

Audiences North East

Connecting people and culture

Report on Pilot Family Friendly Initiative May 2008

Prepared by Caroline Greener, Marketing Manager

Audiences North East Limited

Suite 7, 2nd Floor, 1 Pink Lane, Newcastle upon Tyne NE1 5DW

Phone: 0191 269 1100 Email: info@audiencesnortheast.org.uk Web: audiencesnortheast.org.uk and whatsonnortheast.com

Registered Company Number: 05041634 Registered Charity Number: 1104394

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1. Context

1.1 Project Background, summary and rationale

Family Friendly is an Arts Council England-driven strategy launched in 2005 which endeavours to develop a consistent culture of 'family friendliness' in arts organisations.

The Family Friendly Toolkit was launched in 2006 and has been designed to support arts organisations who wish to make it easier for families to engage with the arts as audiences and participants. The toolkit contains case studies, examples of good practice and a blank audit template that can help an organisation as a mapping and a planning tool.

Turning Point is Arts Council England's strategy for the contemporary visual arts in England for the next ten years. Its ambition is to ensure that the large and growing audience for the visual arts has access to the widest range of contemporary art and the opportunity to see art from the past through the dynamic of the contemporary.

One of Turning Point's five priorities is 'audiences, participation and education'. The priority identifies the potential to increase visits to contemporary art venues by adults, and in particular from priority groups, such as Black and minority ethnic, disabled and economically disadvantaged groups.

By adopting a more family friendly approach and equipping cultural organisations with the appropriate tools and training, this project seeks to fulfil Arts Council England's objective of increasing take-up of cultural activity by priority groups.

This pilot initiative responds to Turning Point and the Family Friendly Toolkit by offering a varied programme of research, training and consultancy on family friendliness to a selection of cultural organisations throughout the North East, with a particular focus on Visual Arts organisations.

More than 60 individuals representing 16 cultural organisations participated in the Family Friendly North East initiative. All of the participants had different needs and were at different stages of engagement with the family friendly agenda.

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Arts Council England, North East identified Audiences North East as the most appropriate organisation to develop and deliver a region-wide Family Friendly pilot initiative.

Audiences North East is the strategic agency for the North East of England, working across the whole cultural sector to retain, increase and develop the region's audiences. It aims to:

- Provide a voice and a focus for audiences and audience development
- Identify, develop and co-ordinate shared regional initiatives to develop and sustain the size of audiences
- Use its expertise to drive up attendance and participation
- Act as a central point for disseminating market intelligence gathered for the benefit of members
- Act as a broker for identifying and responding to training needs and sharing best practice
- Pilot emerging ideas in audience development
- Provide joined up thinking and proactively encourage information exchange within the region and nationally
- Enable cultural organisations to thrive not just to survive
- Bring together organisations from across the whole of the cultural sector across the North East
- Encourage development of the product or cultural offering in response to customer preference

ANE is a not-for-profit organisation and a registered charity. The financial aims of the organisation are to generate sufficient income to be able to continue to deliver audience development initiatives that have a positive impact on the region's audiences.

1.2 Objectives

ANE were commissioned to develop and deliver a Family Friendly Initiative in June 2007, driven by the following objectives:

- Promotion of the Family Friendly Toolkit within the North East and development of a consistent culture of 'family friendliness' in arts organisations across the region
- Offer additional support to and work closely with a selected group of 7-10 cultural organisations to implement the toolkit to include audit, policy and action plan
- Implement a training programme on family friendliness, helping arts organisations to attract and retain family audiences
- Establish a Family Friendly Network where ideas and good practice can be shared amongst participating organisations

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2. Programme of Activities

The Family Friendly North East programme of activities was developed in response to a brief from Arts Council England, North East, and in consultation with other Audience Development agencies, who had experience of their own regional roll-out of the toolkit.

ANE's planned programme of activity within the remit of the pilot initiative:

- Identification of participating cultural organisations and key contact for each organisation
- Overseeing the completion of Family Friendly Audit and Family Friendly Policy for each organisation
- Facilitation of 'mystery shopper' family consultation visits at participating venues (up to 8)
- Development of SWOT analysis for each participating organisation, developing recommendations and ideas to develop family audiences
- Development of SMART Action Plan for each participating organisation which builds in aims and objectives, deadlines and identification of individuals/departments responsible for completion of tasks
- The establishment of a Family Friendly Network and facilitation of 3 meetings throughout the life span of the project where ideas and good practice can be shared amongst the participating organisations. Expert speakers to be invited to each meeting to deliver themed sessions
- Facilitation of practical skills training sessions aimed at developing the family oriented skills base of each participating organisation's management and front-line staff
- Production of an evaluative report

2.1 Selecting the participants

It was essential in order to fulfil the Turning Point strategy for the Visual Arts, that at least four Visual Arts organisations should be included. Other priorities during the selection procedure were to ensure that ethnically diverse arts organisations were represented, and that there would be a wide geographical spread, with at least one organisation in each of the four sub-regions.

