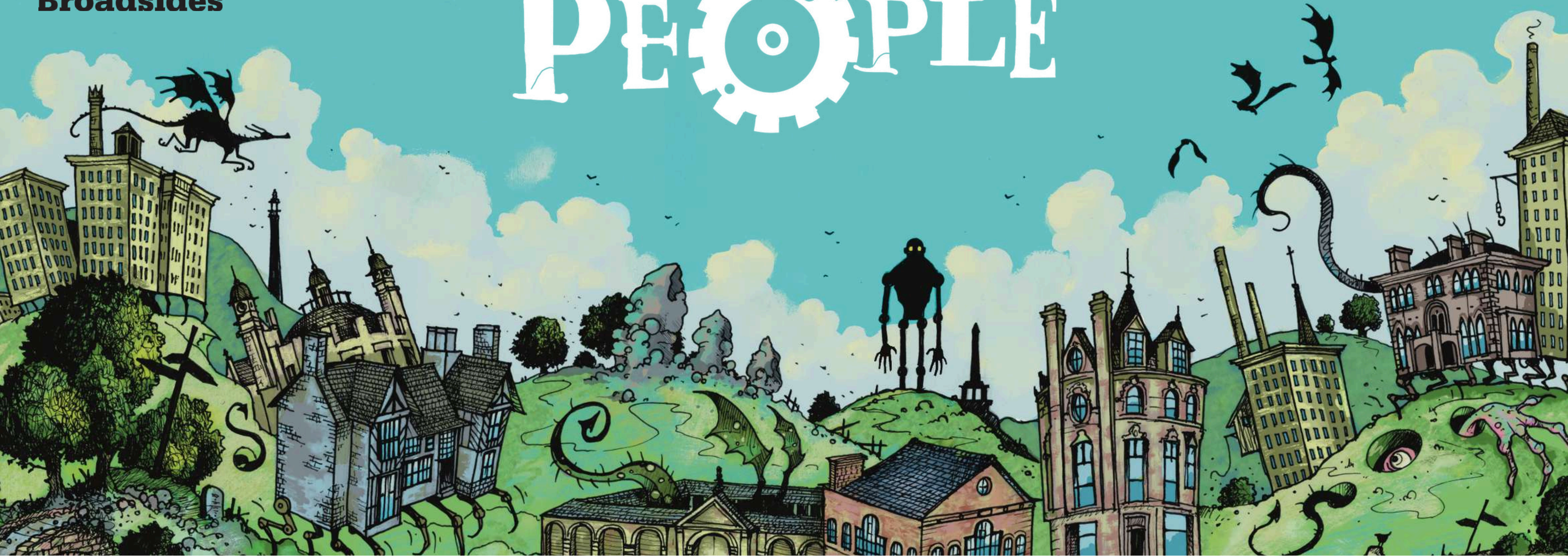




**Northern
Broadsides**

iron PEOPLE

IMPACT REPORT 2025



Funded by
**Calderdale
Council**

 **Tracy Brabin**
Mayor of West Yorkshire
Mayor's Safer Communities Fund



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



**COMMUNITY
FOUNDATION
FOR CALDERDALE**
Creating Strong Communities through Local Giving

 **Funded by
UK Government**

Supported by
 **West
Yorkshire
Combined
Authority** | **Tracy
Brabin
Mayor of
West Yorkshire**

 **THE UZ & TERRY BRAMALL
FOUNDATION**

 **COMMUNITY
FUND**

**“THIS HAS BENEFITTED ME IN
ALL ASPECTS OF MY LIFE”**

- Phil Bruce, Participant: Acting for the Planet

**“DIFFERENCE DISSOLVED AND OUR
WORLD BECAME ONE FAMILY”**

- Abu Rina, Participant: The Writer's Refuge





TABLE OF CONTENTS

Page 4: Foreword

Page 5: At a Glance - Iron People in numbers

Page 6: Iron People Impact

Pages 7-8: Key Outcomes

Pages 9-11: Stories of Change

Pages 12-17: Project Activities

Page 18: Acknowledgements



All photography in this report is by Robling Photography.

