experience in pitching his ideas to a professional jury, skills that will serve him long after the festival. As well as Euan, 17 other filmmakers had a chance to pitch their ideas.

Building Confidence and Professional Networks

Filmmakers consistently describe MTFF as a festival where they feel valued and included: "As a filmmaker I felt so appreciated and involved with not just the festival but the wonderful community itself!" – Lauren McPoland, director of Gr!hood (2025)

"It has so much heart and truly inclusive values ... an amazing experience both for filmmakers and audiences." – Simon Haines, director of Senior Consultant (2025)

"Great event! Loved being apart of such a supportive event with other filmmakers, creatives and artists!" – Sophie Jane Corner, Director of Hindsight (2025)

Student & Emerging Talent Opportunities

Each year, MTFF has showcased films from West Notts College students, as well as shorts from BFI Film Academies in Nottingham and Derby and theatre group Fifth Word.

For many of these students, MTFF marked their first opportunity to have their work screened in a professional venue before a public audience.

Mentorship and Industry Insight

Panels such as Festival Formula on navigating the submission circuit, or The Life of a Stuntman with John B. Tannen, have given filmmakers practical advice on building careers in a sector often perceived as closed.

The introduction of Pitch Up! has also given filmmakers the chance to gain tangible investment in their film projects.

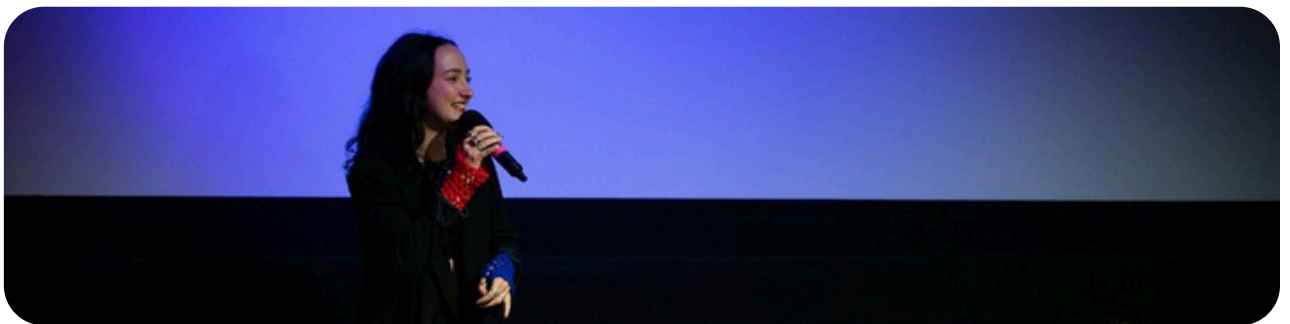


Wider Cultural Contribution

What distinguishes MTFF is its ability to tie individual development into the wider cultural fabric of Mansfield and Nottinghamshire: It creates civic pride by showing that Mansfield is a place where world-class films and filmmakers gather.

It contributes to the levelling-up agenda by providing working-class and diverse filmmakers with an affordable, accessible platform.

It nurtures a pipeline of talent: from West Notts students volunteering, to emerging filmmakers gaining their first festival laurels, to professionals like Hayden McLean using MTFF as a launchpad for national recognition.



Sophie Jane Corner

Hindsight

Great event! Loved being apart of such a supportive event with other filmmakers, creatives and artists!

A great turn out and it was an honour to show the first glimpse of my film here!

Thank you team for having me!

Community Partnerships & Local Impact



Mansfield Town Film Festival has, from its very beginning, seen collaboration as central to its mission. The festival's impact has extended well beyond the Palace Theatre stage - strengthening the cultural, social, and economic fabric of the town through partnerships that link creativity with community benefit.



