

IGLOO

Community Venue Tour January - March 2024

Executive Summary and Final Evaluation Report



IGLOO – Wellspring Settlement photo by Edward Felton

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Executive Summary – IGLOO Community Tour

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'They all sat so still during the performance ... that was so surprising and shows how magical it was and how it captured their attention' (SENCO – Raised in Bristol Nursery, E:2).

The Spring 2024 IGLOO tour was a remount of the original 2018 Early Years Theatre production aimed at 0-3 year olds revised to be performed in community settings and included the addition of a 30 minute 'stay and play' activity following the performance. This creative play activity was developed with a local nursery, Easton Community Children's Centre (ECCC) following a series of workshops. By being performed in community venues, the tour intended to reach children and families who were less likely to access theatre.

Through case-study evidence of eight performances at three contrasting community venues involving 376 babies, children under the age of four and adults who accompanied them, this evaluation process focussed on the following aims:

- To evaluate the immediate impact of watching the show on young children.
- To evaluate the success of the additional 'stay and play' element of the show.
- To review if families/early years settings continued any of the activities from the stay and play or ideas provided in accompanying resources after the show.
- To evaluate the difference between attending in a community venue compared to a traditional venue, and whether this reduced any barriers to attendance.
- To evaluate the emerging partnerships formed during the project and investigate whether these could be developed further in the future.

This Executive Summary provides a brief overview of feedback from evaluator observations of the performance, the 'stay and play' activities, as well as face to face semi-structured interviews conducted at the time of the performance and return discussions within four weeks of seeing the performance. It also takes into account show reports and an online questionnaire provided by Travelling Light. This summary is followed by a more detailed report and appendices. Travelling Light may wish to quote from this extensive evidence when reporting to funding organisations and when making future funding bids based on the findings and developments suggested within this summary and extended report.

Throughout the evaluation five key questions were explored. The following summary represents feedback received and identifies key findings:

- How did watching the performance impact on the young children?

The non-verbal production of IGLOO told the story of two siblings waiting for snow to arrive. Through emotional storytelling, music, movement and use of simple objects of hats, scarves, mats and ribbons children across Early Years ages engaged well with the narrative and the characters. Children and adults enjoyed the non-verbal, playful representation of children's experiences and emotions, which was evident in their comments and squeals of joy throughout the performance. The non-verbal style enabled greater accessibility for younger and older children; for children with additional needs; and for those children for whom English was not their first language.

The young children were able to associate with the narrative and the costumes. They were able to recognise and engage with the emotional content, such as the joy and frustration of waiting for something to happen; the sadness and anger of friends falling out with each other; and the happiness of friendship.

The content and the immersive style of the performance enabled children to experience a range of emotions first hand in a safe space with adults they trusted. As a consequence, many parents and EY practitioners thought the performance supported their child's emotional development and helped them understand the moods the children often experienced.

'It was wonderful. It was so useful for (name of child). He is 2 ½ and he finds emotions very difficult at the moment. He finds it difficult to share and gets frustrated and angry, so seeing it in the performance was really helpful. They showed him how to respond' (Parent, E:2)

The relaxed style of the performance where children sat in a circle close to the actors was appreciated by the adults who thought the children felt part of an inclusive, safe community. Adults also reported feeling less anxious if their child spoke or moved during the performance than they would have done in a traditional theatre venue.

Early Years Practitioners and parents were surprised by the high level of engagement from the children, how enthralled they were and their level of understanding: babies watched captivated for extended periods of time; children with additional needs, including hyper-activity were still, engaged and enjoyed watching the performance along with their peers; and children who were reluctant speakers started to talk and express themselves during and after the performance. As a consequence, EY practitioners reported the performance contributed positively to many children's language development.

Adults and children appreciated the acting and production elements of the storytelling, particularly the music, scarves, mats and the 'reveal' of ribbons. The interaction between actors and the audience, with the 'gifting' of a mat, or ribbon or being wrapped in a large scarf, were generally seen as being a special and positive aspect of the performance. However, a few children saw the interaction as a sign that they could join in and were disappointed when they had to sit still for the remainder of the performance. A few other children became shy and insecure when approached by the actors.

The production was considered highly appropriate for Early Years children, although a few parents would have liked there to have been further opportunities for interaction. Parents who had attended other performances with their child in a theatre setting, regularly commented that they preferred the more relaxed setting and would want to see theatre designed specifically for young audiences again.

Adults who had seen the performance with their child, reported sharing their enjoyment and this had a positive impact on them, both in helping them feel more relaxed and giving them ideas for creative play with their child:

'They all got something from it. On the way back there were lots of talks about feelings. Some children who do not speak also commented during and after the performance. Their confidence grew during the afternoon (Comments from two EY Practitioners, Cashmore, W:2).

- How successful was the additional 'stay and play' element of the show and how did this impact on the children immediately after the performance?

Overwhelmingly the 'stay and play' was a great success and enjoyed by the children and adults alike. The extension of the IGLOO event beyond the production alone, to include creative play, through the 'stay and play' activities was appreciated by parents and nursery practitioners alike. They felt it enabled children to play with other children they may not have known and therefore support their social development.

Children, 15 months and older, enjoyed the opportunity to help "clear up" at the end of the performance and participate in sensory play time, which was a time for 'free' activity after a time of sitting and watching.

EY practitioners saw the 'stay and play' activity as an important opportunity for families and children to participate in shared, sensory play together, providing a time to be imaginative, something parents may not prioritise outside of the activity.

Adults also appreciated the 'stay and play' activity which helped the young children in their transition from the performance to home or their nursery.

- How important was the venue where the performance and 'stay and play' activities took place to parents and did this reduce any barriers to attendance?

Case-study evidence of eight performances was collected from three different venues. This included four performances from a paying audience at a children's theatre venue in Exeter, two performances at Easton Community Centre to a non-paying audience from two Bristol nurseries with invited families from one of the nurseries who would not otherwise attend theatre. The final two performances were at Wellsprings Settlement in Bristol, to an invited non-paying audience of families from the Family Hub and a nearby nursery.

Irrespective of the setting, all children were unfamiliar with the venue. For the vast majority of children and many of the parents *IGLOO* was their first experience of theatre. In the community settings of Bristol, there was a high proportion of families who were non-theatre goers and therefore had not visited a traditional theatre venue. Nursery practitioners at the Bristol performances spoke of the children who attended the nurseries not being able to access theatre or other cultural experiences if they did not take them. Attending *IGLOO* may have seemed like a strange experience for the children, not only the performance but the journey to get to the venue. Many EY practitioners thought having a new and unfamiliar experience was an important life skill which would help the children negotiate other new experiences when they occurred.

It was clear in both Exeter and Bristol that the tour of *IGLOO* provided an opportunity for families to see high quality theatre specifically designed for young audiences who would otherwise not have access. This hopefully broke down barriers for future attendance.

Feedback from an online survey conducted by Travelling Light to parents who attended a variety of community venues suggested just over 50% of respondents would have been happy to have seen the performance in a theatre venue¹. Other respondents were less sure, preferring a nearby community venue, identifying the cost of tickets as a potential barrier, and appreciating the opportunity on the community tour to 'Pay What You Can' rather than having a fixed ticket price which they may not have been able to afford².

- Did the children/ families and early year providers continue to talk about the performance and use the ideas and accompanying resources to stimulate creative play over time?

Feedback about the *IGLOO* event remained positive over time. EY Practitioners, parents of children aged 18 months and above mentioned revisiting the memory of the performance with their children. They spoke of children remembering the snow, the penguins, the ribbons and the emotions of the characters.

Interviews with children also confirmed the memory of the performance was stronger than the memory of the 'stay and play'. This may in part be due to the performance having greater emotional impact and being an 'extra-ordinary' event, rather than the more 'familiar' stay and play activity.

