

# MORTAL FOOLS

Follow us on: @mortalfoolsUK



[www.mortalfools.org.uk](http://www.mortalfools.org.uk)

**“Mortal Fools are a really exciting, collaborative organisation who think outside the box, and are always seeking to do things in a different way. It is very refreshing!”**

**Lead Youth Worker  
YMCA Northumberland**

**YEAR IN  
REVIEW  
2022-2023**

# ANOTHER YEAR OF CONSCIOUS & THOUGHTFUL GROWTH...

Image of two Mortal Fools Ensemble  
Young Company members during  
a session looking surprised.



**Across the last year,  
we've supported more  
young people than ever  
before and co-created  
some brilliant work.**

**I've been with Mortal Fools  
since its inception, 11 years  
ago, and my excitement,  
belief and drive for this  
fantastic organisation  
remains unwavering.  
Across the last year,  
we've had another year of  
growing, we've supported  
more young people than  
ever before and we've  
created some brilliant  
work – co-created with  
our young people.**



Image of Mortal Fools  
Artistic Director & CEO Kiz  
Crosbie – a white woman  
smiling at the camera with  
mid length brown hair.

Growing an organisation isn't easy and Mortal Fools has demonstrated considerable resilience and ingenuity throughout a challenging period for the cultural sector, pivoting our work to keep serving audiences with high-quality participatory arts opportunities, whilst learning and growing through the experience.

August 2022 saw us secure significant multiyear investment from Kavli Trust and in April 2023 we joined Arts Council England's National Portfolio of regularly funded organisations. This year signalled a new chapter for us as a growing company, on a national stage, amplifying the voices and needs of young people through our co-creation, alongside helping to renew Northumberland's place culturally. The county has great artistic and cultural heritage, but what excites me more is the vibrancy of some of the work being created by artists, organisations and of course Northumberland young people.

We remain committed to enabling the delivery of life-enhancing experiences for our thousands of young beneficiaries. We are continuing to grow our groups by connecting with referral organisations and link workers to support even more young people facing challenges such as mental health and being in care. Young people need more opportunities to use the arts to explore, understand and express their current experiences, questions, concerns and hopes, and I'm excited for Mortal Fools to do this with them, now and into the future.

**Kiz Crosbie,  
Mortal Fools' Artistic  
Director & CEO**

# MORTAL FOOLS

## 22/23 AT A GLANCE

- Engaged 1,316 young people
- Live audience of 640 people and digital audience of 5123 people
- Evidence from Mortal Fools young people's programmes demonstrates that **our projects play an increasingly significant part** in our young people's lives, mental health and wellbeing
- Supported more young people with intersectional needs than ever before (now the majority of our beneficiaries) and developed specialist practice to support these complex needs and to achieve equity of opportunity.
- Invested in the development of our new base in Ashington, establishing two new regular youth theatre groups, one school group and 3 community events per year
- Recruited two young people into paid assistant practitioner roles and supported two young people as Board observers ahead of their intended appointment as Young Trustees

Image of a group young aged 9–13 years playing a drama game during a Tyne Valley Youth Theatre session.

- Worked collaboratively with partners on a capital development project after funding was awarded to Ashington by central government
- Nominated for a North East Charity Award 2022 in the Uniquely North East Category for our work with children & young people
- Nominated for a National Diversity Award 2023 for our work championing young people's voices
- Joined Arts Council England's National Portfolio
- Secured a Hadrian's Wall 1900 Festival Community Commission for Fools Fest Tyne Valley: a festival night with short performances and improvisation games, inspired by the Saturnalia Festival
- Featured on BBC Look North showcasing the outcomes of one of our Northumberland school creative interventions funded by Children in Need
- Featured in **The Guardian**, **The Stage**, **North East Times**, **BDaily**, **North East Family Fun**, **High Life North** and many other press publications.

"Mortal Fools continued growth and success is fabulous news for Northumberland and for children and young people. As well as co-creating powerful theatre productions and films of resonance and relevance, they are an excellent and inspirational training agency working across many diverse sectors."

"This is testament to their clarity of vision and the effectiveness of their approach in supporting strong, dynamic individuals and the leaders of tomorrow."

Cultural Development Manager  
Northumberland County Council



# YOUNG PEOPLE'S WORK

Image of 48 youth theatre members and 6 Mortal Fools practitioners smiling at the camera with the birthday cake at the front to celebrate 10 years of Mortal Fools.