Initially, nine organisations were confirmed as participants of the initiative, selected from a long-list of more than twenty organisations as being those that would benefit most from additional support following the distribution of the family friendly toolkit. These organisations

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agreed to commit the requisite time and energy to the programme on offer:

- Dance City (Tyne & Wear)
- Northern Print (Tyne & Wear, Visual Arts)
- Queen's Hall Arts (Northumberland)
- Kalapremi (County Durham)
- Kielder Art & Architecture (Northumberland, Visual Arts)
- Laing Art Gallery (Tyne & Wear, Visual Arts)
- mima (Tees Valley, Visual Arts)
- National Glass Centre (Tyne & Wear, Visual Arts)
- Northern Stage (Tyne & Wear)

As the project evolved and gained momentum, we were later able to offer an open invitation to the ANE membership of cultural organisations to take part in the project, and the following organisations also benefited from selected aspects of the training and consultancy on offer:

- Beamish (County Durham)
- Darlington Arts (Tees Valley)
- Seven Stories (Tyne & Wear)
- Sunderland Empire (Tyne & Wear)
- The Alnwick Garden (Northumberland)
- The Bowes Museum (County Durham)
- The Round Theatre (Tyne & Wear)
- The Sage Gateshead (Tyne & Wear)
- Theatre Royal (Tyne & Wear)
- Tyne & Wear Museums (Discovery, Shipley, Sunderland, South Shields) (Tyne & Wear)

Individual reports, audits, policies and action plans are confidential to the participating organisations and do not feature in this report.

2.2 Disseminating the Family Friendly Toolkit

Arts Council England, North East provided all regularly funded arts organisations and other appropriate organisations with a copy of the Family Friendly Toolkit in June 2007. Downloadable copies of the toolkit are available via the Arts Council's website (www.artscouncil.org.uk), and from the Resources section of the Audiences North East Website (www.audiencesnortheast.org.uk).

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The original nine organisations were each offered a detailed presentation of the toolkit and its uses for their own organisation, as well as an initial workshop geared toward:

- Generating a SWOT analysis of the organisation's current family offer and stimulating ideas about how to attract and retain family audiences
- Completing an audit of the organisation's performance in the following areas:
 - Customer Care
 - Access and Facilities
 - Marketing and Communications
 - Programming

Not all of the participating organisations were able to take up this opportunity and use it to launch the project internally, which inevitably impacted upon the subsequent phases of the initiative, with some organisations needing much more support than others to embed the toolkit and/or raise awareness of its uses.

To further reinforce the value of the toolkit, it was used as the starting point for many other elements of the programme. The audit template in particular proved invaluable in the development of the mystery shopper questionnaires, and later on provided a useful structure for the action planning workshops.

2.3 Mystery Shopper Family Consultations

In order to help 'test' the results of the organisation's internal audit of the four areas identified in the toolkit, we carried out mystery shopping at each of the nine venues.

2.3.1 Family recruitment and training

There is no simple definition of family. Today there are many legal, formal and informal relationships which people recognise as a family unit. Some family units may be contained in a single household with two parents, others may have extended families, intergenerational family units, step- or foster families, single-parent families, families in which parents do not reside together and many other combinations.

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Bearing these principles in mind, twelve families were recruited via the following channels:

- Whatsonnortheast.com webclub
- Whatsonnortheast.com visitors
- Newcastle NDC intranet
- Kalapremi
- Tees Valley Arts
- Durham City Arts
- NECDAF
- North East Strategic Partnership for Asylum & Refugee Support
- SureStart website

Representing a diverse range of socioeconomic and demographic groups, and ranging from single parent families of one adult and one child, to extended families of five or more including grandparents, aunts and uncles, the families initially attended an introductory session where they were introduced to the project.

It was made clear to them that they were to find out about their visit (no information was given apart from the venue name) and to make their own arrangements for travel, entry etc. They left understanding that their visit was to be made in a constructive frame of mind, knowing that the venue had agreed to participate in the project and was keen to see how it might develop regarding family provision. Participants were given questionnaires to complete during and after their visits. Each venue was visited by three different families.

Visits were conducted between July and September 2007. A final feedback session was held in which the visits were discussed in detail and the questionnaires collected.

2.3.2 Mystery Shopping – Key Findings

“It was very useful to have the Mystery Shopper part of the process as this confirmed some items we expected but crucially threw up a number that we had not considered, particularly the provision of parallel activities relating to art and architecture specifically aimed at children accompanying their parents. Most of these items we are already acting on and others, as a result of involvement in the FF initiative, will now add into our projected future programme.”

Curator, Family Friendly participant, Visual Arts

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Whilst individual reports are confidential to the participating organisations, it is possible to draw some key findings from the mystery shopping exercise in terms of the wants and needs of families visiting galleries, museums and other cultural venues.

