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Finding your Tribe by Robert Browne

40 years of Waterford Youth Arts. You must be joking. When I walked up the stone steps of Garter Lane 2 in O Connell Street back in 1995, little did I know that my life would change in the best possible way. I had found my tribe. It didn't matter whether you were from Ballybeg or Dunmore, Ferrybank or Dunhill - Waterford Youth Arts welcomed you and this inclusive atmosphere made those Monday night workshops so memorable. I made lifelong friends - Nick Kavanagh, Linda Kavanagh, Andrew Macklin, James Rockett and many more - and I was empowered to be seen and heard and contribute to the cultural footprint of the great city of Waterford with my ideas and beliefs.

This year marks a remarkable milestone for Waterford Youth Arts (WYA) as it celebrates 40 years of nurturing creativity, empowering young voices, and inspiring generations of young people through theatre, music, dance, writing, and visual arts. As Chairperson of the Board of Directors, I am immensely proud of the organisation and believe that WYA is the leading youth arts platform for young people in the whole of Ireland.

I have watched as WYA has grown in so many ways and continues to provide creative opportunities for young people in Waterford. A big part of the success of the organisation are the people at the apex of the organisation. I am always struck by the passionate approach that Ollie Breslin has instilled and espoused as Artistic Director. Ollie had championed the arts and young people of the city for 40 years and his contribution to artistic life in the Deise is immeasurable. If you come with an idea to Ollie, he will see the passion and believe in it even if you don't. He harnesses a great vision for what youth arts is and should be in the country at large. Together with Cathy Hanrahan in her role as Development and Administration they have planted a seed that has blossomed into a national model of how youth arts can transform lives. Thousands have benefited and I thoroughly feel that WYA helped me get to where I was going. The late Jim Daly always told me that WYA is a vehicle that can change you for the best - 'Be Seen and be heard Bob'. The advice still resonates with me every day. WYA made me be seen and be heard.

Happy birthday to WYA. 40 glorious years. Here is to the next 40.

Robert Browne *Chairperson of WYA*



WYA would like to thank Robert Thompson Funeral Directors for sponsoring this page



Waterford Youth Arts CLG

The Arch,
Old Military Barracks,
Barrack Street,
Waterford
X91 YX7Y
www.waterfordyoutharts.com

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CHY 13110
CRA 20039950

Directors & Mgmt Committee

Robert Browne
Aoibhie McCarthy
Clodagh Walsh
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Waterford Youth Arts

- ★ is the home of the arts for young people in Waterford
- ★ is one of the largest and longest established youth arts organisations in Ireland
- ★ is a celebrated Youth Theatre
- ★ is home to The Lit Young Writers Festival
- ★ is youth-led, welcoming, safe and inclusive
- ★ is informed by youth voice
- ★ is 40 years old!

Waterford Youth Arts

celebrates forty years of growing, sharing, imagining and creating. Established first in 1985, Waterford Youth Arts has gathered forty years of expertise in providing excellent arts experiences and creative opportunities for young people and children in Waterford City and environs. We collaborate with some of the most exciting artists and theatre makers all across the island of Ireland, U.K. and Europe supported and resourced by our funding partners, programme partners and sponsors. In that time, thousands of young people and children have been enabled to imagine, create and discover.

Waterford Youth Arts marks this special milestone with a programme of events and activities to celebrate our 40th birthday from Aug 25 - 31, 2025

Join us ! for more information visit waterfordyoutharts.eventbrite.ie

Cover illustration:- Elliott Jordan Kennedy

Photography & images by: - Joe Evans; Light-Sensitive Photography; HK Stuart; Paddy Dwan; Pat Grimes; Henrique Silva; Mark Stedman Photography; John Power Photography et al

Growing up in WYA by Ren (Rory Farrell)

I joined Waterford Youth Arts creative writing when I was eleven years old. The writing group, led by Eimear Cheasty was this magical place where I could understand and express my creativity. This writing class facilitated me to be able to write regularly and improve my skills. The writing class, and by extension Waterford Youth Arts was an important part of my formative years. I had only really played sports up until that point, something which I played haphazardly and quite frankly, terribly. Eimear's writing classes, despite me lacking any real skill, especially in my younger years, allowed me to express myself and feel like I was good at something, something which I didn't get with sports. I continued with writing for the next eight years, through COVID and through a variety of tutors such as Martina Collender, Alana Daly Mulligan and Mary O'Donoghue. If it wasn't for creative writing I wouldn't be the person I am today.