**“My son is diagnosed with ASD, selective mutism, he has generalised anxiety and over the last three years Max has had periods of terrible depression. Mortal Fools have allowed Max to be himself; they have a real gift for understanding children very quickly and making them feel good about themselves. They are very inclusive, and I can’t thank them enough for the way in which they have made Max feel. It’s very difficult to find groups that make a child who thinks they are different feel like everyone else. Mortal Fools is very unique and brings a great deal of hope to my family for sure and the area. We really appreciate Mortal Fools and their great team.”**

**Mortal Fools Youth Theatre Parent**

# FROM 1<sup>ST</sup> APRIL 2022 - 1<sup>ST</sup> APRIL 2023, MORTAL FOOLS HAS...

- Delivered activities for young people in **48 weeks** of the year, providing a safe creative outlet and supporting wellbeing
- Delivered **392** weekly sessions to **237 young people** in Mortal Fools Youth Theatre, school & youth settings
- Mortal Fools Youth Theatre groups grew in membership to a core group of **102 young people**
- Delivered one off outreach sessions to **72 young people** with organisations like Birkheads Wild, Stepney Bank Stables & NE Youth

- Commissioned by National Citizen Service to run sessions for **130 young people**
- In 2022, **Mortal Fools Ensemble Young Company** took their show **Flux** on a micro tour to YMCA Northumberland & Gosforth Civic Theatre, screened a filmed version at a Northumberland Pride event, and redeveloped the show for 2023, preparing for a North East & North West tour in April 2023
- Young people achieved **92 Arts Awards**
- Worked in partnership with Highfield Middle School, Dukes Secondary School, The Duchess Community High & Amble Youth Project running **4 creative intervention projects**, 3 of which are continuing as long-term residencies

“Being a part of Mortal Fools over the past year has been full of exciting new experiences. From gaining confidence, to being back on stage in ‘Flux’, to learning how to facilitate sessions with young people, to experiencing what it’s like to make a short film in ‘My People’. The projects I’ve been a part of this year have been inspiring, full of learning experiences and I have fun memories I will never forget.”

Ensemble Young Company Member



Image of two Mortal Fools Ensemble Young Company during a Flux performance rehearsal, with the set in the background including a rainbow flag during the “Pride Club” scene.

- Hosted **3 large-scale** Mortal Fools Youth Theatre community events & **7 small-scale** sharing events
- Created **24 short films & animations** with young people
- Developed new engagement partnerships with **Curious Arts, Burnley Youth Theatre & Company 3**, and reignited pre-pandemic partnerships with **Theatre Porto & Theatre Factory**
- Developed a **Wellbeing Evaluation Toolkit**. As part of a Northumberland Local Cultural Education Partnership pilot project, we tested it across settings and trained folks to use it to measure wellbeing outcomes in community settings.

“I joined Mortal Fools Board because I had heard good things about the way the organisation works; centring and empowering young people, developing them as artists, humans, and leaders.

By being a board member, I have learnt more about how Mortal Fools works, the care taken by the talented team and most importantly, I have increased my understanding of how their creative and inspiring projects can positively respond to the urgent and evolving needs of young people in the region.”

Mortal Fools Trustee  
& Chief Executive Curious Arts

“Across the project, there have been noticeable changes in some children; they have more confidence. This applies to actual lessons, for example, being able to put up their hand, asking for help, helping others etc. As well as their general confidence around school, speaking up if they have a problem or are worried about something or helping a friend.

“Another difference is in the resilience of the group in general. Post-Covid, a lot of the children have shown very low levels of resilience and independence. This has been a huge change with the children Mortal Fools have supported and this has been refreshing to see.

“The greatest testament to Mortal Fools is the behaviour of the children in the sessions; their energy is infectious, they love what they are doing, and are proud of themselves. The focus on well-being and mental health clearly has an enormous positive impact on these children and the whole team at Mortal Fools should be commended for this.

“However, it is not only the children who benefit. Mortal Fools have come into school to work with our teachers and support. These tailor-made partnership sessions have proved incredibly valuable and supported teacher wellbeing.”

Teacher – Highfield Middle School

Image of two young people during a Mortal Fools partner school creative intervention session in a school hall, with three Mortal Fools practitioners.



