



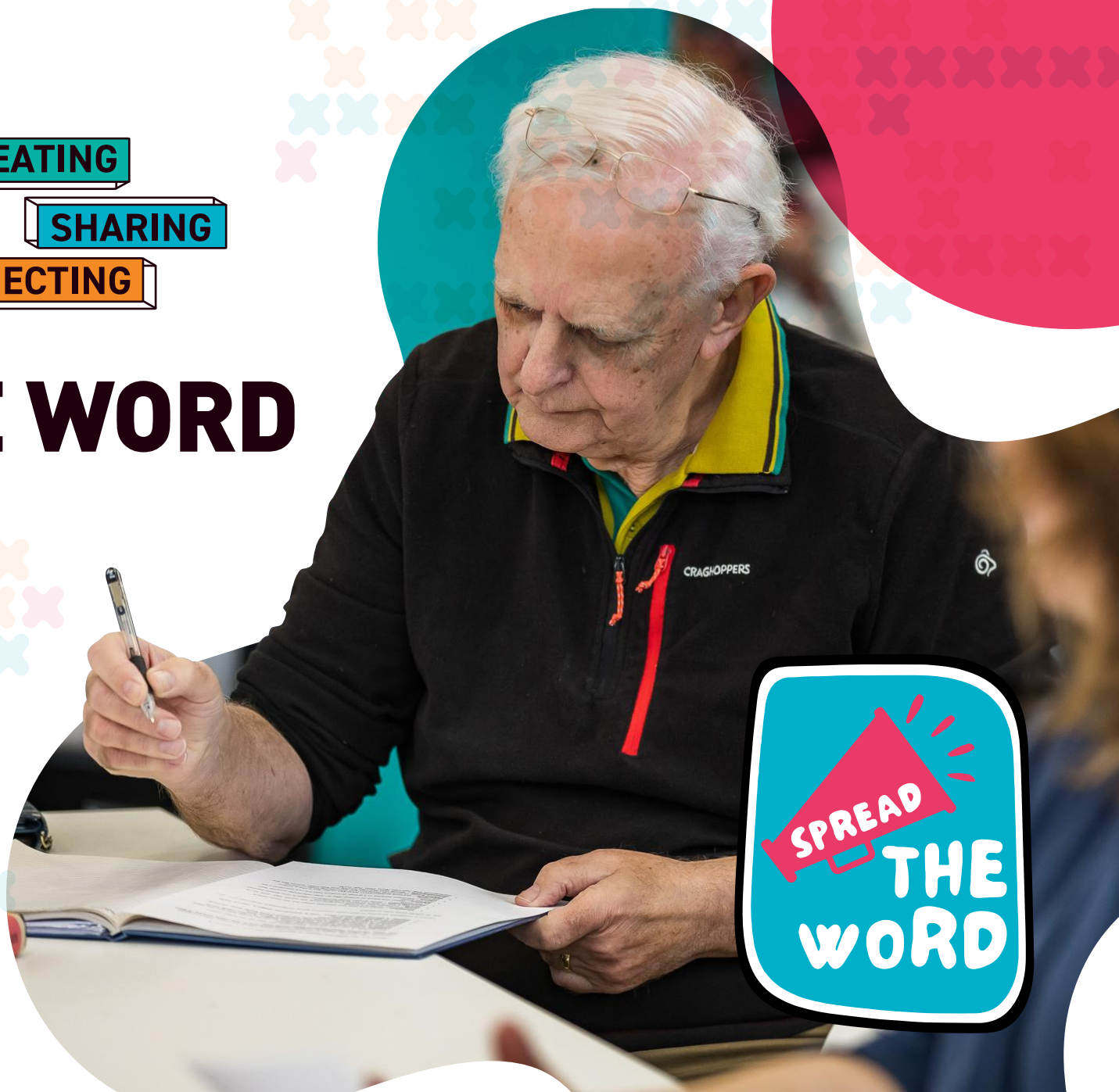
CREATING

SHARING

CONNECTING

SPREAD THE WORD

FLUX's creative writing project is dedicated to nurturing and celebrating stories through listening, writing and sharing.



Co-created arts with communities of Rotherham

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CREATIVE
PEOPLE
AND PLACES

SPREAD THE WORD - CREATIVE WRITING PROJECT

FLUX's creative writing project is dedicated to nurturing and celebrating stories through listening, writing, and sharing.

It aims to help people find their voices, build their confidence, and move towards sharing their work if they want to.

Spread the Word began in Wath in 2023 as one of FLUX's very first projects.

Since then, it has extended across Rotherham with regular writing groups at Mowbray Gardens Library and Swinton Library.