One of the clearest examples of this is the festival's ongoing relationship with The Garrison, an independent bar and live entertainment venue in the heart of Mansfield. What began as a casual partnership in 2023 has evolved into a vital part of the MTFF ecosystem - hosting the festival's after-parties, networking events, and special gatherings for filmmakers and audiences.



Each year, the collaboration has generated significant economic benefit for The Garrison, with sales increasing notably across the festival weekend as attendees, guests, and filmmakers converge there to continue conversations long after the final screening.



In 2025, this relationship was deepened further through creative collaboration: the Silver Springs Duo, a local act, hosted the Movie Music Quiz at The Garrison, a light-hearted, high-energy event that sold out and drew audiences beyond the traditional filmgoing crowd.



The result was a night that not only boosted the bar's takings but also reinforced the festival's ethos of celebrating Mansfield talent in all its forms. These shared successes ripple outward - demonstrating how the cultural and hospitality sectors can mutually strengthen one another and contribute to a thriving, night-time economy for the town.



More broadly, MTFF's local impact is seen in how it connects people and organisations with shared ambitions for Mansfield's renewal. Through partnerships with Vision West Nottinghamshire College, the BFI Film Academies in Nottingham and Derby, and Inspire Culture, MTFF has created new opportunities for young people to gain skills, showcase work, and see pathways into the creative industries that were previously inaccessible.

By working closely with local venues, educators, and small businesses, MTFF embodies the spirit of We Are Mansfield: creative, connected, and community-led. It is proof that arts and culture can drive regeneration, not just through entertainment, but through tangible economic returns, civic pride, and the cultivation of a shared identity that says, confidently, Mansfield belongs on the map.

Case Study

The Garrison – A Local Partnership on Tap

In the heart of Mansfield town centre, The Garrison stands as one of the town's few remaining independent pubs - a warm, welcoming space that has become an essential part of the Mansfield Town Film Festival experience.

Festival Director Jay Martin, a long-time regular and supporter of the venue, saw in The Garrison not just a great local pub but a vital piece of Mansfield's independent spirit.

When planning the inaugural festival in 2023, he wanted to make sure the event's success flowed back into the local community - and so the MTFF Post-Festival Club was born. What began as a casual space for filmmakers and audiences to unwind quickly became one of the most memorable parts of the festival weekend.

The atmosphere was electric: filmmakers from across the country sharing stories over pints, locals mixing with artists, and The Garrison's tills ringing as festivalgoers poured in after the Palace Theatre screenings.

"Working with MTFF has been brilliant for us," says Dan Moody, landlord of The Garrison. "Each year, we've seen the buzz build and our sales go up. The place is packed with people talking about film, art, and Mansfield. It's something different - it gives the town real energy."

In 2024, that partnership evolved into something even more special. Jay and Dan collaborated to create Reel Ale, the festival's official beer, a celebration of creativity, community, and Mansfield pride. The launch drew in crowds of filmmakers and film fans alike, and the unique tie-in became a local talking point. Sales spiked, and The Garrison's reputation as a hub for arts and culture grew stronger than ever.

By 2025, Reel Ale made a triumphant return, joined by the first MTFF Movie Music Quiz, hosted by local band the Silver Springs Duo, bringing together locals and visiting creatives for an evening of laughter, music, and film trivia.

The collaboration has proven how cultural activity can directly drive footfall and spending in the town centre, while enriching the social fabric of the community.

It's a model MTFF now hopes to expand, working with more independent businesses across Mansfield to ensure the economic and cultural benefits of the festival are shared as widely as possible.

"It's become one of our favourite weekends of the year," adds Dan. "It's not just good for business, it's good for Mansfield."



Financial Overview

From its inception, MTFF was designed with a sustainable funding model in mind, one that would gradually transition from public sector support to a balanced mix of sponsorship, ticketing and film submission revenue.

The agreement with Mansfield District Council (MDC) ensured three years of foundational support via Arts Council England's (ACE) National Portfolio Organisation (NPO) funding, with the understanding that the festival would use this period to establish a track record, attract new partners, and diversify income sources.