# PROJECTS

CO-CREATED 3 YOUNG PEOPLE'S LARGE SCALE CREATIVE PROJECTS

Image of one of Mortal Fools Ensemble Young Company during a Flux performance – a white young woman with long blonde hair holding a microphone performing.

flux

come  
on  
in...

Image of one of Mortal Fools Youth Theatre members during a Come On In performance – a white young boy with short blond hair, holding a silver plate performing.

FOOLS

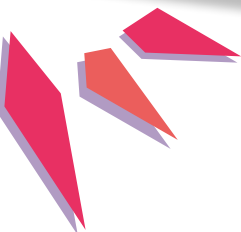
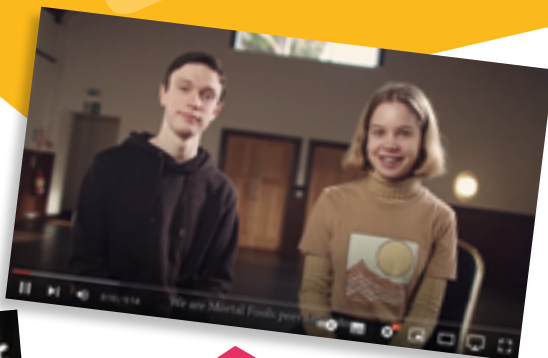
FEST

Image of a group of Mortal Fools Youth Theatre Ashington on stage in front of a Fools Fest graphic ahead of a performance. 15 young people rehearsing with two practitioners instructing.

**"Excellent!  
Joyful and uplifting."**

**Digital Audience  
Member**

# SPARKED\*



**Sparked, My People and  
Creative Catalyst: The Creative  
Industries all available on  
our YouTube channel.**



## MY PEOPLE



**CREATED & DISTRIBUTED  
LOTS OF DIGITAL  
RESOURCES & PIECES OF  
CO-CREATED DIGITAL CONTENT**



**What's On Offer Guide,  
Invest in Mortal Fools and  
Wellbeing Resources all  
available on our website.**



**Image of one of Mortal Fools Young  
Leaders hosting Fools Fest – a white  
young woman with long curly brown  
hair, holding a microphone performing  
and looking down at a script.**



# AUDIENCES

“Brilliant! Loved the imagination and audience participation!”

Fools Fest 2022  
Audience Member

- **9 live performances to 470 people**
- **5 advocacy events** championing our work to multiple sectors and to **170 stakeholders**
- **5,123 digital audience members** (folks who engaged significantly in our digital content)
- Digital content reached **375,593 people**
- Achieved **2.4k** views on our YouTube racking up **80.1 hours watch time**
- **89 listeners** of our audio theatre experience, When The World Is Loud.

“I have been lucky enough to experience a couple of productions by Mortal Fools over the years and I always leave feeling inspired, thoughtful and incredibly proud of the talent in our region. What really stands out in their productions is how the voices of local young people, and the issues they face/would like to share, are at the very heart of every production.”

North East Family Fun

“The performance was great, it delivered a powerful message about being a young person, bringing to life the challenges, demands, excitement and angst of emergent adulthood. That the production was co-produced made it all the more meaningful. An interesting story, told well.”

Flux 2022 Audience Member

Image of a group of Mortal Fools Youth Theatre Tyne Valley on stage in front of an audience. 4 young people stood with their backs to the audience performing.

# MORTAL FOOLS' YOUNG LEADERS

- Ran 51 young leader's sessions with 9 young people engaging bi-weekly
- Achieved 2 Gold Arts Awards and 2 x Silver Arts Awards
- Pitched & ran 2 successful social action projects funded by The Key UK
- 3 young leaders participated in a National Youth Violence Peer Action Collective project with Youth Focus NE, showcasing their social action at an event at Baltic in December 2022
- 2 young leaders transitioned into paid employees as Assistant Practitioners
- 2 young leaders joined Mortal Fools' Board formally in 2023
- 1 young leader transitioned into a volunteer Trainee Practitioner role to gain experience of socially engaged theatre making
- Ran 2 events – a one-off co-creation practice sharing event for 14 North East young people's practitioners and a one-off free arts exploration day for 22 Ashington children featuring a range of arts disciplines, including animation.