We started out by asking the families to consider what they look for in a family day out (as opposed to a trip to an arts venue). They look for, in order of importance:

- Children's activities
- Value for money
- Nice food which is good value
- Good access (parking or public transport nearby, storage for prams and buggies and all-weather provision)

When looking specifically at arts venues/cultural activities, they had similar requirements, but greater expectations of an arts venue, exhibition or gallery visit, for example:

- Advertising which is easy to access and obvious
 - In appropriate places eg the internet, NCVS, community newsletters, schools, other similar venues
 - Set out according to calendar so they can see what's on when they have a free day
 - Activities that are labelled/branded as family friendly and grouped together in Marketing materials
- Product which is interactive
 - Age-appropriate activities that link to an exhibition
 - Guided tours for families to give perspective
 - Guided creative activities
 - Being able to touch things (parents relax more if they are not constantly policing their children)
 - Child friendly interpretation in galleries or museums
 - The opportunity to do their own version of what they are seeing (this was particularly in relation to art)
- Friendly staff who are not policing them
- Value for money and/or clarity as to what is 'free' – when unexpected contributions are asked for, the families don't appreciate surprises
- Storage space for coats, buggies, bags etc
- Seating not too cramped, and the possibility of using booster seats for smaller people who are unable to see in conventional seating if an adult sits in seat in front

The young people (aged between 3 and 13) who were involved in the mystery shopping had clear views too.

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When asked what is GOOD about visits to arts venues, in their experience, answers included:

- Interactivity
 - Activities and joining in
 - Make and take home
 - “I could touch things and it was OK”
 - “There was a quiz as we went round – with a prize!”
- Programming
 - Content of show/production/concert
 - Seeing new things
 - Seeing famous people
- Customer care
 - Kind and generous people
 - Staff who are used to dealing with ‘active’ children
- Access and facilities
 - Comfortable seats in which you can see (ie higher seating)
 - Heating right
 - Sweets/ice cream

When asked what is BAD about visits to arts venues, in their experience, answers included:

- “They are expensive”
- Things were too expensive to buy and there was resentment at feeling like a ‘captive audience’ in the venue shop
- Some things are just for adults
- Performances can be too long
- Tempting exhibitions with no railings – children wanting to touch and parents feeling concerned and uncomfortable
- Signage is sometimes not clear enough for younger children to understand
- Toilets
 - They can be too far away when you are in a hurry or ‘can’t hold it in’
 - Queues can be so long you miss the beginning of the 2nd half
- Staff
 - Disability awareness – the need for staff to understand that you cannot always see someone’s disability – this from a child with autism
 - One teenage girl said “they aren’t very friendly when I go with my mates” but the same staff were fine and friendly when she was there with mum and dad

Following the briefing session, we assigned venues/events to each family and gave them the questionnaires we’d devised based on the

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audit model used in the Family Friendly Toolkit, which covers in detail Marketing, Access and Facilities, Customer Care and Programming.

It's clear that not all of the participating cultural organisations have complete control over every aspect the families covered. In the cases of organisations hiring or touring to venues they don't run or have responsibility for, issues such as customer care and signage are obviously not in their control. However, clear dialogue about expectations and standards of care for families should assist in improvements.

In rounding up the key things that families want and don't want from their experiences of cultural activities, we have not identified individual organisations except to point to good practice.

Their first perception of cultural organisations is likely to be formed through the **Marketing** they find. It is vital to families to be able to find out about somewhere easily – usually on the internet but also through print. If a website is down, looks too adult or is unattractive to children and young people it won't bring them in. The families like clear links to 'family events' or 'kids activities' on websites.

They want clear information which says exactly what is available for families of children with different ages. They want to know when it's going to happen, as often families plan around a date when everyone's free, rather than the type of venue/visit they would like to have.

Whether online or in print, the design needs to be attractive to parents who are looking at it through their children's eyes.

Printed materials need to show that the event/exhibition is aimed at families. Flyers need to say exactly what the families will get, and programmes should contain information or content which is additional to the flyer – families resent paying for a programme which does not say more about what they are seeing. The pre-publicity for the Théâtre Sans Frontières production at Northern Stage was felt to be very good, as was the programme which included activities such as a word search and additional information which kept the young people occupied whilst waiting for the production to start.

In terms of pricing, families are willing to pay a 'fair' price for a good visit – as long as they felt they had had value for money they were content. Frustration only arises when somewhere is described as 'free' and they then find that they have to pay to enter a specific part of an exhibition, for example.

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When thinking about what they want in terms of **Access and Facilities**, the families want clear directions to the place/venue. Parking is not always under an organisation's control, but families visiting the National Glass Centre in Sunderland commented on how good parking was – and that it was free!

Clear signage both within the venue and around it (eg from the parking or bus stop) is very important, as is somewhere to put buggies/bags/coats. Dance City was felt to have considered this well and the lockers at mima were much appreciated.

Where such storage was not available, it was important that thought had been given to providing enough space to move around and within exhibits with buggies or wheelchairs.

The families appreciate decent food which is value for money and aimed at kids, but not just 'chips and beans'.

A memento of the experience is valued, and shops which have a good selection of cheaper items were liked – not just pencils/stationary, but more venue-specific stock. Laing Art Gallery was held as a good example with cheaper arts and crafts kits on sale.

Probably one of the most commented-on areas were the toilets! Cleanliness and ease of access were top priorities, particularly for those with the youngest children.

In terms of **Programming**, families want activities which are age appropriate, and if possible for different ages at the same time. Interpretation materials are often seen as very adult in galleries and at exhibitions, so a child-friendly alternative is highly valued.

Theatre productions aimed at children had less of a problem with interpretation and both TSF at Northern Stage and Multi Story Theatre at Queen's Hall won the young visitors around easily.