2023

The festival's launch year was fully funded through a £30,000 allocation from ACE via MDC's NPO budget. This investment covered programming, venue hire, staffing, marketing, and accessibility costs, ensuring MTFF could deliver a high-quality, inclusive first edition. In addition, around £1,000 in ticket revenue (processed through Gigantic) was retained to support early preparations for the 2024 event, alongside film submission income averaging £1,950 generated through FilmFreeway.

Direct NPO Funding

£15,000



Sponsorship Funds

£3,500



Film Submission Fees

£1,950



2025

In 2025, MDC again provided £15,000, matched by renewed sponsorship from Vision West Nottinghamshire College and Mansfield Building Society. Additional income from film submissions and ticket sales reinforced the festival's growing self-sufficiency. Through careful budgeting, volunteer support, and in-kind contributions from partners, MTFF successfully delivered its largest and most ambitious programme to date, while maintaining affordability for audiences and participants.

Direct NPO Funding

£30,000



Ticket Revenue

£1,000



Film Submission Fees

£1,950



2024

As planned, direct NPO funding reduced to £15,000, with new partnerships successfully introduced to support delivery. These included £1,000 from Vision West Nottinghamshire College, £1,000 from Mansfield Building Society, and £1,500 from Unite the Union, along with continued film submission income. The combination of sponsorship and earned income marked an important step towards financial independence while maintaining accessibility for audiences and filmmakers.

Direct NPO Funding

£15,000



Sponsorship Funds

£2,000



Palace Theatre In-Kind Hire

£7,000~



The Future Of MTFF

As Mansfield Town Film Festival moves beyond its initial three-year cycle, its focus now turns to establishing long-term stability, sustainability, and growth.

What began as a bold idea to bring independent cinema to a town without a cinema has evolved into one of Nottinghamshire's most dynamic cultural projects.

The festival is now poised to take the next step, transforming from an annual event into a permanent cultural institution that champions creativity, community, and opportunity all year round.



The immediate priority for 2026 is the transition to charitable status, formalising the organisation as a registered charity. This will provide a robust governance structure and open up access to new funding streams, including charitable trusts, foundations, and national funders. Establishing a Board of Trustees will bring together expertise from across the creative industries, education, and local business, ensuring diverse representation and shared ownership of the festival's future direction.

MTFF's ambitions are rooted in growth that benefits both artists and audiences. The team will continue developing the MTFF Presents programme, expanding its reach into neighbouring areas such as Warsop and Sutton-in-Ashfield, bringing curated short-film seasons and filmmaker Q&As to new audiences. These touring strands will help strengthen Mansfield's position at the heart of a regional film network, nurturing talent and cultural participation beyond the town centre.

To deliver on these ambitions, MTFF will actively pursue Plan for Neighbourhoods (PfN) and East Midlands Combined County Authority (EMCCA) funding opportunities, supporting year-round activity that engages working-class communities and underrepresented voices.

Alongside this, the festival will begin working towards Arts Council England Project Grants, with a longer-term goal of securing National Portfolio Organisation (NPO) status independently, establishing MTFF as a recognised regional hub for film culture, professional development, and community creativity.



As it matures, MTFF's vision extends beyond film exhibition. It aims to become a cornerstone of Mansfield's cultural identity, a trusted, inclusive, and forward-thinking organisation that reflects the pride, resilience, and creativity of the community it represents.

Through strategic partnerships, digital innovation, and continued grassroots engagement, MTFF will remain both a platform for working-class and diverse filmmakers and a catalyst for regeneration, education, and cultural confidence across the district.

Key Priorities 2026 - 2029

Transition to Registered Charity Status

Establish MTFF as a sustainable cultural institution with a strong governance structure and active Board of Trustees.

Secure Multi-Year Funding

Pursue Pfn, EMCCA, and ACE support to ensure financial stability and growth.