FLUX has also supported an existing town-centre Young Writers group run by *Hive South Yorkshire*.

Monthly Open Mic nights in the town centre at *Grimm & Co* and in Wath at *Wath Tap* offer writers an opportunity to share work with an audience in a supportive environment, attracting audiences of 30 to 40 people.

"The metallic streak of a kingfisher darts past, carrying her body, our ghosts, ourselves reflected back."

From Canal Works, Warda Yassin



In 2023, *Spread the Word* created a literary laundry line.

Made of 16 original poems printed onto tea towels and hung on a washing line, the work toured Rotherham Libraries including Rawmarsh, Mowbray Gardens, Riverside, Greasbrough and Wath.

In March 2025, *Spread the Word* hosted renowned poet Hollie McNish on the opening gig of the national tour of her new collection *Lobster and other things I'm learning to love*.

In October 2025, an anthology of work was published, 70 local poets contributed poems and 40 read onstage at the launch at the Civic Theatre.

Spread the Word is an important part of FLUX's programme, a long-term project providing opportunities for local people to express themselves, tell and share their stories. The sessions are free, open-access, and no prior writing experience is assumed or required.

"(Before the project started) There were lots of poets and some activity but nothing formal. It has a heartbeat now, a life of its own. I think the community is getting really strong."

Writing Sessions

Sessions are led by local poets Vic Leeson and Ray Hearne in 2 local libraries. Each facilitator has their own way of running the session. One session is a writing workshop. It includes sharing information about events and opportunities, a warm-up writing exercise and a main writing session, followed by an opportunity to share what has been written. The other session is more text-based, using poems as the starting point:

Mowbray Gardens

At Mowbray Gardens Community Library, Vic Leeson says: ***"My intention is that we can all create a space together where we share stories with each other. Each of the sessions includes a space to talk to each other as well as some gentle creative writing exercises to help people put pen to paper. You may write a few words, you may write a full poem or even a paragraph describing something important to you."***

Last summer the group went out of the library on tour with sessions running in a variety of different venues.

These included a narrow boat down the canal from Swinton Lock, the gardens at Wentworth Woodhouse, Clifton Park Museum and Gardens, and Grimm & Co's Emporium of Stories.

"People were so delighted to have such quality and that it was special to them, it was made for Rotherham."



At Swinton, Ray Hearne describes his approach:

"It's just trying to get people there and just treat them like adults, to believe in their abilities and try to encourage them to believe the same, eventually. There is no methodology. I just talk to them. Talk to people, get them talking, then get them writing, if you can. And the trick is, how do you get them writing? You show them what other people have written, I suppose."

"Firstly, I fetch in a couple of poems. I put them on a flip chart and then I stick them up on the library shelves. You know, like old fashioned community education. So, I read them, and then we all discuss them. And then we take things out of them, as things that we might write about next time. We take the line's images, tropes, out of it. One by one, depending on what they see, what they've got to say, and then add them to the list of stuff that we might write about. The point is to show them what passes for poetry. It's a much broader spectrum than people traditionally educated in English schools, are brought up to think."

"So that they can see that poems don't have to rhyme. They don't have to have the same line length. You know, they don't have to use posh language. They can use swear words. They can use conversation. Trying to suggest that the experience and language of a person from around here is just as valid as anybody else's. But people don't believe it. They don't believe it until you keep immersing them in stuff that people around here have written, you know."

The facilitation demystifies the writing process. It allows new members to take first steps into writing, and changes it from a solitary activity to something you can do together. For people taking the step into sharing work or performing in public, they are quite literally finding their voice and sharing their story:

"It's a whole range of what is possible, the written and spoken word. Which is really what underpins it. If what's firing you up right now is the situation in the Gulf, write about it and let's hear it. But if it's that teacher that you hated, well, let's hear about that as well. It's about that individual liberation within the collective. Liberation and re-creation of culture."

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The Participant Perspective

"I was challenged by a colleague to write a set of poems about my chemo. The group is a safe space, 'off my patch'. This is a softer group than the other one I go to, everyone is different, I'm surprised every month."

"Writing poetry spontaneously is completely new to me. I'd only ever drafted, redrafted, rewritten. I'm inspired by Vic; I'd never have done it otherwise. Whatever I write here, I just keep it."

"It's a place to come that draws your honesty, integrity, risk, vulnerability. Amazing that people are willing to share like this in a library on a Tuesday morning."

"It's a safe space. I wrote my first poem in response to some very bad news. It just came out of me. I've got to be moved by something to write. The news came to be reality, now this is helping with bereavement."