Young people wanted to be involved with the exhibition/show in some way whether through a trail or worksheet or through activities relating to it. The art and architecture trail at Kielder was, according to the families, an excellent way to focus their visit – they would have ambled aimlessly without it.

Most of all, families want to feel that they've learned something new from their experience, as a family.

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What families want in terms of **Customer Care** is staff that assist them without having to be asked, that are prepared with information and a smile. They also value it when staff can advise them about other places they might enjoy, and when they are comfortable and confident in dealing with young people of all ages.

As previously mentioned, one of the families includes a young person with autism, and another is a wheelchair user, so disability awareness within staff is highly valued, particularly the awareness that some disabilities cannot be seen. Where they can be seen, there is no excuse for not treating the individual with respect. Where they can't, efforts should be made to accommodate the needs of the individual.

This was an interesting area as there was much inconsistency within Customer Care, and sometimes despite the Marketing, Facilities and Programming all being rated as very family friendly, still families felt let down by the care (or lack of) that they received during their visits.

In certain cases families had visited venues previously and had a completely different experience, which exemplifies the need for a consistent level of family friendly training, particularly for front of house staff, for whom it is easy to forget what it's like to come to their place of work as a visitor.

Obviously, different staff have different skills, but customer care does need addressing in most cases, with notable exceptions being the staff at Northern Stage who were exceptionally disability-aware, and the helpful and knowledgeable staff at Kielder.

To conclude, here are some of the things that our families definitely DON'T want from their cultural experience:

- Marketing
 - A programme which tells them no more than a flyer
 - Advertising which appears adult
 - Dull websites
 - 'Hidden' charges
- Access and Facilities
 - Getting lost on the way there or home
 - Problematic navigation for buggies and wheelchairs
 - Dirty toilets
 - Expensive and poor food with little consideration for young palates
 - Boring, expensive shops

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- Programming
 - Performances/exhibitions which do not include children
 - Venues with no activities for children of differing ages
 - Adult interpretation only
 - Exhibitions which display objects at tempting heights for small hands
- Customer Care
 - Staff who make you wait whilst they finish their social conversations
 - Staff who act like policemen – the balance between care of a collection and being a point of information is a hard one to find but parents often became anxious and would shorten their visits
 - Staff who make disabled visitors feel they are a problem or unwelcome
 - Restaurant staff who make families feel as if requests for children’s catering are just too much!

“For me, the Mystery Shopping part of the project was useful. It emphasized some points that we already knew and highlighted some that we can now act upon. The feedback from the families was circulated through the company including the board of trustees.”

Marketing Manager, Family Friendly participating venue

2.4 Family Friendly Network

As part of a broad commitment to ensuring a legacy for the pilot Family Friendly initiative, one of the major programme elements is the establishment of a Family Friendly Network.

Three meetings have been held throughout the period of the project, and there is interest from participating organisations in carrying on with these networking and skills development opportunities, which offer a chance to share ideas and good practice in a supportive atmosphere.

Speakers from inside and outside the region acted as facilitators for round-table discussions, and future themes that could be explored include Marketing to families, Programming for families, and collecting information about family audiences.

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2.4.1 Network Meeting 1 – Family Visitors: What do they want and expect?

This session (November 2007) was a chance to debrief the participating organisations on the key findings from the mystery shopping exercise and to share the knowledge and learning gained.

Individual organisations were free to discuss the contents of their own detailed mystery shopper report, or alternatively were able to keep the information confidential, and the meeting was conducted under the Chatham House Rule, with the aim of providing anonymity to speakers and encouraging openness and the sharing of information.

In particular, participants found it useful to explore the disparities between their own internally conducted audit of family friendliness, and the views expressed by the families who visited their venues, and how these can be used to inform future development.

Short group discussions were then facilitated, looking at generating ideas on how to improve services for families.

2.4.2 Network Meeting 2 – Engaging with disadvantaged and marginalised families

This session (January 2008) was facilitated by Robert Laycock, Director of Newcastle-based Helix Arts and directly relates to the Arts Council's target of increasing take-up of cultural opportunities by priority groups including Black and minority ethnic, disabled and economically disadvantaged social groups.

Helix Arts Specialises in developing arts programmes with different groups of disadvantaged and marginalized groups, such as young people in care, young offenders or people with mental health problems.

Their expertise lies in enabling people who would not normally be able to access arts activity to do so. This has relevance to creating Family Friendly arts activity since many of the principles and actions are similar, and this session looked at the more extreme end of family friendly provision, and the impact that reaching these difficult to reach families can have upon their lives.

The meeting took the form of a presentation by Robert Laycock, interspersed with group discussion.

Participants were given insight into the potential benefits and pitfalls of engaging with traditionally hard to reach groups, ideas for ways of developing arts programmes aimed at these groups, and saw case studies of work Helix Arts has done specifically aimed at families.

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2.4.3 Network Meeting 3 – Family Friendly Case Studies and Partnerships

This session (February 2008) was facilitated by Christian Jenner, a freelance journalist and consultant experienced in establishing, developing, researching and promoting family friendly policy and practice. Christian was commissioned by Arts Council England to prepare a report and bank of case studies on family friendly activity throughout England, based on research carried out between March 2006 and March 2007.