FOREWORD

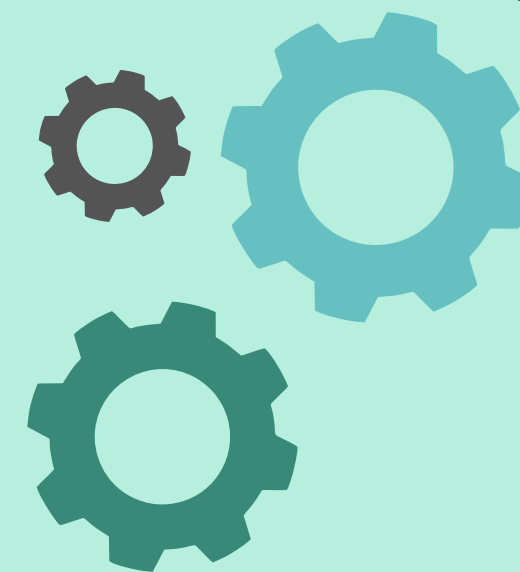
BY LAURIE SANSOM (ARTISTIC DIRECTOR & JOINT CEO)
& RUTH COOKE (EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR & JOINT CEO)

Northern Broadsides is a theatre company and charity based at Dean Clough in Halifax. For over 33 years, we've toured the UK and internationally, presenting classic and new plays that celebrate Northern voices and resonate with contemporary audiences. Our vision is a world where powerful stories break down social, geographic and economic barriers, bringing people together through shared enjoyment, cultural experiences and creative collaborations.

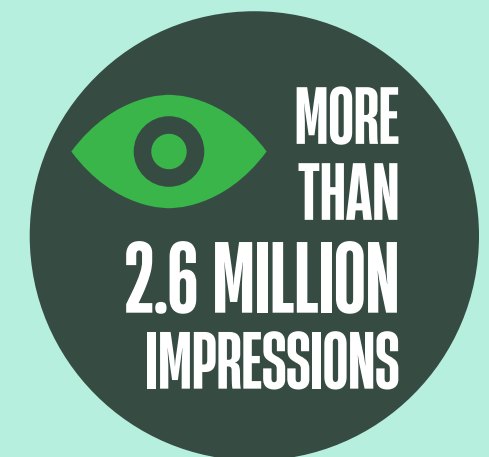
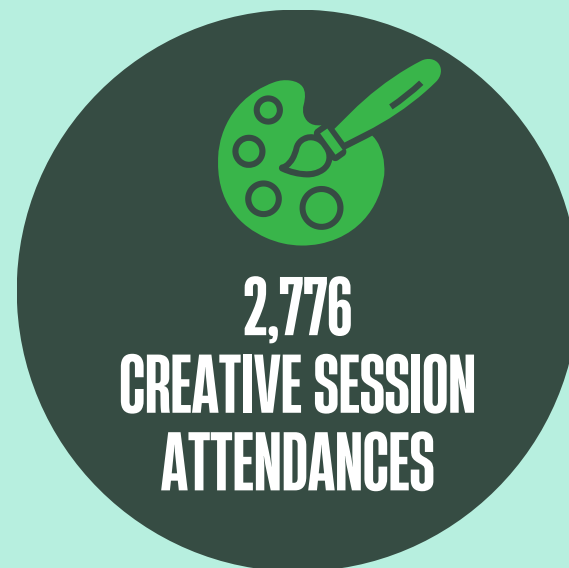
Alongside our touring productions, we've been keen to develop new strands of work that root Northern Broadsides more deeply in our home community here in Calderdale. *Iron People* grew from that ambition: a chance to collaborate with local artists and audiences in ways that extend beyond the traditional stage, and to discover what creativity can do when it's shared and shaped collectively.

The project was sparked during the COVID-19 pandemic, when conversations with local organisations, artists, and our Board highlighted a shared concern for the environment and the need for meaningful creative connection. The *Iron People* project became a way to explore those concerns together, combining performance, participation, and storytelling rooted in Calderdale's landscape and community.

CultureDale – Calderdale's year-long celebration of its 50th anniversary in 2024 – offered the perfect moment to bring this vision to life. We drew inspiration from Calderdale's own Ted Hughes, whose *The Iron Man* and *The Iron Woman* books reflect on our relationship with the natural world. These stories became a springboard, but the heart of *Iron People* lies in the voices, ideas, and creativity of the communities who joined us.