"I'm where I want to be and with who I want to be with. At school I really enjoyed writing and poems, some I can still remember. I always had a leaning towards words. I didn't really have access to culture after school. Now I'm retired and I'm thinking 'If not now, when.'"

People come for all sorts of reasons. Some already see themselves as writers and want to develop, or to engage with other writers. Others have stories they want to tell. Some are coming back to writing after a long gap, often all their working lives. Others come in response to hard times - bereavement, illness, redundancy. And others come simply because it's something to do and a social connection.

It's a local activity, a friendly welcoming group that's free and in a neutral venue. It's a safe space, you can speak if you want to, but no-one will make you. It's clear that for some people the writing process is a chance to think about things, try and express them on paper, understand them better.

Spread the Word is a key long-term project in the FLUX programme and a good example of excellent process. It offers artistic development for people, light touch but serious and of great quality. It raises aspirations. It's people-centred, gentle, welcoming and positive. In line with FLUX's mission, it enables people to explore and express their own creative ambitions, heritage and identity. It embodies FLUX's core values of being community-led and relevant, generous, inclusive, caring and creating positive change.



In 2024 and 2025 FLUX supported Rotherham Young Writers group, one of several South Yorkshire young writers' groups run through the Hive network. The groups meet fortnightly during term time at local venues.

"The partnership with Flux enhanced the offer in Rotherham, allowing us to join forces around platforming voices and creating cultural outlets locally. Young writers attended Spread the Word nights every three months and Flux's support during this period has helped bring young voices into the Spread the Word network and wider activity in Rotherham."

★ **People's highlights:**

Writing Groups

"This group is about me as an individual, where I can write without thinking, I'm forming what I write when I come home."

"I like that we challenge each other's ideas about the world and learn from each other. I've learnt such a lot from everyone here."

"I went on a trip, felt a kinship, saw glimpses of people 'who might be my tribe,' and here I am."

"My ideas and work are valued here, it's a space that feels nourishing. I always leave feeling inspired and connected."



Open Mic Nights

"The feeling in the room where someone gets up to share, it's a shared experience, full of love and encouragement."

"It feels like a proper night out."

"You get those performances that make you sit up or make you cry."

"You just turn up and bring yourself, it's got a very down to earth feel about it. It's accessible brilliance."

Poetry Readings: Hollie McNish

In 2025 FLUX hosted renowned poet Hollie McNish, with support from local poets, at Grimm & Co. Hollie launched her tour to a capacity crowd bringing a new opportunity to hear poetry for local writers and audience.

"Sometimes you feel like maybe you're not clever enough or you're not cultured enough to come to these sorts of events but anyone can come and sit and be immersed in someone else's art."

"It was great to have some local poets and someone better known. Rotherham deserves to have events like this."

Building on the success of this event poet Len Pennie, suggested by participants, will read in Rotherham at the start of Phase 2.



Ourselves Reflected Back - the Anthology

"The project demonstrated how much people value being taken seriously as writers. Being asked to edit, refine and meet a standard rather than simply being included without challenge."

The *Spread the Word* anthology, published in October 2025, brought 137 poems by over 70 local writers to a wider audience. The project was intergenerational, poets were diverse in age, ethnicity, and life experience. The work was deeply rooted in Rotherham and many of the poems reflected Rotherham's history and the poet's lived experience.

"The project saw people who might only have attended open mic nights step into a more rigorous creative process, gain confidence, and then stand on a theatre stage at the launch reading work they had refined and worked hard to realise."