Remembering the performance was also prompted by parents engaging with the additional resources of the picture book and activity leaflet. Parents appreciated being given these

¹ The results from the online survey should be treated with caution. The online audience survey was not very representative of the total audience, as it was based on 14 responses, which represented 1% of the audience for *IGLOO*. This may explain the contradictory responses to the verbal post performance feedback.

² See Appendix B for further details.

resources as a stimulus for discussion and inspiration for creative play ideas with their children.

In discussion with parents and EY practitioners they were surprised how much the young children were able to recall. Many also felt the emotional aspects of the performance made it easier for them to discuss moods and feelings with their child after seeing the performance.

- How effective were the partnerships formed during the project and how could these be developed further?

'It was a lovely project. Everyone enjoyed it' (Manager ECCC).

As a result of a series of ideas exchange workshops at ECCC aimed at exploring imaginative play associated with the 'stay and play' activities, a deeper relationship between the Travelling Light facilitator, EY Practitioners and the children developed. This helped the children feel more secure when they met the facilitator in the community venue.

The remount of *IGLOO* has enabled Travelling Light to form a deeper relationship with local community groups and nursery providers working with families and young children. Local Family Hubs and Nurseries are keen to develop this relationship further as they have seen the benefits of the partnership in supporting the development of young children's emotional development, language development and wellbeing. As a future development there is an identified need to work with small groups of children through creative and imaginative play to promote emotional and language development, particularly with children with additional needs.

'There was so much laughter – that was unexpected. Some of them don't laugh very much. They were reading the facial expressions and moves well. All of a sudden, they came out of their shells. It was like play therapy. I saw a side I hadn't seen before in many of the children. They were so engaged. Some were shouting out words and putting two words together which they hadn't done before'. (EY Practitioner Cashmore, W:2).

Introduction

*'I feel warm, snuggled and optimistic...a beautiful hug of a show'
(Comment from a parent, TA:2)*

The *IGLOO* tour during Spring 2024 was a remount of the 2018 production focussed on providing theatre for Early Years audiences aged 0-3 years³ and performed in a community rather than theatre setting. In addition to the original, this production included a 20-25 minute 'stay and play' session at the end of the performance. The 'stay and play' activity centred on sensory play with objects such as silky-soft materials, foam circular blocks and a white carpet pathway. As this was a new and extended element of the production, it forms a key element of this evaluation report.

The 'stay and play' was developed following a series of four workshops at Children's Centre (ECCC) in December and January prior to the tour. This preparation was part of an emerging partnership between Travelling Light and ECCC, and this will also be a key focus of this evaluation.

IGLOO was performed in community venues across the South West between 30th January 2024 and 21st February 2024⁴. This evaluation will focus on feedback from eight performances within that time span. Four performances took place over two days at Theatre Alibi's Children's Theatre venue in Exeter to a paying audience. Two performances took place at Easton Community Centre, Bristol to an invited non-paying audience from Raised in Bristol Nursery, and ECCC. The manager of the ECCC also invited some families who did not attend ECCC on the day the performance took place. The final two performances were at the Wellspring Settlement to an invited non-paying audience from the Wellspring Settlement Family Hub, and children and Early Years (EY) practitioners from nearby Cashmore Nursery. The tour of these venues was focused on reaching children and families who were less likely to access theatre.

This evaluation draws upon case-study evidence from four groups in three locations listed above and represents audiences from the *IGLOO* performances which are culturally diverse, covering a range of ages and includes feedback from children, family members and EY practitioners. Through observations of performances, including targeted observations of individual child audience members, and semi-structured interviews, predominantly with adults, this evaluation report seeks to address the following questions:

- How did watching the performance impact on the young children?
- How important was the venue where the performance and 'stay and play' activities took place to parents and did this reduce any barriers to attendance?
- How successful was the additional 'stay and play' element of the show and how did this impact on the children immediately after the performance?
- Did the children/ families and early year providers continue to talk about the performance and use the ideas and accompanying resources to stimulate creative play over time?
- How effective were the partnerships formed during the project and how could these be developed further?

³ The Igloo tour was supported by Arts Council England National Lottery Project Grants, Bristol City Council and Travelling Light's Friends and donors.

⁴ 27 performances were performed in ten community spaces across Devon, Bath and North East Somerset, Gloucester and Bristol to a total of 1133 children aged 0-4 and their accompanying adults. The audiences were varied in size with the smallest audience being 19 at Gloucester and the largest, 75 at Easton Community Centre.

Whilst this report is based on extensive and rigorous evaluation, it is a summary and further detailed reports from each visit can be provided on request⁵. The Appendices at the end of this report also provides further evidence and quotes to support findings. Within this report, venue names have been abbreviated and responses have been anonymised. Where it is relevant specific nurseries or settings have been provided.

This report is organised into four sections. Part One focuses on the audience's reaction to the performance and its impact. It also includes analysis and comparison of the responses of different ages of children, different needs of children and the type of setting in which they saw the performance. Part Two focuses on feedback on the additional post-performance 'stay and play' activity and the resources provided by Traveling Light at the end of the performance. Part Three focusses on longitudinal feedback gathered from children, parents and EY Practitioners within two weeks of the performance. It also examines how the additional resources of the picture book and activity sheets have been used to generate creative play with children. Part Four examines the partnerships Travelling Light has formed during this project; it reflects on the importance of preparation activities for the 'stay and play' and explores possible future work with local EY providers working with groups of children from different cultural backgrounds. Finally, the report concludes with a short summary of findings and suggestions which the company may wish to consider as future developments.



IGLOO – Wellspring Settlement photo by Edward Felton

Part One: How was the performance received and did the impact vary by different groups of children and settings?

'The performance was universal – you could take what you want from it. Different children will take away different things' (Comment from an EY Practitioner).

IGLOO was a non-verbal performance incorporating music, movement, and objects to tell the simple narrative of two children, Ira and Sadie, who could be siblings, waiting for snow to arrive. The performance explores the roller coaster of emotional responses young children may experience and the imaginative play they develop with simple objects such as hats, scarves, mats, and a sudden reveal of ribbons.

⁵ More detailed notes of all eight performances seen is available on request.

The non-verbal nature of the performance was appreciated by audiences of all ages. Children, including babies, were regularly observed intently watching the facial expressions and movements of one character to the other and being fully absorbed by their reactions. Some children would watch seriously, whilst others would watch smiling and giggling, particularly in the penguin sections, where both actors moved and squawked like a penguin.

Children enjoyed the playful representation of the penguins both during the performance and spoke about it as a favourite part of the show or something they would remember. A group of nursery children commented and illustrated their enjoyment of the penguin moves when they returned to their nursery after the performance:

'I really liked it. I liked the Penguin. They walked (*Child H imitates the penguin movements and sounds and laughs*),

What do you remember about IGLOO?

'A penguin'

(3 children started to make "Wah, wah" and "Beep, Beep" sounds. Although sat down, they then started to waddle with their upper body and put their hands out as penguin wings mimicking the actors),

In addition to the penguins, they also mentioned 'the mats', 'the ribbons', 'the people asleep' and 'I liked the play. My mummy would have liked it' (Conversation with 3 year old children from Cashmore Nursery following W:2).

Adults commented that the non-verbal style of the performance, not only added to the 'magic' of the experience but also made the performance more accessible particularly with audiences where English was not their first language:

'The non-verbal performance works brilliantly for all audiences. No language made it good for all. Music and visuals were enough – no need for words...I thought it was interesting that it was non-verbal but you could easily read the facial expressions. They were very good actors' (Parents from TA),

'I thought the way they told the story through facial expressions was really good' (Parent, E:1),

and

'I liked the non-verbal nature of the performance. For many children here, English is a 3rd additional language. We also have a number of children who have special needs' (EY practitioner, Cashmore,W:2),

and

'I thought this was really inclusive. We have come from Poland and my child doesn't always understand or things don't sustain her attention, but this was great. Being a relaxed performance was very good. It was mine and her first experience of theatre. We tried once when we were in Poland and then gave up' (Parent, TA: 4).