"Out of everything I've ever done at Mortal Fools, joining the Board as a regular observer has been one of the most interesting, educational, and helpful processes. At school we aren't taught what the business world is like, we don't get to see budgets or see how organisations are run behind the scenes. My involvement on the Board has given me firsthand insight in Mortal Fools as a functioning organisation, different people's roles and what working in business may be like for me.

Getting to see the bigger picture makes me feel very proud to be a part of the charity and has widened my view on the sense of community that Mortal Fools creates."

Mortal Fools Young Leader & Trustee

"She has made some new friends and it has encouraged her to push herself out of her comfort zone to try new things – as a child who struggles with anxiety this is a big deal. Attending has improved her mood hugely and given her boost she needed. As a family, we are really grateful for this. Her new favourite day of the week is Wednesday because she's looking forward to Mortal Fools!"

Mortal Fools Youth Theatre Parent



Image of one of Mortal Fools Ensemble Young Company during a Flux performance – a white man with short brown hair, speaking with the passion mid performance.

# CREATIVE CATALYST

- Actively, engaged in steering groups and alliances, acknowledging our privilege, and taking our responsibility to influence change in a meaningful way. Our memberships include – **VONNE, Arts Marketing Association, North East & North Cumbria VCSE Sub-Group, North East Institute of Business Ethics, Northumberland Local Cultural Education Partnership, Northumberland Employability Forum, North of Tyne Good Work Pledge, Art Works Alliance, Connecting Culture Northumberland and North East Youth Alliance**
- Completed the Heads-Up Leadership Programme from Arts Marketing Association – exploring the responsibility those in marketing roles have for social justice, focusing on equity, access, and participation



Image of Mortal Fools practitioners and youth workers during a practice sharing event – 6 people listening to a speaker in a cinema setting.

**“The positive feedback I was given made me feel so valued and so lucky to be part of a company that would champion me, especially when I was my true self. Mortal Fools have helped me take up space in my own life.”**

**Mortal Fools Young Leader**

- Further increased accessibility to our work with captioning, BSL, access resources, website info and digital assets (e.g. films)
- Continued to deliver online activities and content to reach those that prefer to engage with us digitally
- Staff regularly attended external training and open forum sector discussions on social justice issues, accessibility, cost of living crisis and mental health
- Continued our work striving for equality, diversity, and inclusion by being open and visible about our allyship work, owning and sharing our accessibility evolution. You can read more via: [www.mortalfools.org.uk/activism-and-inclusion](http://www.mortalfools.org.uk/activism-and-inclusion)
- Restructured our Young Leaders programme and our activism and allyship work, integrating and embedding Social Action and socially conscious leadership at every organisational layer, experimenting with how we can meaningfully involve our young people in decision making
- Established Mortal Fools Green Team, with members of staff working towards a greener, more sustainable organisation, that is thoughtful in its consumption of resources.

**“My daughter has Autism and SPD. The explanations at the beginning of the show and the options to use the headset were fantastic.”**

**Come On In  
Audience Member**

**"I feel uplifted and passionate every time I work with Mortal Fools. Everyone is respected and held in such high regard with one another; each and every member of a project is an essential part of the Mortal Fools jigsaw."**

**Freelance Member  
of Team Mortal Fools**

## **FOR ARTISTS, CREATIVE PROFESSIONALS & LOCAL ECONOMY:**

- Recruited and trained **12 new permanent employees**
- Recruited **7 new sessional practitioners/assistants** to train and develop their work with us
- Given paid work to **23 freelance professionals**
- Worked with/ purchased from **52 North East small businesses**
- Programmed external training in mental health, autism, LGBTQIA+ awareness, safeguarding and first aid
- Ran co-creation practice development sessions and facilitated practice sharing with theatre makers, artists and youth sector professionals
- Presented our work and practice at conferences and networking events
- Contributed to careers events at Dukes Secondary School and Whitley Bay High School
- Hosted an online creative careers event viewed by **152 young people**.



Image of a Mortal Fools practitioner during a day of performance filming – a white man with short blonde hair in the foreground facing a cast of young people in the background reading their scripts during a read through.

**"Working for Mortal Fools is an exhilarating learning process. They never stop and get comfortable. They support their team to grow and develop, with them, with every project. They are always looking for ways to progress, to move forward and actively respond to what's happening around them."**

**Member of  
Team Mortal Fools**

"It's a great resource for helping children identify and understand worries, where they come from and how to address them effectively."