Vicky Morris, HIVE South Yorkshire

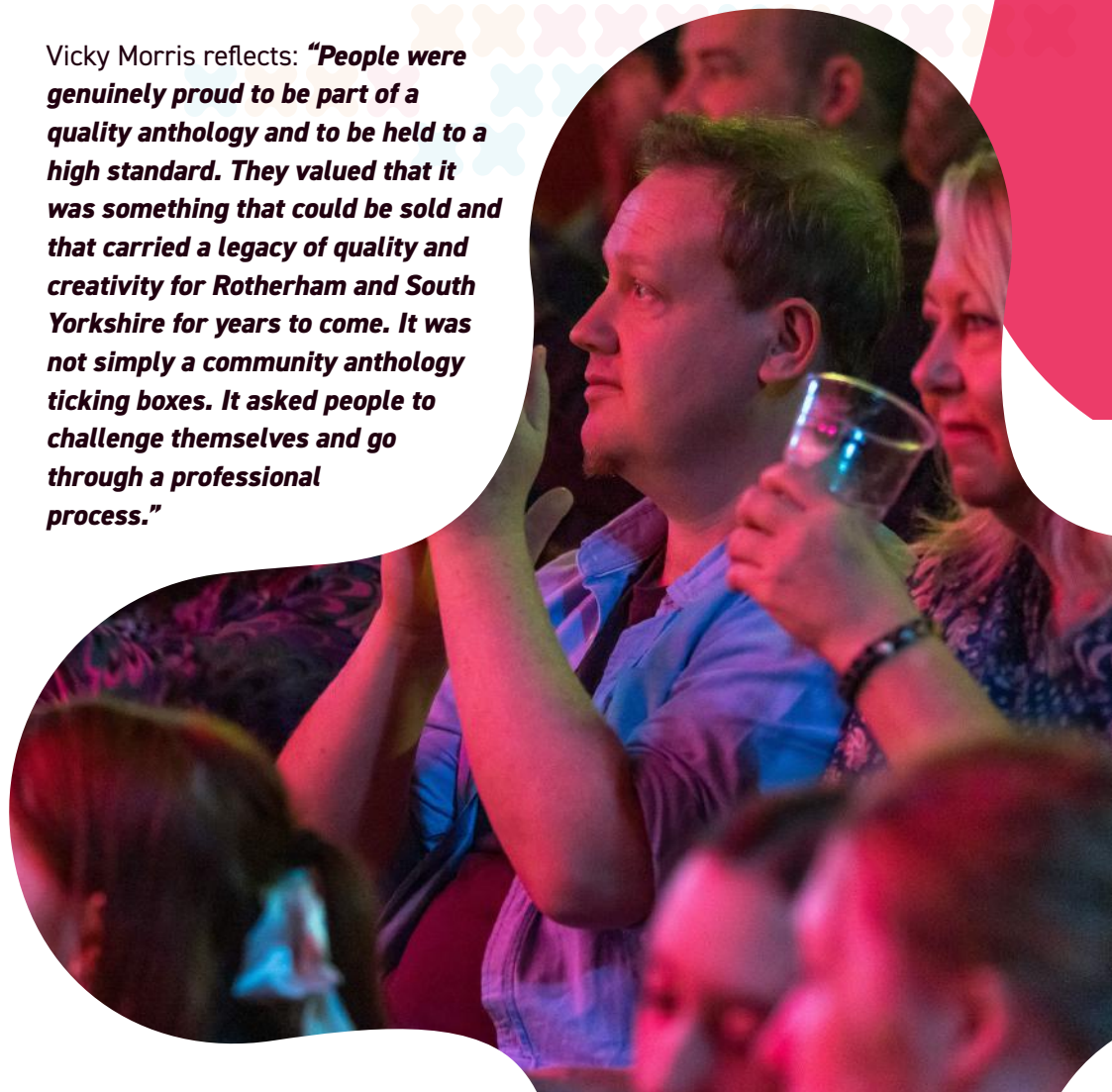
The anthology was the first time the groups worked together. To start the process FLUX opened a call to everybody in the Spread the Word network inviting them to an edit and writing session.

With a strong publishing and editorial track record, poet Vicky Morris ran the session and worked with local people to prepare their poetry for submission: ***"It was very important to ensure as many people as possible could be involved and published in a meaningful way, so the focus was on helping them understand how to edit and strengthen their work, how to submit it, and what the process of working with an editor looks like in a real-world setting."***

Next came an open call for submissions across Rotherham, including Rotherham Young Writers, and writers across South Yorkshire. Around 80 submissions of up to three poems each were received.

The anthology, *Ourselves Reflected Back*, launched on National Poetry Day as Flux presented *Spread the Word Anthology LIVE!* – the official launch, at Rotherham Civic Theatre.

Vicky Morris reflects: ***"People were genuinely proud to be part of a quality anthology and to be held to a high standard. They valued that it was something that could be sold and that carried a legacy of quality and creativity for Rotherham and South Yorkshire for years to come. It was not simply a community anthology ticking boxes. It asked people to challenge themselves and go through a professional process."***



Editing Surgery

"I feel lucky to have had the opportunity in taking part in the editing process and being part of the anthology fellow writers' community. I learnt my writing strengths and the theme emerging in my writing. Understanding and applying in my writing 'personal is universal' as you said. It was a lightbulb moment for me. It made me believe in my words."

"I've never been published before so it feels fabulous! ...It's so lovely to get feedback from a real editor / writer who can give me constructive advice."

"I thought I was ok at editing and re-evaluating my work. However, after today's session I see how much I have been missing. My toolbox is now much fuller than before. Confidence much greater and enthusiasm heightened. I got a better understanding of the terms abstract and concrete. Your poetry does not need to tell the whole story. It built my confidence to think about publishing."