The non-verbal aspect was also seen as increasing the accessibility for children with additional needs including, Deafness, global development delay, Autism and other sensory needs. This was mentioned prominently by parents of two Deaf children who attended the performances at Theatre Alibi, and were emotionally impacted by the performance.

One parent said how touched they were by the performance and its impact on their child who has a hearing impairment. They commented that it was so inclusive, and as a result, they felt like crying because he, their child, was so fully involved. They had never felt so happy for him. Another family with a Deaf child also came to the same performance and commented;

'My favourite part was the non-verbal aspect. I really liked it because it was accessible to my child – They enjoyed and understood it' (TA:2).

However, the non-verbal aspect of the performance where adults played the parts of children and do not speak was considered strange by a few children in one performance who took a little time to settle at the beginning of the performance (E:2).

Emotional content of the performance and its impact

IGLOO explored the emotions young children can feel; the excitement, anticipation and disappointment of waiting for the arrival of snow, the joy of playing with someone else, and the anger, sadness and happiness that accompanies children playing and sharing together. Observations of children of eighteen months or older showed they engaged with the emotional aspects of the performance; showing empathy, mimicking the facial expressions, and at times hiding in the lap of their parents/ EY practitioners when they needed reassurance.

During the performance, children would often articulate the emotions either to a child next to them or an adult, often checking out or clarifying the emotion being displayed. They said comments, such as:

'They felt sad' or 'sad, She's sad' (Cashmore nursery, W:2), 'Sad, Sad, very sad' (child at W:1), 'She's happy' (child at TA:3).

In one performance a child was concerned when Ira kicked Sadie's pile of mats over and exclaimed "Ut-Oh" in recognition of the impending tension between the characters.

Children also became aware of the emotional content of the performance conveyed by the music. Observations showed the children often became more serious when the playful music at the start of the performance stopped. They became aware of other moments of emotional tension, such as when Ira smashed up the pile of mats Sadie had built. In contrast, children smiled and laughed during lighter, playful moments when Ira and Sadie enjoyed playing together.

Parents also expressed how they felt at the end of the performance, either because they were impacted by their child's engagement, by the performance itself or how their well-being had been improved by having the opportunity to share in the experience with their child,

'I thought I was going to cry because of the music. I thought it was so clever- so appropriate for L, who is just over 2. It was lovely to see the show with him. He loved it (Comment from parent, E:2),

'I cried like a baby, because it was her first show. She was SO engaged throughout'...

'I felt emotional. It was soft, filled with gentle movements which was good for her and for me' ...

'It was really good to focus on something which was positive and away from everyday stresses' ...

and 'I found it very relaxing. I felt really happy, I had a smile on my face throughout. It was lovely to have a shared experience with my child. It felt very relaxing and age appropriate I know we will play about it after at home and read the book'
(Comments from parents, TA).

Parents also spoke about the event providing a safe and supportive place where they could enjoy watching with their child, and because of the relaxed atmosphere did not feel stressed if their child fidgeted, chatted during the performance or ate a snack.

Parents also expressed surprise at how the children recognised the complexity of the emotions,

'I was surprised how my 3½ year old understood the facial expressions. She understood the emotions really well. I thought it was pitched at a good level for this age group' (Parent, TA:4),

'It was amazing (name of child), was totally in it, commenting on how the characters were feeling or what they were doing' (Parent TA:3)...

EY practitioners also noted the changes in the children they were supporting. A child who had difficulty regulating his emotions behaved in a way that surprised one EY practitioner who was amazed at his level of understanding and engagement:

'I expected him to feel overwhelmed by everything, but he was not. I am really impressed with the way R (name of child), was able to understand the emotions throughout. He understood how frustrated and sad the characters were feeling when they were throwing things down. He kept telling me their emotions and that surprised me. It is interesting to see how he is joining in with others. I thought he would not last very long at all and I would have to take him out' (ECCC:1).

At times when there were heightened emotional incidents in *IGLOO*, other observed children who had additional emotional needs, could often be seen chatting quietly with EY practitioners, appearing to want some reassurance, as well as verbalising what they thought was happening. (E:1, E:2, W:2).

Some parents felt the performance would contribute to their children's emotional development and their understanding of having to share with others,

'It was wonderful. It was so useful for (name of child). He is 2 ½ and he finds emotions very difficult at the moment. He finds it difficult to share and gets frustrated and angry, so seeing it in the performance was really helpful. They showed him how to respond. It will be very useful when we get home because we can refer to it and talk about how he is feeling with reference to the performance' (Parent, E:1),

and

'I thought it was very good, particularly with its focus on moods. That's so appropriate for my son who is all over the place. (Parent of a 2 year old child, E:2).

Production features – Music, Sounds, and Objects

The music held the narrative and emotional content of the performance as well as adding rhythm. There was an intensity of engagement when the music underpinned the action. Younger children and their parents moved with the rhythm of the music, bouncing up and down. Some children of all ages copied the sounds the actors were making, such as the various squawking and honking of the penguins.

When giving feedback many adults said how much they enjoyed the music and how important it was for their child and for them,

'I felt it was really uplifting for me, as well as the children. I loved it, especially the music' (EY practitioner, E:1),

'He liked the music. I think you feel different when there is music- he felt more relaxed, joyful and his attention was captured by the music' (Parent of 2 ½ year old child at TA:3).

This was echoed by EY practitioners who also thought the music had an important impact on children with additional needs,

'They loved the music. The non-verbal children particularly responded to the music – rocking... vigorously rocking. She kept hearing the deep bass sound and found that relaxing. By the end she was a lot more relaxed' (EY Practitioner, Cashmore: W:2).

Younger children often became excited by the music, and their attention became more focussed when there was a musical underscore to the action,

'I felt my 8 month old swaying along to the music. The ribbons really caught her attention. It was lovely, for her and me. I thought the music was really good' (Parent TA:4).

In feedback, one 3 year old said they felt 'Happy'. I Liked the music' (TA:3).

As well as the music, the props had an impact on the audience increasing their engagement. The costumes, included an array of outdoor wear, such as hats, scarves and gloves with which the children were familiar when going outside to play in the snow. In one performance, the child audience, who were quite loud as they came into the space, quickly became silent and

transfixed as soon as Ira and Sadie started to move and were playing with their scarves, hats and gloves. (W:1)

The set included a pile of multi-coloured woven mats which were integral to the play activities Ira and Sadie participated in. Towards the middle of the performance the actors offered the children in the audience a gift of a mat. This seemed a moment of special connection between the actor and the child with many children either smiling at the gift or commenting with wonder, “ I’ve got a mat” (Child 3 -TA:3).



IGLOO – Wellspring Settlement - photo by Edward Felton

When the children were given a mat, there was excitement and pleasure as the children accepted the gift of the mat. They often laughed or smiled as if they had been given a special present. As one EY practitioner noted:

‘The interaction with the actors was good. You could see the children’s eyes light up as the actor came towards them with a mat or a ribbon’ (EY Practitioner, Cashmore Nursery, W:2),

Whilst most children were delighted, a few children became shy and distressed when they were offered a mat from a ‘stranger’, turning to a known adult for comfort, and were happier when the mat was placed away from them and they could choose to engage with it when they felt safe. As will be discussed later, a few children also became unsettled when they received a mat as they took this small act of interaction between the actor and themselves as a sign for them to join in and play.