When I was sixteen, I auditioned for my first Waterford Youth Arts play, Remote. The play, directed by Deirdre Dwyer, with Sinead Hourigan as assistant director, was one of the most important moments in my life so far. Collette helped me with my first audition, however I still had no idea about how I got in. I had done drama at a different organization for the prior five years, however this was my first time in a more formal environment. This made me love the stage and, quite honestly, saved my life. If it was not for the stage, Waterford Youth Arts as well as the work of Deirdre Dwyer and Sinead Hourigan, I would not be here. Throughout my years I loved Waterford Youth Arts as it was the place I could express and understand myself, it is the place where I became myself. I struggled in school, I didn't feel like I belonged anywhere and I struggled with anxiety. Waterford Youth Arts, for a long time was the only place where my brain could rest and I could enjoy myself. WYA also gave me the opportunity to help give back to the community, so I was involved in organizing the lit fest, volunteer minding children as well as the members committee, opportunities which I cherish. I am twenty now, so my time has come, but I will always miss my time at WYA, whether it be behaving like a cretin to Shane, Ollies hilarious stories, Sinead's drama classes or Mary's writing classes, I will always miss Waterford Youth Arts.



A Walk to O'Connell Street by Jim Nolan

Sometime in the winter of 1979, I left my then home in John's Park and set off for town. The trip was a distance of no more than a mile or so but marked the beginning of a journey that would shape the rest of my life. My destination was the then Municipal Library building on O'Connell Street and my purpose was to attend a meeting convened by the Combat Poverty Project to discuss the ways in which access to and participation in artistic activity might be enhanced. By direct or circuitous routes, that meeting led to the formation of Garter Lane Arts Centre, Waterford Youth Arts, Spraoi and Red Kettle Theatre Company. Each of these organisations has left a revolutionary and extraordinarily positive impression on the cultural landscape of our city - and none more so than Waterford Youth Arts.

Although familiar with and admiring of its work from the outside, it would be WYA's 25th anniversary before I had the opportunity to join the circus with a production of *Dark of the Moon* in 2010. In the years since, I returned to direct *The Crucible* (2014), *Our Town*, (2015), *Romeo and Juliet* (2021) and *Under Milk Wood* (2024). Each of these productions brought the usual challenges to which the various casts and creative teams responded magnificently but *all* of them were a demonstration of the governing ethos of WYA - that however important the outcome, the *process* is what matters most. In the hard-bitten world of professional theatre where the opposite, too often, is the case, it was good to be reminded of this and I count my collaborations with WYA as among the happiest and most fulfilling of my creative life.

For forty years, Waterford Youth Arts has been an open, accessible, safe and welcoming space for young people to engage in artistic activity across a wide range of arts disciplines. Critically, it has encouraged and enabled successive generations of young people to proclaim and celebrate their individuality and to do so in the service of a shared endeavour. That is no small achievement.

This anniversary year brings with it the opportunity to acknowledge the very many volunteers, administrators, board members and tutors who shaped and nurtured a creative climate where young people felt free to fly. They did so under the leadership of departing Artistic Director, Ollie Breslin, whose contribution to the development of youth theatre here in Waterford and throughout Ireland is unparalleled and deserving of our collective gratitude and admiration. I wish him well on the road ahead as I do for all at WYA on the next leg of what has been a truly wonderful journey.

Burning Bright and Brilliant: The Lit Festival in 2025

by Alana Daly Mulligan

Current coordinator and alumni of The Lit Young Writers' Festival, Alana Daly Mulligan talks about the festival's early beginnings and current reimagining as Ireland's Youngest Literature Festival in Ireland's Oldest City.

