

## Leigh Film Society

### Looking after communities in lockdown

Leigh Film Society, based in Greater Manchester, is a famous name in the community cinema world. Founded in 2013, Leigh Film Society have inspired groups across the UK with their dedication to serving their communities, and their extensive work focussed on battling social isolation and providing new opportunities for disadvantaged groups in their area. They are multi-award winners at the annual Film Society of the Year Awards, and were presented with the prestigious Film Society of the Year award back in 2017.

During lockdown, Leigh Film Society, have been providing a very special service in their communities, by delivering DVDs to vulnerable and/or isolated people. They are made up of a team of dedicated volunteers, including the wonderful Elizabeth Costello – who also features on the [Digital Releases During Lockdown episode of the Cinema For All Podcast](#). We wanted to talk to her about their inspiring DVD delivery initiative, and the impact that this has had on their community.



*Elizabeth Costello sporting a Leigh Film Society fleece!*



*Leigh Film Society volunteers with director Jeanie Finlay at Film Society of the Year Awards 2019.*

### Can you tell us a bit about the Leigh?

Leigh is the second largest town in the Metropolitan Borough of Wigan, and suffers from severe deprivation. It is a post-industrial town which has lost many of its traditional jobs over the past thirty years (particularly in textiles, mining and engineering) and has the lowest social mobility of any area in the UK.

The community of Leigh is inspiring a cultural revival by restoring places like Spinners Mill a Grade II listed mill that hosts an inclusive and varied cultural programme, and where Leigh Film Society have established a base!

Our film society, Leigh Film Society, is an independent community cinema charity. Established in 2013, we use film screenings to fight against social isolation, create opportunities for young people and support community cohesion. We have many different film screening

projects from the Evening Film Society, Afternoon Classic Cinema Club, our Annual Short Film Festival, Community Cinema events, monthly Saturday family matinees, and an Adult and Young Carer's Film Club.

Leigh has always been a cultural town bursting with talent and enthusiasm for the arts; a town rich in its heritage and community spirit!

**Leigh Film Society is an inspiration to so many community cinemas because of your incredible breadth of work. What have been some of your most notable achievements so far?**

Over the past seven years we have used film screenings to commemorate national events, raise awareness to campaigns and to help raise money for good causes whilst bringing the best in non-mainstream films to our town. We've had so many achievements, it's hard to select a notable one! Winning Cinema for All's 2017 Film Society of the year was a big deal for us and that really meant so much to receive national recognition.

We are made up of 100% volunteers at Leigh Film, and in June 2018 we were extremely proud to be awarded The Queens Award for Voluntary Service for "Providing socially-inclusive cinema screenings for everyone in the community and broadening access to culture".

In 2020 we were awarded Edge Hill University's 2020 Employer of the Year for the work we do with student work placements at our annual short film festival. It is really important, in a post industrial town, to create opportunities to support young people enhancing their CVs to get into the film industry.

Something I personally enjoy is that we have reinvigorated the family Saturday matinees. We have also recently started a new Carer's Film Club which gives valuable respite to adult carers and young carers - cinema escapism is perfect for this.



*Carer's Film Club.*

**You are doing something amazing during lockdown to look after your community.  
Please can you tell us about your DVD delivery service?**

With no screening events able to take place, we started looking at ways to keep film in our community. We tried a few online screenings and set up a forum for film discussion. With our vast DVD collection we decided to offer it out to vulnerable people living in isolation. The response was amazing - there's so many people out there living alone. With support from Forever Manchester we were able to offer a DVD delivery service, run entirely by Leigh Film Society Volunteers.

Requests started to come in from Facebook, Twitter and via our Wigan Council's community hubs. When people get in touch, we check out their preferences and then a bag is delivered containing from 6-8 DVDs, as well as a treat to enjoy while watching! There is no personal contact as the deliveries are left on their doorstep. All bags are age appropriate and we call them our 'orange bags of cinema sunshine'!



*Delivering some orange bags of cinema sunshine to a local care home!*



*Local resident receiving their*

For many years, we have championed cinema therapy and the therapeutic benefits that cinema offers. Watching films is a great way to escape to another time or place and a relaxing way to take our minds off the current crisis.



*Lots more happy Leigh residents!*



## What inspired you to start this initiative?

The initiative was inspired by our afternoon classic cinema club as we knew so many of our members lived alone. We wanted to stay connected with them and show our support.

## We saw that you received some DVDs from Studio Canal as a thank you for all the hard work that you're doing - congratulations! Do you have any advice for other groups on approaching a studio of this size for support with a project?

To be honest, I just messaged them and they responded! It was as simple as that. However, we do keep our social media up to date and can clearly evidence what we're doing in our community. I'm sure they will have taken a look at us first and researched before responding - they said they liked what we're doing and wanted to help. Due to the success of the project, we have put out numerous requests for DVD's donations. People in the community have really got behind this initiative and donations are coming in on a regular basis!

## What feedback have you had from people in your community about how it has helped them in isolation?

The feedback and positive comments have been wonderful, and the smiling faces when we deliver the DVDs makes it all worthwhile.

It's wonderful to receive feedback like this:

*"Thank you for the DVDs. You really lifted my spirits. Not only with the delivery but the content. The film Along came Polly. Gave me a giggle as I'm known as Polly. Thank you for your kindness."*



Preparing the bags of DVDs.



We have now expanded this project to include: primary school children who are vulnerable, children who are accessing free school meals, refugee groups, care homes and carers.

What it has highlighted to us is the amount of people and families who are not online or can't afford the streaming channels. This is a concern that we need a digital reform for the most disadvantaged in our society.

When this is all over we will return to our regular screening programmes bringing great films for everyone.

**Find out more about Leigh Film Society on their [website](#), and on their social media channels, [@LeighFilm](#) (Twitter) and [@LeighFilmSociety](#) (Facebook).**