A few children started to put the mat on their heads as Sadie and Ira had previously. The adults particularly became fascinated by the never-ending scarf... a few children also laughed. Whilst all children had been engaged with the hat, gloves and scarf sequence at the beginning of the performance – something they were fully familiar with and a link to their lived experience of the world, a few children didn’t like the ‘extended’ scarf coming towards them. (E:2, W:2)

Towards the end of the performance, there was the unexpected pleasure of brightly coloured ribbons and gold strips falling apparently from nowhere, out of the sky. There was obvious surprise and enjoyment with many children becoming fully captivated. Adults and children would often squeal with joy and “Wow/ Oooh” when the ribbons dropped whilst other children would chat to others close to them about the glitter and the ribbons; a few children tried to get to the glitter strips for themselves. Again, children of all ages were delighted to be given a ribbon to hold, feel, move up and down, and in the case of babies, put in their mouths.

Being given a ribbon or a mat, was a significant moment for many children, particularly the more serious children at the Wellspring Settlement. For some of these children it was the first time they smiled during the performance (W:1, W:2).

The sensory element within the performance was appreciated by parents who noticed a positive change in their child. For many of the children who had been unsettled by the performance and were sitting towards the back, it was a time when their child wanted to come closer in order to be given a mat or a ribbon:

‘I loved the way they blended parts into the show – the interaction with the scarf, touching the mats and the ribbons – and the anticipation and excitement children feel’ (Parent TA:3),

‘My baby loved the tactile stuff and being given the mats. The mats are very attractive – the colours and textures attracts you to it. She loved the ribbons’ (Parent: TA:4).

The sudden appearance of the ribbon was met with outbursts of clapping, squeals of delight and also led many parents to describe it as magical for them and their child – a shared pleasure. An observation of one 5 month old baby showed, despite her young age, she was delighted to be given a mat and a ribbon and thoroughly enjoyed playing with the gold strips at the end of the performance. It was clear, due to the interaction between the mother and the child throughout, this was a positive shared experience for both (W:1).

Engagement and interaction within the performance

‘The play and the story was so good – the whole show was very interactive. That was good because I wasn’t worried that he had to sit still’ (TA:2),

Observations from the eight performances observed showed a high level of engagement for the vast majority of children. Many parents were surprised how enthralled and captivated their children were; many EY practitioners mentioned how children behaved differently and, much better than anticipated. For the majority of parents, *IGLOO* was their first experience of theatre and therefore there was a sense of the unknown about how their child would react;

‘I was relieved when I saw how much he was enjoying it because he hasn’t been to a performance before, I didn’t know how he would react. When I saw how much he became absorbed by it, I was pleased. It shows that children don’t need much to enjoy a show – they don’t need lots of theatrical elements. At the end I asked N, (name of child), how he was feeling and he said he felt “happy” and “excited”. During the performance he kept speaking to me. When they were looking through the window waiting for snow, he kept saying “try again” (Comment from parent of a 2 ½ year old child, T:3),

and

‘T (name of another child) was smiling all the way through. She loved it. She turned to me and said “it’s Magic...Magic”. That made me want to cry. I thought they pitched it very well. Another child said “It’s like a dream”. They forgot they were watching a show and thought it was real. At this age, it was so appropriate’ (EY, ECCC, E:2).

There was a playfulness and enjoyment between the actors and the audience, from the beginning with some children clapping their hands in excitement. In the playful times there was a lot of laughing which became infectious with many children copying those children next to them as they thought they had been given permission to laugh and giggle. Many EY practitioners commented that they had not heard the children laugh as much previously (ECCC; Cashmore):

'There was so much laughter – that was unexpected. Some of them don't laugh very much. They were reading the facial expressions and moves well. All of a sudden, they came out of their shells. It was like play therapy. I saw a side I hadn't seen before in many of the children. They were so engaged. Some were shouting out words and putting two words together which they hadn't done before'. (EY Practitioner Cashmore, W:2),

Or the children's concentration was much longer than they had expected:

'Everyone got something out of it. They sat for a much longer time than they normally would. The music helped as it re-directed their attention and feelings. Many of the children normally have an attention of 30 seconds so their attention today was amazing' (EY Practitioner Cashmore nursery, W:2).

When children gave feedback, they would often mention their favourite part of the performance as being "all of it", "the rainbow" [The ribbons], " the pink rainbow" "the gold ribbon", "the penguins", "the glitter" and the "snow" (ECCC, Cashmore). In this last case, the child has either interpreted the gold strips at the end as being snow or given the performance an imaginative ending for themselves.

However, in many observed performances, there were two or three children, often aged between two or three, who felt constrained and wanted to get closer to the action, or wanted to be able to wander and move around:

'My child is always on the go. He always wants to be on his feet running around. He did enjoy it but wanted to join in. You can see he loves the 'stay and play' because he can join in. The whole event was lovely. There will be bits he liked that we can talk about later' (Parent of child who left the performance for a while, TA:3),

In feedback, there was also a request from some parents that consideration be given to allowing children to join in or

'having a clearer divide between the performance area and where children can move?'

and 'Could there have been more interaction at an earlier point and giving children a sense of ownership earlier in the piece?' (Parent comments,TA:3)

Children wanting to move around was more of an issue when the community space was smaller with little spare capacity to play or move at the side of the seating. The wriggleness of the children seemed to occur at the time when the mats had been given to the children. Some parents thought this was because there was a signal to the children that they were invited into play and this signalling could have been considered further in the direction.

For many children attending *IGLOO* was a new and 'strange' experience, not only because it was the child's first experience of theatre but also because they were in an unexpected place often with other children they did not know. Whilst this was not an issue for many children and all children were happy to play with others in the 'stay and play', it may have been the reason why a few children were upset before the start of the performance and left for a short period of calmness or activity outside the room. These children often returned to the performance but sat with a parent or EY practitioner towards the back of the room. As the children began to feel more at ease, they often became keen to re-join the action of the performance when mats or ribbons were offered to the audience. (E:2, W:2). Many EY practitioners thought the

experience of attending something with which the children were unfamiliar was an important life skill which the young children needed to negotiate so they were able to cope with other unfamiliar situations. They felt it was important children who left the space because they were upset, were encouraged to return. (ECCC, E:2 and Easton Nursery).

In one performance, an EY practitioner was surprised by how unsettled an otherwise confident child was, and had to leave the performance for a while. When she spoke about the reason, a few days later, the child explained she had become upset because there were some parents in the audience with their children and she wondered why her 'mummy wasn't there and she felt sad because of this' (L: ECCC).

Whilst the vast majority of children who saw *IGLOO* were fully engaged and thoroughly enjoyed the performance, there were a few children who did not enjoy the performance, as a parent of a two year old explained:

'He just didn't like it. He didn't engage with it and so I thought it was best to take him out. We tried but it didn't work for us. Sorry' (Parent of a child who left the performance' W:1).

Impact on language development and emotional development

From observations and from receiving post-performance comments, it became clear that parents and EY specialists noted how the children enjoyed talking during the performance; they did not feel constrained by the 'no talking' etiquette of theatre performances in a venue. Instead, the children wanted to discuss what they were seeing and experiencing:

'I found it really helpful at the beginning when they said it was okay to talk during the performance. W,(name of child) wanted to chat to me a lot, telling me what she was thinking. That was really helpful'. (Parent of 3 Year old -TA:3)

From the beginning of the performance lots of children said "hello" when Sadie and Ira woke up. There was a lot of interaction between the children: they would talk to their friends or spoke aloud far more than some Nursery practitioners expected. The children wanted to make noises and laugh. During the performance some children became excited and tapped the person next to them and chatted about what was happening and what they were enjoying seeing:

'A number of our children are non-verbal and have significant additional needs. We place a high importance on play and see it as therapy. This is the same, it's like play therapy – the performance and the activities. Some of our children don't talk, but here they were very vocal – One child who doesn't usually talk was talking about what he was seeing. That was special...The performance has been very good for developing emotions. We try to encourage children to express their emotions at the nursery, so this has been very good'.(Manger Cashmore nursery, W:2).

and

'Some of the children who don't usually talk were laughing, clapping and chatting. It was so good to get out. It surprised me how they could read the actions and how focussed the children were'...' They all got something from it. On the way back there were lots of talks about feelings. Some children who do not speak also commented during and after the performance. Their confidence grew during the afternoon (Comments from two EY Practitioners, Cashmore, W:2).