(Not so) Long Long Ago...

Waterford Youth Arts has always pushed the boundaries when it comes to how Waterford celebrates and believes in young people, and its impact can be felt across its current members and alumni. In 2016, talks between Eimear Cheasty, Ollie Breslin & Cathy Hanrahan began to see about creating a youth-led literary festival. Not just something that drew young people to the event itself, but something more holistic. The secret sauce to this idea was that the WYA creative writing class would lead it out as programmers and co-organisers, while also getting a chance to platform their own work and connect with industry professionals. This idea soon caught the imaginations of the young writers who naturally made a wish list of their favourite authors they wanted at the event. They further started ideating what a visual brand could look like, and how they should promote this new-fangled festival on social media. With that, *The Lit Young Writers' Festival* was born. We became Europe's first festival of reading and writing for young people, co-organised by Waterford Youth Arts very own YOUTH.

Light to the future

Eight years on from the dreaming of what The Lit could be, there is a new, powerful energy running through the festival. There are not just writers involved, but filmmakers, theatre-makers, artists and all flavours of Waterford's blossoming creative scene involved in making a festival that reimagines literature and youth arts in our city. Yes, our young people might be different, but the needs



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remains the same: the want for quality youth festival programming and the desire to do it themselves.

New bits, same flame

We're refocusing on the training and mentorship that the original festival established, and have thrown out the rope to more world-class professionals offering their expertise to young creatives looking to improve their craft. We're excited to offer our young co-organisers more opportunities when it comes to managing and planning. Further, we're excited to launch The Lit Alumni Programme that endeavours to connect different generations of The Lit co-organising committees to reflect, celebrate and support one another after their time in the programme has ended. We run a book club in partnership with our new literary partners at Dubray. We are proudly supported by Waterford Council, The Arts Council, Waterford Treasures, The Book Centre, Iarnród Éireann, Garter Lane and The Theatre Royal.

On a personal note, The Lit changed my life. It was something I talked about when I interviewed for university and when I entered into the world of work. I practice all the skills I learned during *The Lit* nearly every day as a working artist and professional bossy boots. I reflect back on being a tuff-butt teenager, and am so grateful Eimear and Ollie were so patient with me, with all of us, as the festival found its feet. It's an honour to be able to do the same thing for the new cohort of young people, who remind me I'm not as cool as I think and make me feel excited to come in and work with them every day.

Mól an óige agus tiocfaidh siad – praise the youth and they will prosper.

WYA would like to thank Tully's Bar for sponsoring this page



The Birthday Weekend will include:

Waterford Youth Arts @ 40 | Saturday, Aug 30, 2025



Animation | with Paul Bolger

When Sat Aug 30 | 11:00 - 13:00

Where St Patrick's Gateway Centre, Waterford

Ages 12-19 year olds

Booking waterfordyoutharts.eventbrite.ie



Easy E-zine | with Cuán Cusack

When Sat Aug 30 | 14:00 - 16:00

Where St Patrick's Gateway Centre, Waterford

Ages 12-19 year olds

Booking waterfordyoutharts.eventbrite.ie



Audition & Self Tape | with Jamie Beamish

When Sat Aug 30 | 11:00 - 13:00

Where St Patrick's Gateway Centre, Waterford

Ages 14-19 year olds

Booking waterfordyoutharts.eventbrite.ie



Shakespeare Shakedown | with Keith Dunphy

When Sat Aug 30 | 14:00 - 16:00

Where St Patrick's Gateway Centre, Waterford

Ages 14-19 year olds

Booking waterfordyoutharts.eventbrite.ie

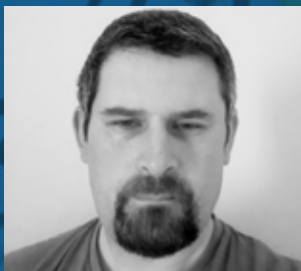


24 hrs for Waterford Youth Arts

When Sat Aug 30 | 19:00 - 21:30

Where Garter Lane Arts Centre, O'Connell Str, Waterford

Booking waterfordyoutharts.eventbrite.ie





Waterford Youth Arts @ 40 | Sunday, Aug 31st, 2025



Picnic in the Park

When Sun Aug 31 | 11:00 - 15:00

Where Wyse Park, Johns Lane, Waterford

Ages Families & children

Booking waterfordyoutharts.eventbrite.ie

*Weather permitting. * Families ** children u12 yrs must be accompanied by adult*