AT A GLANCE: IRON PEOPLE IN NUMBERS





IRON PEOPLE: IMPACT

Iron People was an ambitious and highly successful project, embodying our vision of nurturing creativity of, by and for Calderdale communities. Its high-quality engagement and co-creation reached diverse people, unlocking belonging and enjoyment, building participation, trust and confidence, and providing joyful exploration of our shared environment. The project developed local audiences and talent, supported community-owned venues and social-purpose groups, forged new partnerships and networks, and sparked legacy projects such as Park Youth Theatre and Immortal Bloom with Ryburn Valley High School.

As a key CultureDale commission, it also raised Calderdale's profile as a creative destination. Hands-on action-learning during *Iron People* generated new creative and practical insights, shaping Northern BroadSides' strategic planning and approach.

The project's scale and complexity challenged our core team to adopt new ways of working quickly. Building on *Iron People's* success and our reputation as a touring production company, we are well placed to co-create significant, high-quality work, nurture emerging creative talent, and support socially engaged, thriving local communities.

KEY OUTCOMES: ENGAGEMENT

- Delivered high-quality creative sessions and celebration events.
- Connected with new audiences through participative relationships.
- Provided 2,776 opportunities for creative participation, far exceeding targets.
- Showed Calderdale's enthusiasm for co-creation, unleashing local creative talent and producing high-quality, relevant work.
- Built insight into participation, inclusion, and accessibility through:
 - Free-to-access activities
 - Safe, trusted environments
 - Flexible budgets and planning
 - Community role models in creative roles
 - Local community producers and volunteers

OUR SUSTAINABILITY

- Built new funding relationships and diversified income streams.
- Explored narrative change methodology to understand impact.
- Sparked community passion, supporting local creative potential.
- Generated strategic and practical learning to shape future creative engagement projects.
- Strengthened Northern Broadsides' profile with audiences, partners, and stakeholders, enhancing local and wider reputation.
- Upskilled the team and freelancers through experience and targeted training, including adaptable data capture methods for varied settings and audiences.



ENVIRONMENT & CLIMATE CRISIS

- Increased awareness of the local environment and challenges relating to the Climate Emergency.
- Connected local people with global climate issues through shared creative experiences.
- Raised the profile of local environmental groups, activating and enabling people to take personal action towards environmental sustainability.
- Highlighted issues of local relevance to engage people with environmental topics, eg litter in Park Ward; flooding, peat and sphagnum moss in Todmorden and the river in Sowerby Bridge.
- Generated knowledge and understanding of tools and data capture methods to secure Theatre Green Book basic accreditation.

THRIVING CREATIVE SECTOR

- Connected with diverse local audiences open to co-designing and producing creative output with Northern Broadsides, developing new, participative, audience interactions.
- Unlocked opportunities for local people, including people who arrive into Calderdale as migrants, to unleash and share their creative talent, producing high quality and significant work.
- Created employment opportunities for local creative professionals and artists, nurtured local creative talent, providing opportunity and stepping stones into creative sector roles.
- Contributed to broader sector development through collaboration and evaluation.
- Co-developed ideas have sparked ongoing legacy initiatives.
- Developed new audiences to support work for families, young people and communities.



STORIES OF CHANGE: WRITERS AND ACTORS



“I am finally the story that I’ve been too afraid to write” - Hana Gillani

Hana is a disabled single parent from Pakistan who is an asylum seeker and refugee living in Halifax. Hana describes herself as an achiever, a dreamer and a freedom fighter. During 2024/25 Hana joined over twenty people attending two five-day residencies and regular weekly writing sessions as part of The Writer’s Refuge.

“The Writer’s Refuge gave me confidence and allowed me to trust my ability to write...it helped me relive my journey of words with dignity and above all respect... I have found my voice and identity, developing my confidence and resilience.”



“I have this little treasure box of all my best achievements in my life, and this is going in there” - Phil Bruce

Phil is a local volunteer and nature enthusiast with a passion for the Calder Valley. He was involved in the Cromwell Bottom audio tour as an actor and writer, read poetry to a huge crowd at Gordon Rigg Garden Centre, and took part in the *Iron People @ Eureka!* performance. Phil speaks about the process with a deep sense of pride, telling us that through the project, he overcame his biggest personal barrier: public speaking. *“I’m happy to actually try more things out and actually being able to enjoy the moment... now I feel if I do a presentation for an interview, I’d be a lot more confident.”*



Stories of Change is a qualitative, participant-focused approach that captures and analyses short personal or group narratives to reveal the impact of creative projects like *Iron People*.