IGLOO can be seen as contributing to young children's emotional and language development, particularly as highlighted by EY Practitioners from Cashmore nursery.

Accessibility and Inclusion

As has been highlighted above, through its non-verbal style and its simple playful content, IGLOO was seen by many parents and EY professionals as being highly accessible and inclusive for all children. As one practitioner said, 'They all got something from it' (EY Practitioner, Cashmore).

For parents, who brought children with additional needs to the performance, it was an unexpected pleasure:

'We really enjoyed it. My child has additional needs and I was concerned that this would be a problem – It's always a concern wherever we go, but he was captivated visually throughout. The music also helped. As a parent it was really nice and relaxed. It was good that we didn't have to leave at the end. Sometimes it feels as if you are being thrown out at the end and that causes tension if your child doesn't want to leave. The sensory bits are wonderful – both in the play and now. I liked that it was non-verbal. For my child that was really important – inclusive - because he could follow it like everyone else. It's the first time we have come to a performance – We are certainly encouraged to come again' (Parent at TA:3).

The contrast between how children behaved before and after the performance was clear during observations. It was suggested by the manager of the ECCC, I observe a child (Ru) who had one-to-one support due to his ADHD as she expected he would find sitting for the 30 minutes of the performance difficult. During the performance he watched intently, looking from one character to another, fully absorbed in the facial expressions and emotions. Occasionally he turned and spoke quietly to the EY practitioner who was supporting him. He found much of the performance funny, and smiled when he was given a mat and then a ribbon. He enjoyed feeling the texture of the mat whilst still watching the performance and applauded enthusiastically at the end. However, during the 'stay and play' section there was a complete contrast to the stillness and focus he had shown during the performance. He was up on his feet and running around the space, often trying to leave the space. Eventually he became less noisy and played well with others but still ran from one place to another. His EY specialist, commented that she was delighted with how Ru had responded,

'He had been really excited on the journey here and I wasn't sure how well he would settle. But he sat down and thoroughly enjoyed it. He kept saying to me, "Oh they are sad". He focused really well. And then he said, "Oh, they are happy now". He also has been playing really well. It's been really good for him and he has loved it' (EY Practitioner ECCC, E:1).

The final performance at the Wellspring Settlement with Cashmore Nursery also demonstrated inclusivity. This was a more culturally diverse audience than other performances and included children with a breadth of needs, including children who were non-verbal or autistic. The nursery manager mentioned that for one child who was non-verbal, this was his first visit. They had tried to take him outside the nursery previously but this had not worked for him. At the start of the performance, she was apprehensive as she was unsure how he would respond. At the start of the performance, it was clear he felt unsettled and would often lay across a nursery practitioner's lap for security, but he did not appear distressed or try to leave. Gradually, as the performance progressed, he started to become more confident and showed increased engagement by watching the action, but often turned away if the actors approached him. By the end he held a ribbon and became fascinated by the gold strips and, although on his own, fully engaged in the play activities following the performance. He became more resilient and learnt to negotiate this new experience well. At the end of the performance, the nursery manager commented:

'This is his first time out of the nursery. We haven't been able to bring him out before. He usually doesn't engage at all, so it was really good to see him integrated with the others and enjoying what he was seeing. He likes anything which is familiar, so this was a big step today to take him to a new place and give him something which is

unfamiliar. You can see he is playing with the sponge blocks because they are familiar. We use them at the nursery. It was lovely seeing him enjoying himself and being with others during the 'stay and play. We also have children who rarely speak – speaking during the performance and during the 'stay and play'. Really good. I would love to do more of this' (Manager of Cashmore Nursery: W2).

As has been highlighted earlier, *IGLOO* was inclusive, not only for children with additional needs but also those for whom English was not their first language. This was particularly appropriate for children who were local to the Wellspring Settlement and attended the Family Hub:

'For some of the vulnerable ones it was really good. Really inclusive. Everyone was given something and everyone was able to benefit from the being there. We have a lot of EAL children where English is their third language so it was so lovely that they understood the performance without words. It was so lovely watching them and seeing their involvement' (EY Practitioner: Cashmore, W:2).

The whole experience of walking the children to the Wellspring Settlement was also a means of providing understanding and building confidence in the local area :

'It was nice to see our children out in the community in a different space. They showed a different behaviour. One child I was near, who is quiet and shy, behaved really confidently in the show- she was laughing and chatting throughout the performance' (EY Practitioner, Cashmore: W2).

The performances of *IGLOO* were also beneficial for adults who lived in the community. In a different performance at the Wellspring Settlement, the Family Hub manager invited a parent who had recently moved to the area with her five month old baby. Both she and her daughter watched intently. When asked for her post-performance response, she explained that English was not her first language and preferred to write her response:

"It's a wonderful show for children but also amazing for parents. I'm a mother and I also felt relaxation. It's such a good idea for toddlers. This show is good for all of the family. I miss my childhood memories after this show. I'm happy to see this. My daughter observe and feel good, she saw and her reaction was "aww". How good is it going [emoji of smiley face]."

This parent then spoke to me again at the end of the stay and play, and wrote: "The goodbye song is like a meditation and so relaxing voice" (Parent at W:1).

It was clear that attending the performance had a positive impact on her as well as her baby.



IGLOO – Wellspring Settlement photo by Edward Felton

How did the age of the children watching IGLOO make a difference?

From the observation evidence, child audience ages varied from babies being a few weeks old to four year olds. Children of all ages were highly engaged with the performance, as were those who brought them to the event whether this was EY Practitioners, parents or grandparents.

Younger children, aged from three months to eighteen months, were totally engaged, being focussed and absorbed throughout the performances. They watched with wonder and often smiling whilst sat on their mother's lap. Although they were not able to understand the narrative of the performance, they enjoyed the sensory elements and became transfixed by the colours, movement, music and tactile features, such as feeling the mats and ribbons when they were given to them. At times, they looked at other children in the audience, particularly when they had been given a mat or ribbon;

'She only 14 months, but she loved it and the activities at the end have been really good. I thought she might be a bit too young to see the show but I was wrong. It was brilliant, and the stay and play is a good idea to use the space' (Parent, E:2).

Throughout the eight performances, I was unaware of any young child having to leave because they were upset.

Due to their age, performances with older children aged two or above, were noisier (TA:3, W:1, E:2). The children were keen to chat to their parents or EY practitioners about what they were seeing and experiencing. Some of these children also wanted to join in.

Some children, particularly boys, who were aged between 18 months – 2 ½ years had a greater tendency to want to wander and found it harder to sit still. Of the more than 220 children who were observed, ten children left the performance. All were aged between 18 months – 2 ½ years. Seven were boys who wanted to wander and interact with the actors and three were girls who became emotional and upset. The majority of the children who left during the performance returned for the stay and play.

It was clear from the majority of children who were 2 years or older that they had enjoyed the performance and were able to interpret the narrative and the conflicting emotions of the characters. Feedback from parents, showed how there was an increased focus on the emotions which was considered to be important.

Parents, particularly in Exeter at the children's theatre setting, spoke about their surprise at how their children had engaged with the performance and understood the narrative. As expressed below they often underestimated their child's ability:

'This has been a living example of how you underestimate children's attention span, even as a parent. He understood a lot and spontaneously made the sound of a penguin. He knew straight away, that's what it was... We loved the reveal. At the beginning he called the characters statues' (Comment from a parent of a 2 ½ year old, TA:3).

