

Little Red and the Big Bad Wolf: Christmas Family Outreach

Objectives and Strategy

As part of the Christmas family outreach initiative, a small programme of creative workshops was planned with schools in the local area. These workshops aimed to engage with families in the local area who. The families were from schools in the south Manchester areas of Rusholme, Streford, Trafford and Hulme. The purpose of the outreach was to boost attendance to the Little Red Christmas theatre show, incentivising the parents with heavily discounted tickets, which were subsidised to encourage families from these areas to experience family theatre. The workshops were visual arts activities, directly related to Little Red and the big bad wolf. Tickets were offered after attending and participating parents and their children in the workshop that they would be eligible for the tickets. The tickets were offered out at £2 from £10, meaning £8 was subsidised as part of the initiative. Free tickets were also offered to families (within the schools), who had experienced care which was part of the Looked After Children Campaign that was running simultaneously.

Key Objectives

- Encourage families to do a workshop activity together
- Offer families affordable tickets for Christmas via an outreach scheme
- Boost attendance of families to the Little Red Show, and ultimately to Z-arts
- Raise awareness of Z-arts as a family arts venue

Venues

The schools involved were Seymour Park Community Primary School, Divine Mercy Roman Catholic Primary School, Webster Primary School and Holy Name RC Primary School. It was these schools who had the capacity to respond and ensure workshop to take place.

Each of the schools who participated were schools we had either previously partnered with through schools linking for instance, or those in relatively proximity with a prior knowledge or encounter with Z-arts. This was important as it helped to develop an already existing relationship with the schools and hopefully strengthen the connections with these schools and families.

Workshop Activity

The workshop activity was planned with team work in mind. To help encourage the parent / carer and their child to work together and create one piece as group. There was 1-hour time limit, and as workshop facilitator I had to make sure that that the families were following the plan and instructions set but also comfortable with the activity and fully understood. The plan and instructions were simple and adaptable. If the group were happy doing just the one part of the activity then that was allowed, similarly if they group were advanced and finished ahead of time they were encouraged to make another puppet and use up the time as best as possible.

Using inspiration from the Little Red Riding hood forest in the story and the characters, the task was to create a forest background and create a character puppet-on-a stick, using materials provided by Z-arts. Together these two elements would make their very own mini puppet show that they could take home with them.

The workshops were planned at times that suited the family and school schedules, 2 of which were after school and 3 which fit into the school day as they allow for family engagement in the school curriculum.

At the end of the workshop a letter explaining how to obtain tickets was supplied to the families. It was one of two ways 1) buy on the spot, directly in person with cash 2) buy online using the outreach code given for the project.

Uptake Strategy

The workshop plan was shared with the teachers or members of staff that managed family engagement in the school. It was the school’s responsibility to help liaise with the parents on behalf of u raise awareness of the workshops to gain interest, which required some persistence and support as this added to the workload. Seymour Park and Webster Primary school both have family engagement departments. We provided the schools with a letter for the parents to help encourage attendance and uptake to the workshops. The letter informed families about the show and the discount which was on offer for their participation.

Workshop Attendance

Each workshop had a capacity of 30 participants (including adults and children). Initially this wads to be split by 7 schools, so a potential 210 participants in total. The overall attendance was 78%, a positive indication of the interest in arts outreach for these areas.

Little Red Outreach Workshops	School	Number of participants	Adults	Children
Tuesday 5th December	Seymour Park	29	13	16
Tuesday 5th December	Holy Name	13	0	13
Wednesday 6th December	Divine Mercy	22	9	13
Thursday 7th December	Seymour Park	32	15	17
Friday 8th December	Webster	67	20	47
		163	57	106

There was a total of 5 sessions and 163 attendees across the 4-days of the workshop. Overall there was an imbalance of children to adults. 65% of the participants were children. In the case of Webster Primary school under half of the parents expected were able to attend. In the case of Divine mercy and Seymour park the adult to child ratio was balanced and meant these sessions had the best ‘family group’ attendance and therefore family group experience. It was expected that not all parents could attend, and the numbers could

not be wholly accurate or 1:1 of adult to child, as this wasn't necessarily the case e.g. there were mothers alone with 3 children and families with 2 adults and 2 children.

The cultural diversity at these suggestions was extremely broad at all schools, so a positive aspect of targeting the schools that we had was that the audience development potential was high. At each of the schools there, parents who didn't speak English as a first language, it was necessary to pay extra attention to this in case instructions were unclear or extra assistance was needed. As was the aim of the activity it was apparent that the children who understood more were able to communicate this to their parents and therefore help them work as a team.

Tickets

There were 25 physical tickets sold and 30 online using the outreach code. 55 tickets in total which works out as 34% of the attendees bought tickets and came to the show. With over a third of the participants converted into attendees who came to our venue and experience family theatre they may not have otherwise been able to afford, there is some value in providing these workshops.

Strengths

The strongest achievements of the outreach were that of the 5 session that took place 4 out of 5 had parents in attendance. It is particularly important as this means that the incentive of affordable tickets did encourage parents to take time from their days and busy schedules to work creatively with their children.

Seymour Park were able to organise two sessions both of which were at full capacity. This could be related to having a member of staff that focussed family engagement, and resulted in a good uptake of tickets.

Some of the parents were uninterested in the Little Red Show but showed an interest in the Z-arts programme which had been talked and out an introduced in the sessions. This was because the idea of a Christmas show wasn't in line with their cultural beliefs, however arts activity was something they wanted their children to participate in. Therefore, awareness of the Z-arts offering was raised, encouraging families to join the programme in the New Year.

Weaknesses

Following on from the above point it is necessary to see the importance of outreach to families with different cultural beliefs and how activities or theatre shows could be better tailored to be more inclusive. Ultimately positioning as a Christmas show was bound to exclude some families, as it is not a festivity that they celebrate.

The session at Holy Name unfortunately had no parent attendees. The workshop continued with just the children and two parents at the end of the session but the family engagement aspect was lost, despite this two parents still bought tickets. Miscommunication seemed to be the problem in this instance. Moving forward more attention should be paid to how this

school encourages parental participation and finding out if they need help in encouraging this.

Summary and Feedback

The workshop activity was well received and all workshops ran on time. The results were finished, colourful and diverse pieces of art, with children and parents alike enthusiastic and proud of their work.

One of the mothers emailed specifically to say what they enjoyed it (see below), therefore it could be said that the activities objective worked on at least one of the families, as well as the mothers and parents who gave great verbal feedback on the day after the workshops.

“Thank you so much for today, me and my son enjoyed it and was nice to do something together”.

In terms of how ticket uptake could be improved, ease and simplicity are important, making the process of committing to buy and attend effortless. A way to further develop the ease of the uptake process and encourage attendance could be to give the physical tickets to the parents, and request payment on arrival to the theatre. This physical reminder of their commitment to come could help to better indicate interest in the show, and still result in the purchase. Enthusiasm and desire to come to these how could be high at the end of the workshop compared to two days later when they rethink and perhaps decide not to.

Another improvement could be better coordination with schools, so either work solely with schools who have the family engagement department for a better number of uptake or alternatively with schools who had lesser interest from parents, offer and develop a programme that could help to give the parents a sense of membership and ownership of the creative activities they do. Encompassing the workshop as part of a scheme could help with incentivising parent engagement and give the adults a sense of belonging and reason to part-take. In this instance, Z-arts would act as an extension of their faculty and offer a Parent Arts Group, for instance.

Pictures