STORIES OF CHANGE: PARK YOUTH THEATRE

*“This is the best club I have ever been to!” Akram,
Park Youth Theatre participant*

Akram, 11, joined Park Youth Theatre in October 2024 and quickly became a driving force in the group, always offering ideas and helping guide discussions during brainstorming sessions. While confident and outgoing, Akram is blind, which presented challenges in the physical activities. From her first day, the team worked to adapt warm-ups and games so they were inclusive. Other members eagerly supported her, modifying favourite activities and ensuring Akram could fully participate, demonstrating both teamwork and empathy.

Keyan is one of our shyest, longest-standing members. At the performance day at Eureka!, he really surprised us all - confidently answering questions, sharing ideas, and really owning the space. He'd never done that before. Seeing him believe in himself like that is the biggest change that Kassie (Youth Theatre Assistant) reported seeing throughout the *Iron People* project.

Youth Theatre Director, **Kash Arshad** said: *“I was approached by the families of two of our youth theatre members, both who are young Asian boys. Their parents said that they see me as a positive role model, coming from within their community, and that along with Ali [Youth Theatre Support Worker] we represent possibilities for careers and the future”*





KATRINA

Community Producer Katrina Heath worked with the Todmorden community on a range of creative sessions leading to a celebration event at Gordon Rigg Garden Centre:

“The sessions fed our poetry, our campaigns, the creation of a beautiful sculpture, and a song that was written using the lyrics from the poetry performed by a wonderful cast, two professional musicians, and two musicians from the community, including a nine-year-old who played two different instruments... This has been an absolutely fabulous opportunity for me as a fairly new producer...to have that support that the wider organisation has given, to scaffold my independence, to support my own decision making.”



SARAH

Finance Administrator, Sarah Oliver-Webb, reflected on the new-found strength within the core Northern Broadsides team:

“We quickly developed an understanding of each other’s working styles, preferences, and strengths... I’ve seen team members thrive in new and existing areas - Kassie took on the PYT lead role, making a real impact on the young people... Jess stepped out of her usual marketing work to engage new audiences across diverse events... Ruth juggled big-picture strategy with day-to-day details. Laurie brought everyone’s ideas together into one thoughtful vision. This experience of working and learning together has made us a stronger team for future projects.”



JESS

Jess Rooney, Marketing Manager, shared how she’d seen the Northern Broadsides audience shift during the project:

“I feel our audience now are so different to our usual tour audience; they are local, diverse, and highly engaged. Families and communities come to take part, with no financial barriers or formalities. We’re their box office. The work is made with them, not just for them.”



PROJECT ACTIVITIES: PARK YOUTH THEATRE



35 sessions, 39 individual participants aged 8 -14, 100% South Asian ethnicities, 100% new to drama activity outside of school, 2 access needs met, 2 funders, 10 freelance artists.

Park Youth Theatre takes place on Wednesday evenings at Unique Community Hub in Park Ward, Halifax, led by Director Kash Arshad. The project provides a safe, trusted space where young people can develop confidence, communication, teamwork, and make friends. Participants explored climate change, social justice, global futures, and the local landscape through devised scenes addressing environmental issues, showing both problems and positive solutions. This hands-on approach empowered them to think critically, express ideas creatively, and take action. In March 2025, they performed their own protest songs at The Outback Community Kitchen and Garden, raising their voice for a cleaner, greener Halifax. Members also took part in the finale performance at Eureka!

BIG GREEN FUN DAY

121 attendances, 1 funder, 10 professional artists.

This free event in Park Ward offered a full day of performances, workshops, and activities focused on climate action and sustainability. Chocolate prompted conversations about Climate Justice, while Indian dance and storytelling explored humanity's responsibility to restore nature. Hands-on activities included a nature trail, recycling crafts, a clothes swap, and a Repair Café. The day concluded with a communal vegetarian meal, served alongside poetry by Anjum Malik. The Big Green Fun Day was led by Community Producer, Shazia Bibi.





FAMILY CREATIVITY DAYS

1,040 attendances, 3 funders, 10 professionals involved.

In late 2023, we developed a new model for Family Creativity Days, with events in Sowerby Bridge, Elland, Mytholmroyd, Park Ward and Todmorden. The days engaged youngsters and adults alike, exploring the tales of *The Iron Man* and *The Iron Woman* through storytelling, movement workshops, drop-in crafts, and art workshops with illustrator Chris Mould. In 2024 and 2025, a second series was delivered in the same locations, this time with community producers who selected venues, artists, and partners to support delivery. Each event was tailored to local environmental concerns and interests; for example, making puppet river monsters in Sowerby Bridge, music-making in Todmorden, and storytelling in Park Ward.