'I thought it was beautiful. We all thought it was wonderful. H (a ten month old child) was transfixed throughout. It was amazing how much of the story L (a 3 year old child) understood. I didn't tell him the story at the beginning but he knew what was happening. He said, "They were sad because it didn't snow".... We've been to a few other shows but not like this – not designed especially for this age group. The quality of this is way above anything we have seen before in children's theatre'. (Parent TA:3)

How did the setting of the performances make a difference and how did this break down barriers for attending a theatre performance?

All children were unfamiliar with the setting whether the performance was in a children's theatre, or a community venue. There was a strangeness for the children not only because it

was their first time of seeing a theatre performance but also having to negotiate the journey there. For many children, particularly those from Cashmore and ECCC, the walk to get to the community centre added to the event. The journey back to the nursery also gave an opportunity to discuss and process the performance with EY practitioners. The act of leaving the nursery and walking to an unfamiliar space was an additional challenge for young children with additional needs and led to some children feeling nervous and taking the first ten minutes to settle.

It would be easy to generalise and assume all families who attended the Children Theatre venue at Theatre Alibi were used to attending theatre and those who attended Community Centres in Easton and Barton Hill had not previously attended a theatre performance. This generalisation would be incorrect. However, it was true that a higher proportion of the audiences at Theatre Alibi spoke of attending arts performances prior to attending *IGLOO*. This could in part be due to the older age of the audience at Exeter and families reporting of taking their child to local theatres, particularly pantomimes or Christmas shows. Conversely, there were a number of members of the audience, particularly parents of younger children, who had not attended theatre events previously either with their child or on their own;

'I thought it was lovely, I really loved it. The first 15 minutes my child didn't move – she loved it. I liked the non-verbal story-telling. It had such lovely music too. It was her and my first experience of theatre. I have never been to anything like this before. My 10 month old is a real crawler, but this wasn't a problem today- she was joining in with the sounds. The whole event has made me feel relaxed. I thought the stay and play was good. I would certainly be interested in seeing more' (Parent of a 10 month old child TA).

Many of the audience who saw the performance at Theatre Alibi, also commented on the lack of high quality theatre for children in the area and particularly theatre designed specifically for an Early Years audience:

'I felt very proud... It was momentous – bringing this to Exeter. Nothing like this has been to Exeter before. You knew it had made its mark – Such a skilful performance. I really enjoyed the music – it felt as if it was being performed live' ...'There is nothing like it in Exeter – It was so good to have it here' (Comments from adults, TA:3).

Although families were fee-paying at Theatre Alibi, the cost of the performance was highly subsidised and therefore the cost per family of two was no more than £10.00. Being affordable and local was mentioned by many parents.

Affordability and having easy local access was also a factor mentioned by respondents in the Travelling Light online survey⁶. Whilst it may be surprising that just over 50% of respondents would have attended the performance if it had been performed in a theatre venue, other respondents were less sure. 7% of respondents said they would not have attended a theatre performance and other respondents appreciated being able to pay what they could afford rather than a fixed ticket price:

'It was easier to see a show at a community venue. I appreciated the 'pay what you can' option and made a donation but finance would be a barrier. (Comment from a parent of a 1- 2 year old child).

⁶ See Appendix B for further details. The results from the online survey should be treated with caution. It needs to be recognised that the online audience survey was not very representative of the total audience, as it was based on 14 responses, which represented 1% of the audience for *IGLOO*. This may explain the contradictory responses to the post performance feedback provided in the three community venues included within this evaluation, which represents almost 30% of the total audience.

In the community settings in Bristol there was a higher proportion of families who were non theatre – goers and for who *IGLOO* was their first performance. However, there were some parents who had taken their children, often older siblings, to a traditional theatre venue:

'I thought it was lovely – I didn't know what to expect. Tracey just said it was on and I didn't realise it would be a theatre performance. The emotions on the girls faces – you could tell the children understood. It made me feel happy and joyful because of the music and movement. It was so playful. She was transfixed at the beginning. It's the first time we have seen anything like this. It was so beautiful and interactive. The playfulness – it was quite surprising. It was really surprising. She was transfixed and she loves this (Stay and play). We were so lucky we were able to come. This is my second child and with my first born I came a lot to things like this but I haven't with her... It's reminded me and made me think I need to do more' (Parent of 14 month child, W:1).

and

'I didn't know what to expect. Tracey said something about it and I thought I'd go. We've been to a performance for 3+ before but not like this. This is so much better because it is especially for 0-3 year olds -it's suitable for all of them. The smaller performance, sat in the circle, the music and movement without talking and the play session at the end – all good' (Parent of 2 ½ year old, W:1).

Some parents who attended the community performance at Wellspring Settlement commented that they were pleased the performance was free, as their child had not coped well with sitting and watching the performance and had wanted to be active and would not settle. They thought their child was 'not quite ready for theatre watching and they had not wasted money. At least we came today and it was free. I would have been annoyed if I had had to pay and then had to leave' (Parent who left the performance early, W:1).

EY practitioners commented on financial accessibility and providing an arts-based cultural activity for the children as being important. If they did not take the children to events such as *IGLOO* or museums etc, many children would not have access to these performance as parents would either not have the time, money or would consider other things more important, 'It was a big win today. Many children don't get the opportunity to see theatre – they might never see anything again(EY Practitioners, W:2).

What was evident was that no-one, irrespective of the setting, reported having seen a performance previously which was specifically designed for Early Years audience. Many parents also appreciated the 'relaxed' style of performance where children could chat and move within given restrictions and not seeing the performance in a more formal end-on traditional theatre setting.

EY Practitioners and parents also commented on the community feel of the performance with it being set in a circle and allowing children to see other children's reactions.

'I think the fact we were all in a circle was important... we were all part of the same community and could see each other's reactions. Being in a circle helped the children with transitions. It helped them feel familiar and gave them security as they were integrated with each other. It was particularly important in the afternoon when we had parents and children from another nursery there' (Manager of ECCC), and 'I loved the fact it was in a circle and we were all so close to the actors. That was really good. It makes you feel part of it, especially with the scarf being wrapped around us' (Parent W:1).

It was clear, in both Exeter and Bristol, the tour of *IGLOO* provided an opportunity for families to see high quality theatre specifically designed for young audiences who would otherwise not have access, and therefore broke down barriers of attendance.

Part Two: How successful were the ‘stay and play’ activities and additional creative resources provided by Travelling Light?

‘Play and stay was brilliant. Child-friendly. Really good’ (Parent comment)

The addition of the ‘stay and play’ element was appreciated by all audiences. Parents saw it as a useful transition following the performance before the children had to leave the performance and EY practitioners also saw it as an important opportunity for families and children to participate in shared creative play.

The ‘stay and play’ session ran smoothly from the performance and was led by a facilitator who initially invited the children to help clear-up the gold strips to make a new space to play. This clearing-up activity provided a familiar task for children before moving into a time of imaginative, sensory play-time which was inspired by the performance. The children enthusiastically helped Rebecca, the facilitator:

‘N (name of child) was very happy, particularly now as he really likes helping. He said “I’m doing a job” and he loved the ‘stay and play’... The ‘stay and play’ was a really good idea. I liked that it wasn’t facilitated and was free-flowing and led by the children (Parent of 2 ½ year old child, TA:3).

Parents also saw the transition from the ‘unfamiliar’ situation of having to sit and watch a performance, to the ‘familiar’ activity of playing, although the resources provided may have been more sensory and simple than their usual toys:

‘We loved the stay and play. He is more used to stay and plays than theatre’ (Parent, W:1).