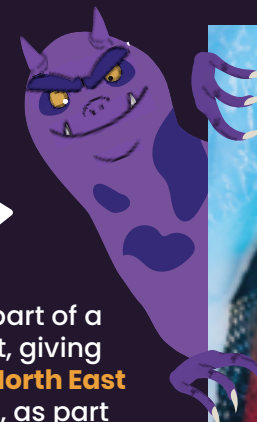
Parent of  
Melva Participant

# MELVA

- Engaged approx. 640 young people academic year 22/23
- Launched our "gift Melva to a school" offer for businesses and professionals with **Muckle LLP and Ryder Architecture**, purchasing 13 licences between them for usage in academic year 23/24
- Launched **Worrit Warriors** – a partnership project with Children NE using Melva as an intervention with counselling support and teacher CPD, to support children at risk of self-harm, suicide & other harmful behaviours, in 16 primary schools
- Developed **Melva Teacher CPD offer**, testing with Melva schools Highfield Middle School and Fernhurst Primary



Performance still of Melva Mapletree & Gideon (Melva characters) – two white people, dressed in winter attire and woolly hats, hiding in an ice cave, looking out holding a torch.



- Commissioned as part of a NHS Asthma project, giving Melva access to **11 North East & Cumbria settings**, as part of a wider project with primary schools
- Commissioned by **Newcastle NE1 Business Improvement District** to host an outdoor screening of Melva as part of their Summer in the City programme of films
- Featured in National publications Headteacher Update, School's Week, Teach Primary and the Guardian.

"Articulating and recognising in your head that something isn't quite right and that you are worried or anxious, and then verbalising it to someone else is a massive step, not just for adults but for children as well. A lot of the time it's about finding the language to do it. Melva gave mental health a voice in our school and it touched children in ways that we hadn't seen before. It was really powerful."

Hareside Primary Head Teacher

“Today’s session was relaxed, enlightening and enjoyable! The space was really supportive, and some good techniques were shared – it was another excellent session and great delivery.”

NHS CONNECT Training  
Participant 2023

# CONNECT

Training and professional development programme for organisations, teams, and individuals.

“Our experience with Mortal Fools has been really positive. They have been supporting us by facilitating our initial member meetings to help us cultivate a really positive co-produced alliance from the outset. They have been professional and brought an engaging, creative and unique approach to formal meeting facilitation.”

CONNECT Client North  
Tyneside VODA

“It felt like a very safe space and people really joined in and committed themselves to the experience – it takes good facilitators for that to happen. The sessions were a good balance between personal and professional reflection and growth.”

North East Youth Alliance  
CONNECT Training Participant 2023

- Delivered 51 CONNECT training interventions and engaged 952 training participants
- We had returning CONNECT bookings from the likes of Newcastle University, Ryder Architecture, Sunderland Culture, North East Institute of Business Ethics and Art Works Alliance
- New training relationships grew with the likes of SeedLegals, Muckle LLP, Ground Work, NHS, North East Youth Alliance and Institute of Art, Design and Technology (IADT)
- Commissioned by National Trust, South Tyneside Local Education Partnership and North Tyneside Voluntary Organisations Development Agency to support the development and delivery of various projects, supported by our training, facilitation and consultancy work.



Image of event dressing at a Mortal Fools advocacy event – a purple Mortal Fools branded sign hung in front of a rainbow-coloured paper tassel curtain.

“We have worked with Mortal Fools on a few occasions and their presentations skills training is unlike any other training we have ever offered our staff. It was both inspiring and challenging; it really made our staff think about how they present and *the why* – not just *the what* they present. Everyone learned so much and came away from the sessions with practical tools to tackle sometimes stressful presentations. I can’t recommend this team highly enough; they are excellent to work with and so professional.”

**CONNECT Client**  
**Newcastle University**

Image of business leaders at a Mortal Fools advocacy event exploring social responsibility of businesses to communities – 9 people sat in small clusters taking part in lively discussion.

MORTAL  
FOOLS

# CONNECT

TRAINING & PROFESSIONAL  
DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME  
FOR ORGANISATIONS,  
TEAMS & INDIVIDUALS.

Image of a CONNECT training session – 11 training participants sit on chairs in a circle in a theatre seating with 1 participant stood in the middle interacting with the group.