Lark in the Park | Teenage Kicks

When Sun Aug 31 | 15:00 - 17:00

Where Wyse Park, Johns Lane, Waterford

Ages 12-19 yrs

Booking waterfordyoutharts.eventbrite.ie

Weather permitting.



Waterford Youth Arts | 40th Gala

When Sun Aug 31 | 19:00 - 21:30

Where City Hall, Waterford | Mary Strangman Room

Booking waterfordyoutharts.eventbrite.ie



Waterford Youth Arts | Exhibit 40

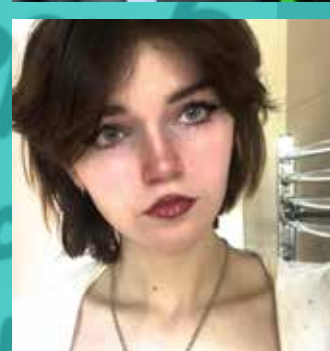
40 years in pictures, print, programmes and memories

When Aug 29 | 10:00 - 22:00

Aug 30 | 12:00 - 22:00

Where Vestibule, Theatre Royal, Waterford

Admission Free



I've been involved in Waterford Youth Arts for the past 4 years, and during that time I've met lifelong friends, and really developed my confidence. WYA has given me the opportunity to explore myself through the arts, and discover my passion for acting. It has opened a door to a plethora of connections which has allowed me to pursue different ventures, such as event management and PR. Waterford Youth Arts has given me a space to figure out who I am, and I believe everyone deserves that chance. It has been an integral part of the youth community for 40 years, for members and the public, and I believe it should continue for another 40.

Neeva Coughlan

Some pieces by present members of WYA and looking forward to its future...

Waterford Youth Arts is one of the only acting organisations in Waterford for young people. This creates a great opportunity for people who might not like singing or dancing but love acting, like a lot of people in WYA. You have so much freedom to express yourself, you feel like you can completely be yourself and that's so important for young people. Everybody is given equal opportunity. Everybody gets a chance. It is a truly great organisation and everybody in it will say with confidence it should stay for another 40 years.

Emma Coughlan

My time in Waterford youth arts has been transformative. When I first joined the Monday night drama classes I was extremely socially anxious and had few friends. Since joining ive gained massive confidence through being in stage and having to work closely with others and have made so many amazing friends through the organisation that I'll hopefully have for life. Through waterford youth arts ive gotten the opportunity to do many things such as act on film/stage, direct my own play and participate in many other aspects of theatre such as set design. Overall waterford youth arts has been a very important organisation for me and many of my friends. Its been equally as important to many other young people over the last 40 years and hopefully it will continue to be important to the next generations for many years to come!

Ryan Keogh

Facilitating Dreams by Liam Murphy

My involvement in Waterford Youth Arts goes back to the early days when it was Waterford Youth Drama. At that time, it was run by Ollie Breslin and Jim O'Meara, who shared a bijou house up the Stony Steps.

I was helping out in Ferrybank with Ted O'Regan, writing, drama workshops, and Summer bus drama tours around the South East. Jim O'Meara and others were members of Waterford Dramatic Society's 'Chesterbread Saturday Boys', who built sets in Henrietta St. I was also becoming involved with Waterford Arts For All Project, and touring children's plays to housing estates.

Waterford Youth Arts was in transition, and at some stage, I went from workshop facilitator to play director on several occasions in Garter Lane Arts Centre.