IGLOO – Wellspring Settlement photo by Edward Felton

Providing a seamless transition for the age group of the children, was also seen as being important, particularly for children, eighteen months and above. Parents in all settings spoke about how the stay and play activity was enjoyed by their children, but also helped reduce the stress for them as they did not ‘have to drag him away’:

‘The play and stay was really good for this age-group (her child was aged 2 ½). My child may not have wanted to leave at the end of the performance so having the stay

and play was really good as it gave a good transition between the performance and having to leave' (Parent comment, TA:1),

'I thought the playtime now was really important – they get to play and not have to rush off. They are playing so nicely with other children- some they know and some they don't. We have been to a show at the Old Vic, which was good, but they didn't have the freedom of this one. Often, it's a problem when you go to leave the show – There is not a transition and the children find that hard. It's been great' (Parent, E:2)

and

'I thought the stay and play was really good. My older child struggles with hard transitions and having the stay and play really eases the transition from the performance to home. Playing with the fabric was good. I love the tactile, sensory elements of the show – also the miming and allowing the children to join in. it was nice to have something for the older children as well as the younger ones' (Parent comment, TA:4)

After a time of sitting, EY practitioners and parents commented on how important the sensory elements of the creative session were and how this also supported the children's development;

'The 'stay and play' is really good. It allows him to have a sense of freedom. That's needed especially on Friday when he is getting tired at the end of the week' (Parent comment Friday afternoon performance at E:2),

'The stay and play was perfect. It was so clever to allow the children to explore – the use the scarves and sensory elements was like our home area which was good'. (EY Practitioner, Cashmore, W:2)

and

'The children also liked the play part of the event. While they were playing there was a lot of talking about the show. They often copied the actions or made an igloo tower out of the sponges (EY Practitioner, Cashmore, W:2)

Some parents also appreciated the relaxed atmosphere so the children could enjoy snacks whilst they were playing. The nursery at ECCC also brought snacks with them so the children could have their normal snack-time routine before they walked back to the nursery.

During the stay and play, all children seemed to enjoy the community aspect of the activity. Many of the children moved away from children from their own nursery and played with other children irrespective of whether they knew them or not. The white carpet was very popular with slightly older children. From observing the play activities, not introducing all activities at once seemed very well timed to avoid the children being overwhelmed or bored.

EY practitioners also commented on the value for the parents and children playing together and also networking with others adults and children. This was confirmed when discussing the value of attending *IGLOO* with the SENCO at the Raised in Bristol Nursery:

'Look at the adults (*pointing to adults in the stay and play activities*)... they are learning to play with their own children. That's important. The goodbye song – that is really useful to stop the children getting upset. The stay and play is really important. There is a lot of newness going on – It's the first time the children will have seen a play; the first time they have been in this hall; and they don't know everyone here – there is a lot for them to have to negotiate – so the playing is something familiar.'

'The children will have never seen anything like this before. We would be keen to have more of this if Travelling Light were doing it.

'The children are not used to playing like this at home. Their primary care-givers don't play with them. They often don't have time to be playful- so this is SO important. It is lovely to see the adults working one to one with their child. It's so sensory and low noise, that's what makes it special' (SENCO, Raised in Bristol Nursery, E:2).

At the end of the stay and play, a range of children were asked what their favourite part of the event had been, invariably they spoke of the most immediate element, the stay and play:

'I liked playing'

'The pink rainbow' (one of the girls who had been upset),

'All of the toys...the sponges',

'the white carpet',

All of it!' [Three other children then started to repeat – all of it].(Comments from children at E:2).

After the session, or after a few days in the nursery setting, children and their families were given an *IGLOO* picture book and a creative activity pamphlet encouraging further creative play ideas. These resources aimed to support parents with continuing imaginative play ideas at home. As will be shown in the next section below, many parents found the book and resource sheet very useful. Most families in all venues were surprised and felt delighted to be given a book and an activity sheet at the end of the performance to share with their children at home and thought it would help the performance live on;

'We are going to talk about it for a long while after the show. The book and the activity ideas will help us remember... 'Their dad is going to hear so much about it' ... 'We intend to follow-up the performance with the activity booklet and the book. I think that will consolidate the memories of the story for N'... (Comments from parents, TA: 3),

and

'We will definitely follow it up. I think the book and the activities are great. Definitely make a den... I would definitely come again to something like this'... We will definitely spend time on this later (Comments from parents, W:1).



Wellspring Settlement photo by Edward Felton

Part Three: What was the longitudinal impact of the performance, the 'stay and play' and additional resources over time?

I would love to have more of these kinds of events. I would definitely do again. It felt special.'
(Parent, two weeks after seeing *IGLOO*)

The evaluation of longitudinal impact has focussed on gathering feedback two weeks after the performance from the Family Hub at the Wellspring Settlement and Cashmore Nursery and a return visit to ECCC three weeks after the performance. Two additional parents were interviewed in Exeter having seen the performance at Theatre Alibi. Further longitudinal feedback has been collected through an online survey conducted by Travelling Light who saw *IGLOO* at a range of community venues up to five weeks previously.

When interviewing parents who attended the Family Hub, I also met parents who were at the Raised in Bristol Nursery at Easton Community Centre performance, children and parents who attend Cashmore Nursery as well as parents who attended the Wellspring Settlement performance.

Feedback on the performance remained positive over time; two of the ten parents interviewed had taken their children out of the session for some time, one of these did not return. These parents mentioned that they would have liked the performance to have been 'a bit shorter and the stay and play a bit longer'. They also thought there could have been "less sitting and more interaction". One of these parents also wished she had brought snacks which would have helped her child settle but also felt attending the performance at Easton was worthwhile,

'We have looked at the book and the activities. Those have been good. We have done some joint storytelling and the book has really helped. We have also focused on the basic emotions and talked about feelings. The book was brilliant for that. So even though we didn't get to see the play, we got a lot from the morning' (Parent, E:1).

When reflecting on the performance, other parents mentioned the scarves, mats and the ribbons, as well as the emotional elements of the performance. One parent who gave feedback on the performance, despite not attending, as her daughter, who saw the performance with Cashmore Nursery, had told her about the performance:

'She has spoken a lot about *Igloo*. She loved the performance. It was really good that we were given the *Igloo* book when I collected her from nursery. We have been able to follow-up the story even though I didn't see it. That was good. We have been following up on the emotions. The play and the book have really helped her with her emotions. Since then, she has been able to say "Mummy I am very frustrated" or "I am very sad". She never used to talk about how she was feeling before. I think that is very important. It is very good that the nursery and Travelling Light are spending time on emotions now. Three, is a good age to introduce talking about emotions' (Parent, W).

Parents and EY Practitioners often expressed being surprised by how much the children remembered. One parent who had seen the performance in Exeter, said her child was still mentioning it three weeks later,

'For E, he empathised with the two characters and over time has become fascinated by them sleeping, particularly at bedtime. He says "people are sleeping on the igloo" and "Are they going to wake up?" I was surprised he became quite shy when he met the performer during the stay and play, but he doesn't mention that, just the people sleeping. We have taken him to other performances but he has not spoken about them after the performance' (Parent of 3 years old, T:3).

Respondents from the online survey also commented on the longitudinal impact of the performance on them and their child:

'She talks about snow all the time now! We've been putting flour on the floor and drawing in it, putting on pretend clothes to go out in the snow, making fake snow angels' (Comment from a parent of a 1-2 year old child).

Two weeks after the performance, the manager at ECCC spoke to the children about what they remembered from the performance and said she,

'was shocked by how much they remembered and how much they spoke about. They also remembered the 'stay and play'. One child said, "I liked the fluffy snowballs to build towers". The children remembered and spoke about the smallest detail. Another child went into incredible detail saying, "The friends build a nest when they were sad and then they were happy". The penguin, the ribbons, the scarf and the emotions were spoken about both after seeing the performance and this morning, two weeks later' (Manager ECCC).

The EY Practitioners at ECCC were asked what they remembered. For them the music and its impact on them, the stay and play, the emotional content of the narrative and the children's engagement throughout the performance. A few comments also suggested it may have been 'a bit too emotional for younger children' (under 2's) and having 'more interaction throughout the play would have helped the younger children's attention and understanding' (ECCC, two weeks after the performance).