WRITERS AND ACTORS

95 attendances, 67 individual participants, 2 funders, 5 professionals involved.

At the start of 2024, adults from Calderdale joined free workshops in poetry and acting. Calderdale author Ian Humphreys led three poetry sessions: Writing the River in Todmorden, a Ted Hughes-inspired Eco-Poet Workshop in Sowerby Bridge, and a Children's Eco-Poetry Workshop in Halifax. In late August, community members and local artists gathered at Cromwell Bottom Nature Reserve for storytelling, poetry, and movement, planting the seeds for the Cromwell Bottom audio tour. Acting tasters with Laurie Sansom and Movement Director Jen Malarkey allowed participants to creatively explore the stories and characters that would become the final show at Eureka!



SOWERBY BRIDGE

119 attendances, 71 individual participants, 2 funders, 6 professionals involved.

In Autumn 2024, we worked closely with the community in Sowerby Bridge to deliver a series of creative events outdoors and at local venues such as Fire and Water.

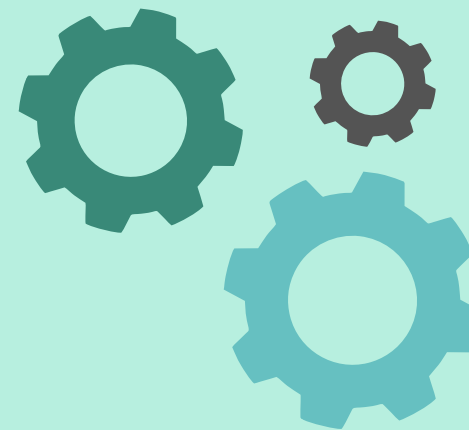
The sessions included mudlarking on the banks of the River Calder, soundscape and writing workshops, artbuilding and storytelling culminating in a creative celebration event looking at the stories of the River Calder. Sowerby Bridge activity was led by Community Producer, Lucy Rose Fee.

CROMWELL BOTTOM

178 attendances, 108 individual participants, 2 funders, 6 professionals involved.

Creative writing and acting sessions exploring the industrial history of Cromwell Bottom Nature Reserve led to an immersive audio trail featuring poetry and stories written and read by the local community. The trail invites visitors to reconnect with nature in Brighthouse and discover the layered history shaped by humans, industry, and climate change that created the reserve's unique habitat. The creative team included Sound Designer Jo Kennedy, Poet Ian Humphreys, and Environmental Historian Paul Knights.

Building on this success, Northern Broadsides are supporting the Cromwell Bottom team to secure funding to ensure ongoing access to the audio experience.





TODMORDEN

241 attendances, 140 individual participants, 2 funders, 6 professionals involved.

A series of creative workshops aimed at adults focussed on water, reflecting Upper Valley experiences of flooding and complex relationship to its many aspects. Most sessions were held at Todmorden Community College.

This theme was explored through creative writing, sound and music as well as a hands on 'water workshop', and culminated in Mastering The Flow, an afternoon of performances and interactive activities for all ages exploring Todmorden's actions in slowing the flow. It included interactive sculpture, original poetry and song, all created by local residents at the popular Gordon Riggs Garden Centre. Todmorden activity was led by Community Producer, Katrina Heath.

THE WRITER'S REFUGE

72 attendances, 21 individual participants, 1 funder, 1 professional involved.

Across six creative writing sessions, 21 people aged 20-53 learnt from professional writers in a relaxed environment and explored their relationship with nature both in their home countries and in Calderdale.

Over 20 local participants took part in two five-day residencies at Wordsworth Grasmere and the IOU Art Hostel, in collaboration with St Augustine's Centre, Arvon Foundation, and Valley of Sanctuary. Each writer received 1-2-1 mentoring, resulting in a published anthology of 12 pieces, launched at a public reading at the Elsie Whitely Centre in Halifax in March 2025. The launch event was filled with live readings, insightful discussions, and a moving online exchange of poetry with a group of climate refugees from Australia.



IRON PEOPLE @ EUREKA!