I have memories of memorable evenings spent in Frank Roche's house with Nora Walls, helping to restructure submissions to meet Arts Council and Waterford City Council guidelines, where the buzz words were 'mission statement', 'outcomes', mission vision', 'equality and inclusion'. These structured sessions cross-fertilised ideas and aspirations to provide better, safer, fun, and enjoyable experiences. Frank lived around the corner from a chipper, and that was fun too.

As part of that restructuring, the committee and later the board initiated Summer play projects where young people would get to work with a broad range of theatre advocates and professional directors, to produce work to be staged in Garter Lane.

There was a long-standing debate about 'process versus product', and the Summer Plays provided a great escape with improvised themes and workshops that led to greater involvement in producing a production, with a focus on presentational values - making theatre.

The membership was always young, lasting just a few years, often spanning from Primary to Secondary, and it was a parade of young people discovering their place in a developing world. There were dreamers, arts makers, writers, poets and friends who came along for the buzz. They came and went. Not all were stars; that wasn't an essential part of the process. Many learned the value of being a witness, taking it all in, and forming friendships.

They were always young in my eyes, as Bob Dylan said: "May you build a ladder to the stars, And climb on every rung. May you stay forever young".



Then and Now by Shane and Ryan

Then:

Waterford Youth Arts is very dear to my heart. I consider it the place I found myself to a large extent. Much of who I am now was formed/discovered in there between the years of 2006 and 2011. Having been dragged along to a drama workshop at age 15 by my friend Dave Rowe, I was instantly blown away by the idea of practicing how to play on a weekly basis, an idea that literally moves me from day to day now. After a few terms as a member of the weekly drama workshops run by James Rockett and Jenny Grangel, the summer of 2007 brought my first summer project experience. "Etcetera" was the name of the play, which ended up being a madcap devised play about a group of young people making a play. It was my first opportunity to work with Liam Meagher, and I got a real taste of just how crazy and fun live theatre can be.

From there I was involved in each of the following four summer projects, both in acting and backstage crew member roles which included my first time sharing a rehearsal space with Jim Nolan. Absolutely unforgettable. I also got to take part in an exchange programme with Croydon Youth Theatre Organization, led by Nick Kavanagh, again giving me completely new and mind blowing ways of facilitating and engaging with young creatives. Getting to work with such a variety of multi-faceted actors, directors and devisers, learning different styles and tips and tricks and methods for creating and rehearsing and facilitating has captured and engaged my mind in ways that very little else ever has, and formed wonderful working relationships on later more recent projects with Liam, Jim and Nick specifically.

Being back working with Waterford Youth Arts these past three years, I'm amazed at how much things have changed and yet also stayed the same. The welcoming environment, the potential and inevitable lifelong friendships, the springboard into the local and national theatre scene along with other areas of the arts are still there, but now stronger (I was always a drama kid, but the art, creative writing and film workshops all have equally powerful effects on those who take part in them - all the moreso if they do more than one of them). The ability of professionals to adapt their methodologies to bring the best out of a young inexperienced cast and the organizations' willingness to adapt to the ever changing needs of its young people astounds and inspires me to do the same, and while it sometimes feels like a new





development, when I think hard about it, it's actually a quality that existed long before I first experienced/noticed it.

An element I definitely didn't notice or appreciate in my younger years is just how much behind the scenes work is carried out by the office in Waterford Youth Arts. Whether it's sourcing funding, rehearsal spaces, performance spaces or any of the other million things they do that I'm still clueless about, the whole team in the office, led by Cathy and Liz, are the vital backbone that any youth arts organization needs to provide the space for self discovery and growth that I've been lucky enough to experience.



Finally, it's been an absolute privilege to get to work closely with Ollie on so many projects these past three years. He's always been at the core of any Waterford Youth Arts project I've been involved with, and while, as a young member, I was rather oblivious to the extent of that core-ness too, after these past three years, it couldn't be more blatant to me. We are all very fortunate to have experienced the care and playfulness he brings not only to his own job, but the jobs of all around him. You've helped shaped the futures and identities of more people than any of us can count. Happy birthday Waterford Youth Arts, and thank you Ollie.