The report is being used to support the work of the Arts Council in developing its Family Friendly Framework, and is the result of extensive research, interviews and site visits with organisations across England who serve a family audience.

Participants in this meeting heard from Christian about some interesting campaigns, policies, practices and strategies employed to develop family audiences in the arts, and had the opportunity to tap into her expertise and discuss their own experiences and concerns.

2.5 Practical Skills Workshops

The series of training sessions were developed to equip both management and front-line staff with new skills and awareness of the issues involved in being a family friendly organisation.

ANE commissioned Playtrain to deliver the training element of the project. Playtrain is an organisation that specialises in creative consultation with children and young people, and has extensive experience of developing skills in family friendliness within the cultural sector following its involvement in the Audiences Central Family Friendly project. The tutors used throughout the project were Janet Hetherington, Arts Manager at Birmingham Children's Hospital and a university lecturer, and Tom Howell who has extensive experience as a youth worker and family friendly consultant.

62 individuals from 17 cultural organisations from across the region have benefited from one or more of the organisational development opportunities on offer.

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“The sessions that I attended which were run by Playtrain were great and really gave people some great ideas. It was great to get together with other organisations and share family friendly ideas. Everyone works in different ways but it is really interesting to find out what other people are doing and share your own ideas with groups of interested people.

The ideas that Janet and her team put forward as ways of working with young people were really inspiring; creating forums; having child centred steering groups; 5 second fillers etc...”

Workforce Development Team, Family Friendly participating venue

2.5.1 30 Second Fillers – training aimed at front line staff

A day crammed full of games, behaviour management techniques, conversation starters and great distractions which can be done in 30 seconds upon meeting families. Front line staff often have to entertain, educate, help and manage families visiting arts venues, and have to establish relationships with families very quickly.

This workshop was designed to introduce front line staff to a range of techniques which can help establish relationships with families very quickly and ensure families have the best possible customer care experience.

There were two opportunities to take part in this workshop, in Newcastle (January 2008) and Darlington (February 2008).

The high-energy day started with a series of fun ice-breakers designed to help participants get to know each other quickly – all of which were suitable to be used with groups of different aged children. There followed a crash course in child development, with a group exercise focusing on designing activities for children of different ages based on their social, intellectual and physical development stage.

There were tips and ideas about how to start conversations, examples of simple games which can be played with anyone, anywhere, as well as more complex mind games designed to stimulate and focus children.

Participants were then able to practice quick and easy strategies for managing bad behaviour and implementing good behaviour, and finally

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we ran through some chill-out activities designed to help calm children (and adults!) and create a peaceful working environment.

At the end of the session, the participants were asked to complete some statements about their experience, and here are some of the responses:

<p><i>Before today I hadn't thought about...</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Conversation starters and I didn't know there were so many games as that! ▪ Developmental differences in age and conversation topics. Loads of it was totally new! ▪ Having more 'planned' conversation starters or keeping some questions in mind to draw out quieter children – this will be good for all our staff ▪ Acknowledging children as the customer
<p><i>After today I want to...</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Pass on the fun and enthusiasm I gained through learning lots of useful games to my colleagues and also implement the games within the centre I work in. I definitely think they'll link with the work we do there really well ▪ Learn more games, to share what I have learnt with front of house team at work. To play the games again so I don't forget them ▪ Give other people in front of house team the information, put games and conversation starters into practice ▪ Add to our toolkit for working with children and families, and ensure that our visitors have a more engaging experience
<p><i>Today I thought the tutors were...</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Excellent!! Really down to earth and fun. The informal setting was perfect and suited everything we were doing ▪ Absolutely brilliant – high energy, fun and knowledgeable
<p><i>Today I would have liked...</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ More time!! I was sad the day was over ▪ To know a little more about ages of children and games ▪ Maybe a bit more information on how to engage parents (reluctant to join in ones) but I feel we covered a great deal in the time ▪ To be able to link the activities into a strategic approach which I'll be able to do at the next two sessions
<p><i>After today I would like...</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ To go to more sessions like this – there really isn't enough training like this around! Thank you ▪ To learn more about planning/Marketing family friendly ▪ To put together what we've done into something that will help all our staff and improve our services to visitors ▪ To add to what I've learnt to create a useful recommendation of activity/practice for my organisation

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2.5.2 Creative Consultation – training aimed at front line and strategic/management staff

This day introduced staff to a wide variety of informal creative consultation techniques which can be easily implemented in most settings, enabling them to find out what children think of the facilities and services on offer.

The course helps both front line and strategic/management personnel to design and create age appropriate consultation activities and provide an insight into the value of working with families to improve services.

There were two opportunities to take part in this workshop, in Newcastle and Sunderland (January 2008).

The session was very hands-on and participants had the opportunity to practice many of the consultation techniques discussed, which made use of a range of verbal and visual approaches.

The facilitators had direct experience of using most of the techniques in the course of their work, and were therefore able to provide case study evidence of the effectiveness of different methods.

Participants created and tested visual tools such as graffiti walls, giant doodles, dream-catchers, coats of arms and maps. Other ideas included giving a fact or opinion for each square of paper in your hand (not a popular exercise for the shy, but effective!), and getting young people to explore by leading adults on a tour.

