

Head in the Clouds 2017 Tour Project Evaluation Charlotte Allan

Summary of Activity

Head in the Clouds, a play designed for under 5s and their accompanying adults, was performed 34 times across 20 venues to a total audience of 1103.

11 of these performances were for targeted groups of families who would otherwise be excluded from experiencing live theatre. These performances, which were free at the point of access, were funded by a grant from Awards for All. The rest of the tour was supported by Creative Scotland, fees paid by the venues hosting us (who retained box office income), and Puppet Animation Scotland.

The 'Awards for All' groups were:

Visibility: Parent and toddler group for under 5s with visual impairments. Glasgow

PEEP: Supporting families and carers with young Looked After Children. Aberdeen.

Kidsplay: Creative club for 0-4 and their carers in an area of multiple deprivation. Glasgow

Expecting Something: Arts focused group for parents aged under 25. Edinburgh

Hailesland Early Years Centre: Support service for families in Wester Hailes, Edinburgh

Re-Act: Playgroup for children of Syrian refugee families. Edinburgh

Scottish Association of Children with Heart Disorders: supports affected families. Glasgow

Rachel House: Children's hospice. Perthshire

Ochiltree Playgroup: Volunteer run playgroup for local young families. East Ayrshire

3D Drumchapel: Families living in the Glasgow West area with pre-school children.

The Puppet Animation Festival venues were:

New Pitsligo Village Hall, Aberdeenshire

Out of the Blue (Drill Hall), Edinburgh

John Gray Centre, Edinburgh

Paisley Central Library

Costorphine Library, Edinburgh

Valley Park Community Centre, Edinburgh

North Edinburgh Arts Centre

The individually booked venues were:

The Met, Abertillery

Blackwood Miners Institute, Caerphilly

The Roses Theatre, Tewkesbury

The Welfare, Ystradgynlais

Theatre Clwyd, Mold

Forum Theatre, Chester

This evaluation was intended to assess how well we did against our company and project aims.

Aim	Method	Form	Conclusion
To reach audiences who would not otherwise access theatre	Asking audience members (adults) Keeping track of numbers	Stats, look at difference between AFA and PAF strands of tour Stats	We did, especially with the targeted groups
To provide a quality experience	Audience feedback	Comments clouds, written after performances	We did
To support play and playful communication	Ask group leaders of AFA performances	Yes/No and comments Relevant comments clouds	We did – though closer and longer observation, with benchmarking, would give more detail.
To meet the diverse needs of unique audiences	Ask group leaders of AFA performances	Yes/no and comments	We did, and this element was particularly appreciated
To effectively manage a funded tour	Evaluations from cast, crew and other PAF venues	Yes/no questions and comments	Yes

Brief summary of successes, challenges and recommendations

We demonstrably achieved all of our stated aims and are going forward with the general note of "more of this sort of thing". To be able to do this however is not so simple. The great strength of this project came from the quality of the work presented. *Head in the Clouds* got to the point it was at from a period of six years of experimentation, research practice, collaboration and uncounted hours of paid and unpaid artistic effort. Also, the kind of sustainability offered by having regular hours worked by a producer, across projects, would help a lot in terms of strategic planning and implementing ideas for improvement in management.

We don't know what the future holds in terms of what funding and resources may become available. However, based on this evaluation I can confidently say Ipdip Theatre can do what we claim to do when given the opportunity.

My recommendation is to continue making and presenting work, prioritising artistic quality and accessibility.

To reach audiences who would not otherwise access theatre

"Wonderful experience for both parents and children! A first opportunity for several of our parents as well as their children." Hailesland Early Years Centre

Theatre for early years is a relatively new and unusual art form and a visit to an Ipdip performance will be many people's first experience of it, and not just the babies. With this in mind we asked (adult) attendees if they had been to theatre for early years before and also how often they attended live performance events. This was to get an idea of their attitude and access to the performing arts. We had to stick to very broad questions with simple answers as most of the people who completed our survey were looking after one or more small children at the time. Here's what we found:

AFA = Awards for All audiences. Targeted groups, free at point of delivery.

PAF = Puppet Animation Festival. Ticketed audiences in Scottish venues

Wales = Ticketed audiences in Welsh (and one English) venues

Have you attended Theatre for Early Years before? (% of responses)

	AFA	PAF	Wales	Average Paid	Average All
Yes	18	45	0	23	21
No	82	55	100	77	79

We had a problem with our data collection in Wales as only one response per performance was recorded though from audience feedback it can be inferred that theatre for under fives was a pleasantly surprising opportunity for many people. That so many people in Scotland have attended TEY events before I believe is a testament to the work of organisations such as Starcatchers, Imagineate and Patter Scotland who support the development of the form.

How often do you attend live performance events?