People found the launch event:

"Moving, uplifting, empowering, positive, encouraged, motivated."

*"Joyful, safe, encouraging"
"Comforting, warm, genuine."*

Numbers

Active participation:

Open Mic Nights



April 25 - Feb 26
188
Attended

Mowbray Gardens

Regular group of
12-15
/ on tour sessions
total participation
April - Feb
106

Swinton Library

Regular group of
12-15
/ total participation
May - Feb
87

Rotherham Young Writers Group

Regular group of
12-15
/ total participation
April - Feb
173

The right artists: leadership, respect, and expert facilitation.

FLUX has engaged artists who are local poets and the initial idea for Spread The Word came from them and a wider group of interested participants. The name Spread the Word was created by Ray Hearne. They are expert in working in communities with complex histories and with individuals who come to the group with very different wants, needs, and motivations.

"I'm conscious of not helicoptering into somewhere and going, yes, I know what people need, because you don't, unless you're really embedded in that community. One of the things that FLUX said at the start was there are no specific outcomes attached to this. We want to see it as a piece of work and see how it evolves and then reflect at the end of it. So, it was really nice for us to be able to think, right, let's see."

There is real strength in the relationship with the artist facilitators. For FLUX, this might mean knowing when to step in and when to step back, and trusting and respecting the artists. For artists, that relationship and way of working is important to the success of the work.

"(What FLUX is good at is) the production stuff. The value that they give you as a facilitator. So that could be the fact that the rates that they pay you are industry standard rates. And they really value your time, so not only am I paid for the two hours of delivery, but I'm paid to prepare which is so often overlooked."

"There's a safety in the way that FLUX holds the project. I can go to FLUX and say, I don't think this is working or, I've had this idea. Should we take the sessions on tour? No-one's going to be like, what are you talking about? It's really open. Yeah, we can do that, let's think about this."

"As the project has organically evolved, the space for my relationship with FLUX has evolved as well and we feed back and forth to one another, which has just been such a gift."





Building a writing community

Working in partnership with other organisations in the field (Hive South Yorkshire, Rotherham Libraries and others) brings a broader demographic, encourages the growth of a creative community of writers and builds sustainability for the work.

The project has been careful to build on what was there already, working with existing groups, and strengthening an informal network of writers. The project has been managed with flexibility and ease, there's no "one size fits all" here. The way the groups have run has offered opportunities for development and for performance, whilst making space for new people to join, supporting them into their writing and into the group.

"I think there has always been a community, but at various different points, it's been fragmented. My sense is that Spread the Word is maybe giving people a bit of a home for that community. There's a certain amount of formal activity, but then it has an identity, just a name and having an identity is something for people to belong to."

"So somebody within the group can be – "oh, there's an open mic here, then I'm going to Ray's group, then I'm going to Vic's group, then I've got an open mic here. And then someone else runs a bi-monthly poetry afternoon and he's inviting people to that. So there's a lot of activity."

"The long-term continuity of sessions and events has created something that the community can see themselves in long-term. It's developed an 'identity' as a result, being part of Spread The Word is something uniquely Rotherham."



Impact on individuals

"That day you sparked something in me and I have written every day since."

It's a safe space, you can speak if you want to, but no-one will make you. It's clear that for some people the writing process is a chance to think about things, try and express them on paper, understand them better.

It's fun (and there's cake). The facilitation demystifies the writing process. It allows new members to take first steps into writing, and changes it from a solitary activity to something you can do together.

For people taking the step into sharing work or performing in public, they are quite literally finding their voice and sharing their story:

"(When you're performing at open mic) you are someone, you are the one, you're not irrelevant."

"The greatest achievements are the voices that come out of it. Not the big showy achievements like Hollie McNish coming, but the remarkable achievements of individuals, the micro-achievements."

♥ Contribution to FLUX's aims

Spread the Word is a key project in the FLUX programme. It offers artistic development for people, light touch but serious and of great quality. It raises aspirations. It's people-centred, gentle, welcoming and positive. In line with FLUX's mission, it enables people to explore and express their own creative ambitions, heritage and identity.

It embodies FLUX core values of being community-led and relevant, generous, inclusive, caring and creating positive change. Perhaps its strongest contribution to Flux's programme is people telling their stories. Spread the Word is a platform for Rotherham stories. Hyperlocal and global, just like Rotherham.

FLUX

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FLUX Rotherham creates art projects and events with communities. From festivals filled with music, dance and outdoor arts experiences to exhibitions, creative workshops and conversations.

To find out more about what's coming up and how you can get involved, visit fluxrotherham.org.uk or follow us on social media here: linktr.ee/FluxRotherham