Here is some of the feedback received by way of drawing around both hands and putting a positive on the one hand and a negative on the other:

On the one hand... (things that you enjoyed and learned)	...and on the other (things that could be improved, ideas for future training, how might it work in practice)
There were suggestions that covered all areas from programming to front of house	I was quite slow after dinner
Enjoyed the art, lovely laid back atmosphere, excellent opportunity to network, interesting points of view	Tea was too strong
I have gained loads of fantastic ideas about how to do consultation work with kids- this will enrich the work I do!	I am interested in 'family friendly' from the point of view of engaging parents- so would like to know more about working with them

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Lots of inspiration for new ideas to take away	Unsure whether ideas will work in practice
Learned a lot of techniques that can be applied at seven stories and sharing ideas	I foolishly picked a big handful of paper at the beginning!
Lots of new ideas and excellent environment to which to share ideas	Would like further info about how to implement changes; might be nice to see case studies
Really, really, really enjoyed the day. Learned lots of new consultation methods. We looked at lots of creative methods that can be adapted to lots of situations	It might have been good to target a specific age e.g. teenagers
Enjoyed listening and having ideas	Realising there is little consultation currently (but I can change this)
It was really sociable and interactive way to refresh old ideas and gain new ideas	I think I also want to adapt these ideas so I can use them with adults
Got lots of ideas and worked with lots of different people from different organisations	Would have liked to have worked with a greater a range of people- often people from the same org stayed together
I learned a lot and it went really quickly and didn't drag	Maybe everyone should have the same slips of paper at the beginning- but it was still really good!

2.5.3 The Master Class: Planning with Children – training aimed at strategic/management staff

This workshop (February 2008) provided strategic/management level staff with the opportunity to examine how families can play an active role in planning and service delivery.

One of the objectives of the day was to promote understanding of the different structures available to design planning processes with children, including practical ideas about how to design the process so that it is sustainable, useful and of course fun.

Participants were asked to reflect on their own organisation and where it falls on Roger Hart's Ladder of Young People's Participation:

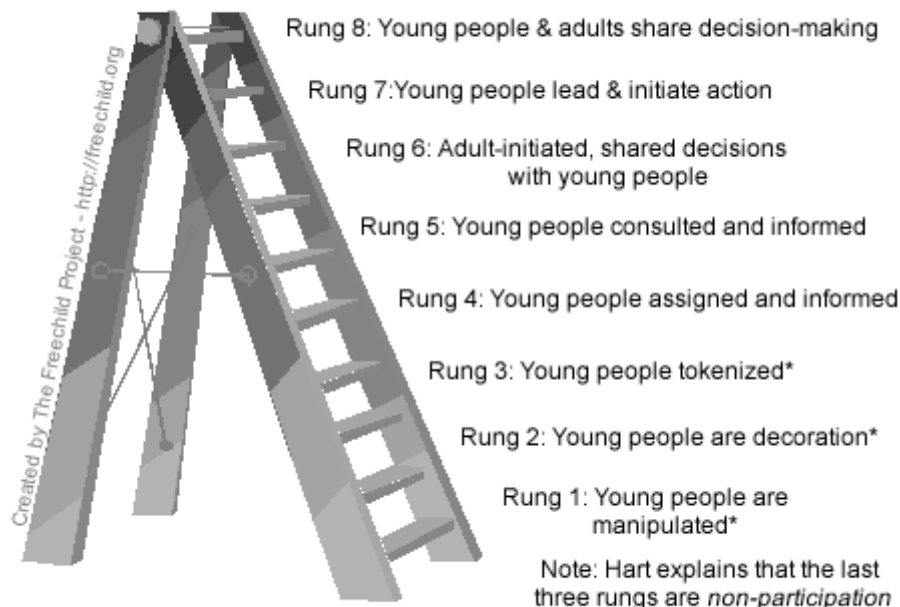
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Roger Hart's Ladder of Young People's Participation



Adapted from Hart, R. (1992). *Children's Participation from Tokenism to Citizenship*. Florence: UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre.

They were further asked to consider how their planning process relates to children's rights, and there was some examination of the different legislation that exists to protect and support children and young people, including the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Article 31 Action Pack), The Children's Act, Every Child Matters, the Health and Social Care Act section 11, and the Human Rights Act.

The project life cycle was discussed, and ideas were generated around the types of activities that could form part of a Young Persons Consultation, for example setting up a children's panel, running focus groups, mystery shopping, board representation, writing a review and using online social networking sites such as Facebook or blogging.

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There were hints and tips as to where to recruit children, young people and families to get involved in consultation. The trainers provided a checklist of practical things to consider during the consultation process, and lots of ideas about how to make it fun for all concerned, including:

- Break traditions, eg walking meetings
- Implement a reward system
- Role reversal
- Children set the rules
- Make a mess and make noise
- No uniform/school dinners
- Bouncy castle
- Make something to take away

Finally, there was advice on how to inform the rest of the organisation and make the changes. Cascading the information to all staff is crucial, and there are lots of ways of doing this, from distributing a letter or e-bulletin to inviting all staff to a presentation or meeting. Representation for the project should be at senior management meetings, and the appointment of a Board Champion can ensure the issue is kept on the agenda.