Join the likes of  
Ryder Architecture,  
Muckle LLP, National  
Trust, Newcastle  
University,  
INTO Global and  
SeedLegals and  
invest into real  
world training  
for bigger,  
bolder impact.

Practical training  
developed in response  
to the contemporary,  
ever changing business  
landscape, delivered  
in person and online  
with heart.

- Powerful Communication
- Dynamic Leadership in Times of Change
- Impactful Presentations & Pitching
- Resilience in Uncertainty
- Growth Mindset & Grit
- Digital Facilitation & Presentations
- Managing Difficult Conversations
- Overcoming Imposter Syndrome
- Team Development
- 1-2-1 Personal Coaching
- Bespoke to You

To download the CONNECT brochure or to find out more visit: [mortalfools.org.uk](https://mortalfools.org.uk) or book a consultation chat email: [Rachel.Horton@mortalfools.org.uk](mailto:Rachel.Horton@mortalfools.org.uk)

[mortalfools.org.uk/connect](https://mortalfools.org.uk/connect)

# flux<sup>DIGITAL</sup>

is available to watch now!

figuring it out  
and fitting in;  
what makes you, you?

"Funny, emotional  
and brave!"

Flux audience member

To watch visit:  
[mortalfools.org.uk/fluxdigital](http://mortalfools.org.uk/fluxdigital)

Supporting our work is  
an investment in  
children and young  
people in the North  
East and beyond

Visit our support us  
page to find out all the  
ways you can support  
our work & young people:  
[www.mortalfools.org.uk  
/support-us](http://www.mortalfools.org.uk/support-us)



A fun, creative digital  
package supporting  
children 7-11 years old  
and their adults,  
to talk openly about  
and better understand  
their mental health,  
emotions and wellbeing.



Are you ready to  
meet boisterous and  
mischievous Melva  
Mapletree?  
She can't wait to  
meet you!

Focusing on early intervention, Melva's  
programme scaffolds the development  
of resilience pathways, positive  
emotional responses and a shared  
understanding of how to look after  
oneself and others.

By purchasing Melva, you gain access to  
an online portal, an episodic film, lesson  
plans, an interactive activity booklet,  
toolbox of resources, a choose your  
own adventure digital game and  
a user guide. Melva is a meaningful  
and revolutionary way to invest into  
mental health education and aligns  
with the curriculum.

Developed in consultation with children,  
teachers, mental health professionals and  
Psychologists, Melva is a high impact,  
revolutionary way to invest into practical  
mental health education in your school  
and aligns with the curriculum.

Available to Primary Schools &  
other education settings now!

[www.melva.org.uk](http://www.melva.org.uk)

Businesses & leaders!

We have opportunities for you to gift a  
Melva package to a primary school – get  
in touch for more information by emailing:  
[Rachel.Horton@mortalfools.org.uk](mailto:Rachel.Horton@mortalfools.org.uk)

Thank you to our kind funders – our work across the year would not have been possible without your support:



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



**Creative UK**

Proudly supporting  
youth social action

**#iwill**



Department  
for Culture,  
Media & Sport



**COMMUNITY  
FUND**



**Paul Hamlyn  
Foundation**



**Children  
in Need**



**SIR JAMES KNOTT TRUST**

HADRIAN'S WALL  
**1900**  
COMMUNITY GRANTS



Made possible with  
**Heritage  
Fund**



**THE  
BERNICIA  
FOUNDATION**



**Local Community Fund**



**Garfield Weston  
FOUNDATION**



**BALLINGER  
CHARITABLE TRUST**



**NORTH  
OF TYNE  
COMBINED  
AUTHORITY**



Our profits go to charity



**Community  
Foundation**

**The Joicey Trust**  
The Joicey Trust is a registered charity 1040751



**Northumberland  
County Council**

**The Ridley  
Family Charity**

Big thank you to our  
wonderful business  
supporters:



**muckle**<sup>UP</sup>

**Ryder**

**NewcastleGateshead  
Initiative**

**Hereward Elton  
COMMUNITY  
FUND**

**NEI**

Follow us on:



@mortalfoolsUK

[www.mortalfools.org.uk](http://www.mortalfools.org.uk)

Big thank  
you to our monthly  
donors and the folks  
who have donated  
on an ad hoc/one off  
basis to support our  
young people's work.

**We appreciate you!**