By Shane Flynn



Now:

Hi my name is Ryan Keogh and I'm a current member of Waterford Youth Arts! My time in WYA has been such a wonderful experience and it all started with me going to see my first play. My friend Charlie Meagher was in WYA production of *Is This Good Enough?* written by Avaes Mohammed and directed by Nick

Kavanagh. It was so inspirational seeing people my age be so confident on stage and I was pushed to give it a go myself. A few months later I took part in my first play with WYA "The Blame... And How To Avoid It" written and directed by Liam Meagher. It was such an amazing experience to be part of and I made so many friends that I'm now so close to. Going out on stage for the first time was so nerve-racking but once I was out there it was so fun! Since then I've got to be part of many other things as a part of youth arts. I've acted in two more summer projects with some amazing directors, got to be assistant director to the amazing Sinéad Hourigan on the show *Saba's Swim* and even got to direct my own show *Beetroot!* My time as a member of WYA has been so fulfilling. I've gained so much confidence and better social skills from my time here. I wouldn't trade my time and memories in WYA for anything.

By Ryan Keogh



Getting out before I'm carried out by Ollie Breslin

Yes I have thought for some time about the idea that a youth organisation should be led by a younger person and so I finally gave my 1 year's notice at the end of 2024 and so I'll be leaving at Christmas this year. This will be a sad time for me as WYA has been so much of my life up to now. I have loved working with the youth of Waterford and I feel we gave them a great service in so many ways up to now. And so I would like to thank all of my colleagues as we have always worked as a team and I'm including all the adults on that team – paid staff, CE workers, Tutors, Volunteer adults, and also our voluntary Board Members – it has been a pleasure to work with you all and I always love bumping into past members and past workers.

And I have always said that it will be harder to replace Cathy than an Artistic Director like me – us arts people are 'ten a penny'. Whereas to find someone who cares so much and is also able to get the funding and support is very rarer. Cathy is a great asset and we wouldn't be able to achieve all we do without her hard work of and her team over the years.

Highlights for me have been:

How the young people have so much seen the organisation and The Arch as their place and this has particularly been helped by all the various youth committees e.g. Members Committee, Lit Festival team etc. How brilliant they are at taking the lead and how they are able to run and create so many things for themselves. The future of Waterford Arts is very healthy.

How the local arts scene has been a very positive place with local organisations and initiatives always helping each other and trying to make the best possible efforts to make things happen – and I believe WYA has played its part in this sense of cooperation





That arts workers are now able to make a living here and not have to move to major cities or emigrate as it was in the past. Again, WYA have helped this idea by always stressing that its in all our interests to pay arts workers and therefore they can stay here and be resources for the local community.

That we heled establish an arts bursary scheme to commemorate Ted and Mary O'Regan which is still providing financial support 21 years later to local arts workers on the ground.

My work on social history and particularly the help of my colleague Keith Currams to make so much of that happen. I believe we have achieved a lot with small resources and hope this area can be developed further in years to come.

That WYA campaigned nationally for Youth Arts and we commissioned two reports on how precarious the situation in general is for this sector especially in comparison to the adult arts sectors.

My Next Steps:

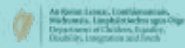
In 2026 I will be stepping out into the exciting area of being a freelance arts worker and I look forward to seeing what that might be like. I feel I have a few things to offer the wider arts market and community and also the youth sectors and the festival sectors. Anyway it will be exciting and never boring and hopefully lots of fun.

Note: The last time WYA had a retrospective publication was on our 25th birthday - 15 years ago and in that we mentioned former arts people who had majorly helped the organisation so far but are no longer with us - Jim Daly and Ted O'Regan

I'd like to take the opportunity to remember the contribution of the late Nora Walls, Galway, who passed away recently. Nora made important contribution to charting the future of Waterford Youth Arts, in its formative years, and the late Ernest 'Max' Ruckle or as we called him, Max. From America, he was a professional artist who moved here many years ago and he eventually became our tech guy and as a volunteer helped create our first WYA website and also lots of other help along the way and we miss them both.



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