2.6 Exercises in Embedding

The final phase of our Family Friendly pilot initiative was to offer participating organisations the opportunity to take part in an in-house action planning workshop with Family Friendly consultants Janet Hetherington and Tom Howell. The ideas generated in the workshop would then be consolidated by the consultants and they would produce a report for each organisation, to include:

- Audit of Marketing, Access and Facilities, Customer Care and Programming
- SMART Action Plan (with objectives that are specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and timetabled)
- Draft Family Friendly Policy

This part of the programme was developed in order to achieve the following objectives:

- Embedding a Family Friendly attitude throughout the organisation
- Formalising the organisation's commitment to being Family Friendly
- Capitalising on the investment participating organisations have made by taking part in this project and enabling the sharing of ideas and experience
- Ensuring a legacy for the initiative

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We were able to organise action planning workshops for seven of the participating organisations:

- mima
- National Glass Centre
- Northern Print
- Seven Stories
- The Round
- The Sage Gateshead
- Tyne & Wear Museums

Group sizes ranged from two to sixteen, so the consultants had to tailor the workshops to each situation, and outcomes were different across the board. For example larger organisations with integrated management systems may have allocated single tasks to multiple departments and require the establishment of a formal working group, whereas smaller organisations seemed more able to allocate actions to individuals and could take a much more informal approach to monitoring and evaluation.

Each workshop began with a visioning exercise wherein the group were asked to consider how they would like the organisation to be family friendly in the future. The group focused on what this would look like in 18 months time. The groups considered both practical issues such as making toilet facilities more child-friendly, and also more conceptual goals such as “getting children to come here by choice!”

Links between vision statements were then explored and discussion between participants encouraged, particularly within the larger organisations where lines of communication between departments can be less open than in a smaller management structure.

The Family Friendly Toolkit was then used as the basis for the development of short-term, medium-term and long-term SMART action points relating to Marketing, Access and Facilities, Customer Care and Programming.

Using all of the ideas and information gathered during the workshops, the consultants were then able to draft a Family Friendly Policy statement for each organisation, which is intended to provide a focus for embedding family friendliness within the organisation, and a formalisation of the organisation’s commitment to providing families with rich, rewarding experiences.

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3. Observations and Learning Points

- Although the Family Friendly North East initiative was an ambitious audience development project (and, in the event, the programme was extended beyond its original timescales), its key objectives were delivered.
- One of the unintended outcomes of the project has been that it has revealed the wide range of existing good practice across art forms.

Learning point 1

Smaller organisations are no less likely than larger organisations to engage constructively and imaginatively with the family friendly agenda, and in fact may find it easier to adapt and change than their larger counterparts.

- The initiative attracted a diverse range of organisations from across the region, covering visual arts, music, performing arts, museums, the outdoors and literature. However during the initial recruitment period, there was some surprising resistance to the project. Some organisations felt that they were already family friendly and didn't need further support, whilst others cited a paucity of resources and capacity, and still others didn't feel the concept was a priority for them.

Learning point 2

Without support at senior management/board level, it is extremely unlikely that an organisation will engage fully with the family friendly agenda, or implement the family friendly toolkit as a core strategy for audience and business development.

- Initial identification of the correct key contact within an organisation is crucial to ensure that the project is driven forward from within. As the project progressed it became clear that family friendly policy and activity can be driven equally effectively by Management, Marketing, Education, Customer Service or Outreach personnel but the key to successful embedment is in fact the involvement of all these departments in the process. In contrast to other areas of audience development which can become compartmentalised or over-dependant on one particular member of staff to drive the agenda forward, family friendliness is truly an organisation-wide undertaking.
- Despite accepting the invitation to take part in the initiative, some organisations participated in only a fraction of the programme of activities, potentially lessening the impact of the project.

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Learning point 3

Because the programme was so varied and aimed at such a diverse range of personnel from board room to box office, it was sometimes challenging to ensure that the information was being disseminated effectively via the key contact within each participating organisation. A solution could have been to acquire a complete list of staff with contact details and target the information at source.

- Although time-consuming, the mystery shopper exercise provided a wealth of qualitative intelligence, and has resulted in a dedicated, enthusiastic and knowledgeable 'bank' of trained mystery shopper families – a resource that one of the participating organisations has already tapped into during the development of a customer care policy.

Learning point 4

The mystery shopper reports, whilst welcomed and valued by the majority of the participating organisations, naturally contained occasional elements of criticism which some organisations found hard to accept. This particularly affected the first Network meeting, where the reports were discussed. On reflection, this type of sensitive discussion was not an ideal topic for the first meeting, as there had not been time to develop trust among the group.

- The Network meetings, which were one of the first elements of the project chronologically, would have been better scheduled towards the end of the programme, by which time the 'key players' at each organisation had emerged.
- The Network meetings were primarily aimed at senior strategic staff, which meant that diary pressure resulted in fairly low attendance. More notice of events may have combated this problem.
- A number of organisations involved in the family friendly initiative were, at different stages in the project, going through broader organisational change, which in some cases meant that the continuity of their involvement was compromised. In other cases however, this actually provided a kick-start to their activity and a new enthusiasm for the agenda.