Expand MTFF Presents

Deliver satellite screenings across Mansfield and neighbouring areas to grow regional cultural access.

Develop Talent Pathways

Strengthen links with schools, colleges, and creative networks to nurture new filmmakers and cultural leaders.

Position MTFF as a Regional Cultural Leader

Work towards recognition as a National Portfolio Organisation (NPO), cementing MTFF's role as a key creative and community asset.



Natalia Zajęzkowska

She's Asking For It

What an honour to have been part of this incredible film festival!

Thank you for giving my film space to be seen, and for recognising it with the Best Editing and Women's Voices awards!

I am beyond grateful to the organisers, volunteers and fellow filmmakers who made this experience so welcoming!

Thank you again for having me!



Hayden McLean

The Last Dance

A GEM of a festival!

It was truly special being part of this year's festival and a huge honour walk away with the Working Class Voices award. Jay, Ciaran and team have created a really special space for filmmakers.

I look forward to seeing it grow and be part of future editions for many years to come.

Thank you again!

Conclusion & Call To Action By Jay Martin

When Mansfield Town Film Festival began, we set out to prove that Mansfield could be a place where creativity in film flourishes and where working-class and underrepresented voices are truly celebrated.

Three years later, that vision has become reality. MTFF has evolved into a cornerstone of Mansfield's cultural identity, welcoming hundreds of filmmakers, showcasing stories from across the world, and inspiring local audiences to see their own lives reflected on screen.

Our journey so far has been built on passion, partnership, and perseverance. But sustaining that progress requires long-term support.

With the festival now preparing to transition into a registered charity, and with ambitions to secure future investment through the Plan for Neighbourhoods and EMCCA Community Fund, as well as becoming BIFA-qualifying, we are ready to grow from a single annual event into a year-round cultural institution.

MTFF has proven the appetite for arts and culture in this town. Now, with Mansfield District Council's continued belief and partnership, we can ensure that engagement becomes a foundation for lasting change, one that drives creativity, opportunity, and pride across our community.

To secure MTFF's long-term impact and strengthen Mansfield's position as a cultural leader in the East Midlands, the following steps are recommended:

1. Sustain and Extend Funding Support
2. Recognise MTFF as a Strategic Cultural Asset
3. Strengthen Partnerships and Governance
4. Encourage Education and Industry Collaboration
5. Support Expansion of Year-Round Programming
6. Champion Mansfield as a Regional Cultural Hub



When I think about what the Mansfield Town Film Festival has become, I keep coming back to a simple image: the lights going down in the Palace Theatre, a hush over the audience, and that feeling that for the next few minutes, anything is possible.

That moment - of focus, curiosity, and connection - is why we started MTFF. It was never just about film. It was about giving people in this town a reason to look up, lean in, and see themselves reflected on screen.

Three years on, I've watched that happen again and again - from a miner's daughter seeing her story told for the first time, to a teenager realising that filmmaking might just be their future.

We've built something that's rooted in Mansfield but speaks to something much bigger: a belief that creativity belongs everywhere, not just in big cities or funded institutions.

MTFF has shown that culture can thrive in working-class towns, that art doesn't need to feel exclusive, and that community and creativity are not opposites - they're the same thing.

As we move into our next chapter, I don't see this as an ending or even a milestone, more a continuation of the same conversation we started in 2023: what does it mean to tell your story, and who gets to tell it?

My hope is that MTFF keeps asking that question for years to come.

If you were part of the audience, volunteered, screened a film, sponsored a session, or just believed in what we were doing, thank you.

You've helped make Mansfield a place where creativity feels possible.

Here's to the lights going down again, to new stories waiting to be told, and to the people who make them happen.

***"Art is important.. It's important because we see our world better when we see it reflected on the big screen."* - BAFTA-winning filmmaker, Ken Loach, Mansfield Town Film Festival 2023.**



The team that started it all in 2023.

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