	AFA	PAF	Wales	Average Paid	Average All
Weekly	1	6	0	3	2
Monthly	1	17	12	14	10
Few times a year	36	49	53	51	46
Once a year	34	16	35	26	28
Never	28	12	0	6	14

The answer to this question was interpreted varyingly, with some people including cinema and attending children's dance recitals for example. Edinburgh audiences reported a spike in attendance during August and those answering once a year often added that this was panto. Many people commented that their personal attendance of arts events had dropped sharply since becoming parents.

Another gap in our data collection was information for the performance we gave for Syrian

refugee families in Edinburgh. The note in the show report for that day reads:

"Data collection not appropriate nor possible in any sort of accurate/comparable way. Producer spoke to interpreter who, on behalf of this group of Syrian refugees, said that none of them will have ever experienced this type of theatre event before. The responses in the room varied from ecstatic to simple attentive watching; the variation was explained by the people running the group – the children most confident, outspoken and involved had been in Scotland for a year or more; the silent ones had only just arrived. This was an incredibly moving and rewarding performance and there is not a single doubt in my professional mind that this was a worthwhile gig. Credit to Ipdip's AD for printing the programme in both Arabic and English for this show. Visiting this group was important work."

To support play and playful communication

As mentioned under the previous heading, there were a number of audience comments that showed an understanding and appreciation of the kind of playful interaction we were encouraging. A number mentioned 'stealing' ideas, or being 'inspired'. We created a handout with the free programme everyone was given which listed simple, sensory based games and explorations that families could take part in taking on the themes of the piece. We were able to offer an Arabic translation of this text to the Syrian families we met.

An important principle of the kind of interaction we offer is that it is by invitation and must feel voluntary on the part of the person taking part; one result of this was so many people commented on the warmth of the performers, the friendliness and the welcoming atmosphere. It is in this state of openness and trust that playful communication is able to take place.

Assessing longer term impact is very tricky but we were able to gather feedback from the organisers and leaders of the targeted groups we visited. They know their groups well and were able to report in general terms what they felt the impact was of the experience. All but one of the contacts for the targeted groups filled out an online survey and gave us the following responses:

Do you think your group benefited from our visit? (yes/no/maybe) – 100% Yes

We aim to support play and playful communication - do you think we achieved this? (yes/no/maybe) 100% Yes

What do you think your group got out of our visit? (open text)
Sample of responses:

Excitement and engagement of participating in a live theatre performance, being part of something new, the magic of the whole journey from initial welcome to taking part in the action and seeing the performers afterwards.

Lots of fun, sensory stimulation. social opportunities, new vocabulary,

These are children who most likely will have limited access to live performances so it was nice for them to have an opportunity to attend one. Most of them have also had to deal with difficult situations in their young lives so it was also a special treat for them.

They all had a wonderful experience, lots of laughs and I'm sure it made them feel welcome in Scotland.

The show was at capacity and drew lots of new faces. So we were also able to reach new families to support.

The last comment there, offers another benefit to our tour, that of supporting the wider aims of the groups we were visiting – who often need to reach out to the families they look to support. This could be something to consider looking at more in a future tour of this kind.

To meet the diverse needs of unique audiences

Group organisers were asked, "Do you think we met the particular needs of your group? Yes/no/maybe" and 100% answered 'yes'.

This was also something that was highlighted in the question "What do you think your group got out of the visit?"

For example this reply the Scottish Association for Children with Heart Disorders:

It was such a treat for us to have a theatre show within the hospital at our Easter Event. Inpatient and outpatient families were then able to attend. Having something inclusive for all ages to enjoy together was fantastic. Babies and younger children and children with additional needs are sadly often excluded from the theatre experience so it's all the more wonderful to have had this opportunity.

and this from Visibility, to the question "Have you had any comments or feedback from group members or colleagues that you would like to pass on?"

yes, we have had lots of positive feedback from parents who all loved the show and the way it was presented to involve a range of communication techniques.

From comments clouds in the wider tour we also received feedback praising the accessibility of the piece. People appreciated the use of sign language, and one parent noted they felt their child with ADHD had had their needs met. A lot of comments clouds also mention (often with an element of surprise) at how children, and adults, of a range of ages enjoyed the show, listing the ages involved. For example:

"Truly impressive. So simple, yet effective. To engage two thirty somethings and two two year olds and 3 month and a 5 month old all at the same time is incredible. Thanks you."

As part of the rehearsal process we invited a specialist in diverse audiences and a baby sign teacher to offer insight into making the show as accessible as possible from multiple angles. Changes made were kept throughout the tour – not just as 'special' performances for groups where we knew certain lines of communication would be more obviously needed. This supported our wider aims as a company, for example our approach to our audiences as collections of individuals rather than as crowds who think as one.

To effectively manage a funded tour