Learning point 5

Work around family friendliness does not occur in a vacuum. Part of the work of embedding family friendliness involves being mindful of existing organisational priorities and mainstreaming family friendliness into these.

- The training sessions were hugely popular and highly valued by participants, and one positive outcome has been the development

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of new networks and partnerships, such as the proposed family friendly hub in the Ouseburn Valley.

Learning point 6

Although the participants valued the hands-on nature of the Playtrain workshops, there have been some that would have liked more handout material to use when disseminating the learning internally to those who couldn't attend. We are working with Playtrain produce downloadable handout packs for each of the training sessions.

- Companies taking part in the initiative reported it to be a positive experience. However, one smaller organisation made the important point that unless there is the internal capacity to act upon suggestions and recommendations which emerge from the work, there is a danger of raising expectations which may be impossible to deliver.

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4. Conclusions and Recommendations

4.1 Conclusions

- The family friendly initiative in the North East has been a successful campaign which has been of mutual benefit to cultural providers and their existing and potential family audiences.
- New knowledge sets and practical skills have entered the workforce of a substantial number of cultural organisations, and will be disseminated widely as a result of the project.
- Nascent partnerships and collaborations have resulted from the project, which will form a legacy beyond the life of the pilot.
- The project has provided a platform for sharing best practice and experience, and has highlighted existing excellence in family friendly provision in the arts, providing inspiration and confidence to those organisations with little or no experience of developing family audiences.
- The project has been instrumental in redefining some of the participating organisations' perceptions of what it means to be family friendly.
- The programme has focused effort towards embedding a positive, strategic approach to developing family audiences and thereby increasing participation in the arts by children, young people and the adults who care for them.
- At least seven participating organisations (four of which are Visual Arts organisations) have conducted a family friendly audit, drafted a family friendly policy as a direct result of the project, and developed SMART action plans for implementation over the next eighteen months.
- Although the scope of the pilot project was wide, there are still many areas for future development. One participant made the following observations: "On several occasions there were members of the group from marketing and promotional areas of their organisation and yet these areas weren't really touched on as part of the training sessions. It would have been good to look at more structured examples of good practice in family friendly venues."
- There is strong support for the continuation of a strategic family friendly initiative.

The conclusions are used to inform the recommendations that follow.

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4.2 Recommendations

The recommendations combine further modelling and application of the family friendly toolkit and also the specific feedback received from participants in the pilot project.

The recommendations coming out of Family Friendly North East are put to all project stakeholders and cultural policy makers for their consideration towards future implementation.

Recommendation 1

- Use the Family Friendly North East pilot project to provide guidance to others and to inform future policy and practice around family friendliness. Work with project stakeholders to achieve this.

Recommendation 2

- Audiences North East to act as a central hub for the sharing of knowledge, skills and experience. Audiences North East has created a database of more than 60 participants from 16 cultural organisations. In order to facilitate the continuation of the enthusiastic and productive networking engendered by the project, ANE proposes to set up an online family friendly forum using project management tool Basecamp where users can ask questions of each other, share knowledge, set milestones and to-do lists, upload files and generally interact in a focused way. If further funding were available, ANE would co-ordinate further Network meetings with expert facilitators, and organise field trips to centres of excellence outside the region.

Recommendation 3

- Measure distance travelled in the life-time journey started by family friendly participants by providing organisations with an opportunity to revisit and review their action plans and to measure progress against key tasks. This will help to measure any organisational shift and/or assess how organisations have sustained organisational change towards family friendliness in the longer-term. An under spend on the pilot project means that it would be possible for ANE to hold a family friendly focus day to allow for this. The day would also include short seminars on marketing to families and programming for families, both areas identified by participants as being key to attracting family audiences.

Recommendation 4

- Building on the organisational development focus of the pilot project, it would be an appropriate next step to find ways to recognise, reward and signpost excellence in family friendly provision.

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- Branding - There is an existing family friendly brand developed and used in the Manchester area, which it would be possible to adopt in the North East. To be eligible to use the badge, organisations would be required to sign agreement to follow a set of guiding principles, and some form of annual inspection or mystery shopping would be required to ensure quality control. Funding would be needed to administer this sort of scheme.
- Marketing – ANE has a segmented email database via whatsonnortheast.com, and there is an opportunity to develop a family friendly e-bulletin, although a small amount of capital would be needed to design and distribute this on a monthly basis, and to build the list further. In Liverpool there is a very effective quarterly magazine produced which lists family friendly events. This is paid for by advertising revenue, and would require some initial capital investment.
- PR – at the beginning of the pilot project, ANE investigated the potential for sponsoring a family friendly award via the Journal Culture Club Awards, and believe that some form of award scheme would provide a focus and incentive to organisations, as well as raising the profile of the family friendly agenda. Funding would be required to achieve this.

Recommendation 5

- Catalyse the learning from Family Friendly North East into real and effective change. The learning from the programme and its inter-relationships should be converted into a strategic plan that will sustain cultural intelligence and develop a consistently positive culture of family friendliness in the arts.

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