1,400 estimated audiences, 339 participatory attendances, 91 individual participants, 2 funders, 33 professionals involved

The grand finale of our *Iron People* journey took place outdoors at Eureka! Children's Museum in Halifax on 26 April 2025. Led by Senior Producer for the *Iron People* project, Steph Connell.

The performance created a new myth for Calderdale, as giant creatures emerged from the valley to confront audiences about our treatment of the planet. The story began with professional and community actors staging a political rally as Valley Management Inc., imposing draconian laws on the borough and its children. Three giants then emerged, joined by local children from Park Youth Theatre and across the valley, marching together to demand action to save the planet.

The puppet creatures were designed by local children during Family Creativity Days in Todmorden, Sowerby Bridge, and Park Ward with illustrator Chris Mould and brought to life by Thingumajig Theatre. 40 members of Elland Silver Band performed a live soundtrack commissioned from three composers. Families engaged with creative work from community projects, visited partner eco-group stalls, and enjoyed a CBeebies' Mr Bloom performance, all celebrating environmental sustainability. This day-long Change-Making event also marked the finale of CultureDale's year-long celebration.





ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Funding, Partnerships and Acknowledgements

Huge thanks are due to the seven funding bodies who supported the *Iron People* project. *Iron People* was funded by The National Lottery Community Fund, CultureDale, Community Foundation for Calderdale's Community Grants for Climate Action Fund, Calderdale Council's Culture Fund, the UK Government through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund, Tracy Brabin Mayor of West Yorkshire's Safer Communities Fund, and The Liz and Terry Bramall Foundation.

Without Arts Council England NPO core funding, *Iron People* would not have been possible.

The project was delivered by the core Northern Broadsides team: Laurie Sansom (Artistic Director and Joint CEO), Ruth Cooke (Executive Director and Joint CEO), Jess Rooney (Marketing and Communications Manager), Sarah Oliver-Webb (Finance Administrator), and Kassie Jones (Production and Administration Assistant).

We are grateful to the many freelance artists and collaborators who contributed to *Iron People*, including: Safeera Ahmad, Kash Arshad, Adelle A'sante, Pippa Bailey, Daniel Bath, Lara Booth, Shazia Bibi, Martin Clarke, Michael Chesterman, Alex Colley, Steph Connell, Frank Darnley, Clare Dodds, Zena Edwards, Lucy Rose Fee, Sam Ford, Ian Humphreys, Sam Harrison, Naomi Hill, Anna Holmes, Kate Ireland, Ali Khan, Andrew Kim, Jo Kennedy, Liz Lane, Paula Lane, Paul Knights, Jen Malarkey, Anjum Malik, Chris Mould, Kerith Ogden, Marlene Ribeiro, Andrea Price, Rachael Rea, Nick Sagar, Jonny Quick, Sinaan Khan, Sophie Rushworth, Steve Summers, Clare Shaw, Tom Shaw, Heidi Thornton, Andrew Whitehead, Jess Weston, and Charlotte Woods.

Special thanks to the consultants who made the project possible: Ann-Marie Merrick (Fundraising), Chloe Nelkin Consulting (Press) and Sustainability Arts in Leeds (Environmental).

We also thank local groups and organisations who were involved, including: Annapurna Dance, Arvon Foundation, Breaking Barriers, Bridestones Rewilding, Calder River Trust, Calderdale Food Network, Calderdale Music, Calderdale Valley of Sanctuary, Creative Flare, Cromwell Bottom Wildlife Group, Elland Community Hub, Eureka! The National Children's Museum, Halifax Canoe Club, Halifax Opportunities Trust, Gordon Rigg Garden Centre, Halifax Playhouse, Lane Shaw Academy, King Cross Library, Mytholmroyd Community Centre, Parkinson Lane Community Primary School, Slow the Flow, Sowerby Bridge Fire and Water, Southgate Methodist Church, St Augustine's Centre, The Elsie Whiteley Innovation Centre, The Old Post Office, Todmorden, The Outback Community Kitchen & Garden, Todmorden Community College, Todmorden Makery, Unique Community Hub and Visits Unlimited.

We thank all the community, and youth performers, puppet builders and volunteers whose creativity, dedication, and enthusiasm brought *Iron People* to life.

Thank you to Helen Jones from locally based charity and social enterprise consultancy, Antworks Community who supported the evaluation of the project.

We would like to give a final special thanks to Senior Producer Steph Connell, whose passion and care were central to managing *Iron People*.