Helping with emotions and supporting language development, was also prominent when speaking to EY practitioners at both Cashmore and ECCC.

The manager at the Cashmore Nursery explained that each term the children had a key learning focus,

'For this term, "Emotions and about me" is the theme. So, *Igloo* - the performance, the stay and play and the booklet, all contributed very well to this theme. This project has also contributed to the children having a sense of belonging which is important for developing their self-esteem'.

Similarly, the manager of ECCC, praised the inclusivity of the performance and the way it helped the children talk about their emotions:

'The staff and the children were saying on the way back from the Community Centre how much they loved it and how it made them feel happy. The focus on emotions was very good as the children could relate easily to them. They may have expressed it as "Feeling Happy" or "She was sad" or "she was angry" rather than knowing expressions like frustration or excitement but they were able to focus and empathise with how the characters were feeling...I thought the way the show was non-verbal made it so accessible to everyone. Many of the children found the lack of words shocking, in a good way, but it also made them focus on other things like the music. I was amazed that some of the children spoke about the music on the way back. One of children I spoke to today (*2 weeks later*) still remembered the music and said, "I liked the music". The music led the story and the emotions and the non-verbal nature of the show enabled the music to be heard and children to focus on it. The music and the show appealed to everyone – all of the children irrespective of their additional needs and all the adults as well...All the children were talking about the sponges, moving from funny to sad, the red mats. The sensory elements and the emotions are really important for this age' (Manager ECCC, two weeks following the performance).

Parents at the Family Hub said how much they appreciated the stay and play element of *IGLOO*. All parents spoken to had shared the book with their children, some with older siblings to help them feel part of the experience when they felt they had missed out.

'My 5 year old felt a bit left out not being able to go but he loved the book. I showed it to him and we made up a story. I said " This is how the play was" and he felt more involved. The book made me realise more about the play. I thought they were waiting for Father Christmas but from the book I realised it was snow...' (Parent: W).

This parent also explained how seeing *IGLOO* had reminded her how important attending theatre was and how she intend to re-engage further when she could afford it.

Other parents spoke about enjoying playing with their child more since *IGLOO*, having been given ideas in the resource leaflet. They had created different stories following looking at the book and had then progressed to making dens and playing. She noticed since seeing *IGLOO*, four weeks earlier, her 2 ½ year child was now becoming more imaginative in his play, taking on different roles and using everyday objects to represent other playful items in the storytelling (Parent: TA),

'Fantastic creative performance which appeared to grip all children watching. My 3 year old and I were inspired to build several dens and still pretending to be penguins a month after the show. It reminded me how creative we can be with going objects instead of designed 'toys' (Parent: Online survey),

and

My daughter really loves the picture booklet because we can make it a different story every time. She looks at it on her own now and focuses on different parts and seems to be really immersed in it!' (Parent of a 1-2 year old child: Online Survey).

When speaking about the performance, children often smiled. Although they spoke about the objects, such as the scarves, the mats and the ribbons, the overwhelming topic of conversation or focus of drawings they produced were based on the emotional aspects. Children regularly drew a picture of a sad face and when asked about the drawing they said "They were sad", or "two men were sad" . When recalling the performance, the children did not appear to be sad when speaking about the emotions. One 3 ½ year old child, who had seen the performance three weeks before , found seeing the book a reminder:

'Child C was chatty and said she liked the "film" but was clearly talking about *Igloo*. She liked the "ribbons", "playing at the end...with a black flying helicopter and the white snow" [The nursery practitioner thought this was her using her imagination with the 'stay and play' activities]. When asked how she felt during the show, Child C said "I felt sad". Child C then saw a copy of the book of *Igloo* which she had not seen before. She was keen to "read" it with me and showed real enjoyment at looking at the pictures. She pointed out the snowmen and thought they were "funny". She liked the scarf but described it as "snow snake" and pointed to her hijab when she saw the hats on the two characters. She laughed at the final page with the gold paper and ribbons(Account from visit to Cashmore nursery).

Parents and EY practitioners, thought the book was an important way of helping them remember the performance. The booklet was thought to be easily accessible as a picture book. It was also open-ended which meant that the children and their parents or nursery practitioners could tell the story they wanted to tell and develop it,

'It was very open to interpretation. That was also good for the parents as it would help them engage imaginatively with their children' (ECCC manager).

The longitudinal impact of *IGLOO* may continue further as children grow up and return to the booklet and activity leaflet when they are older. This was highlighted by one parent of a young child who spoke about the importance of the additional resources as a reminder of the performance in the future:

'Activity leaflet was aimed at older than my 10 week old baby but I will definitely keep it for when he's older as it has lovely ideas! It was really nice to receive a special book after the performance. An unexpected treat' (Parent: Online survey)

Part Four: How effective were the partnerships formed during the project and how can these be developed in the future?

'It was a lovely project. Everyone enjoyed it' (Manager ECCC).

In preparation for the 'stay and play' aspect of the production, Rebecca, an established facilitator spent four, forty minute sessions with ECCC as part of a creative exchange. The children from the nursery worked with Rebecca and Laura, the manager, developing sensory play (Winter Wonderland), creative activity (Snowstorm Art), movement (Snow Adventure) and storytelling (A Winter Tale). Laura thought the sessions with Rebecca had been very successful for everyone involved:

'The sessions helped build Rebecca's knowledge and experience with younger children and Rebecca came with her creative expertise...I could see the impact of the pre-sessions on the 'stay and play' activities with Rebecca adopting a less formalised approach to the session and that allowed it to be more simple and child-led... There was a common thread between the play sessions and watching the show for the children. Really good'.

Laura also thought the children recognised the blue Travelling Light T-Shirt, which Rebecca wore for the pre-sessions and that helped them feel more reassured and relaxed at the *IGLOO* performance. The children recognised the top and knew they were about to have a creative fun session:

"You could see them thinking...Travelling Light – this is going to be good" (ECCC manager).

Other EY practitioners mentioned the importance of the pre-session work with the ECCC children at the end of the *IGLOO* performance at Easton, and how beneficial the partnership with Travelling Light and the nursery had been:

'The stay and play was really good. They were so into the dream of the show and this (stay and play) is perfect. It allows them to transition from the play. Rebecca came to the nursery and the children really enjoyed her coming. They loved Rebecca. I think they will have remembered her. She got them to be polar bears playing in the snow. She is very charismatic and it was beautiful – so creative and sensitive' (Nursery Practitioner ECCC).

Laura thought the ideas exchange between her and Rebecca had worked very well and would welcome the opportunity to develop this working partnership further,

'Working with Travelling Light has certainly enhanced their language development. In the sessions and following the performance, the open-ended nature of the work (the loose parts) gave the children the chance to speak up. In the sessions and the 'stay and play' there was lots of play and many different narratives were going on'...

Conclusion and Findings

'We want everyone to feel special and included. We want all children to feel they were valued and important. Working with Travelling Light, we think we can improve their experience, so children with additional needs feel special' (Manager Cashmore Nursery).

From revisiting both Cashmore nursery and ECCC, it was clear there was a desire for the work with Travelling Light to continue and future partnerships be developed

At Cashmore, the manager of the nursery, recognised the impact of the performance and the creative play activities. She appreciated that much of the session had been non-verbal and therefore used a universal language which would work particularly with children at the nursery who had a high level of additional need, and children for whom English was not their first language:

'We would like some workshops similar to *Igloo*. All of the children were able to access the performance and the stay and play. That really surprised me. There were children there who I thought would not last, but every child was able to get something from the

experience- even a child who was not able to sit down but watched from the door. She was able to access it as well. For some children they may have liked a smaller group' (Comments from the manager of Cashmore Nursery two weeks after seeing the performance).

The EY manager at ECCC was also very keen to work further with Travelling Light. She felt there was a definite need for further partnership as the project had had a positive contribution to the children's development:

'Many of the children and parents come from deprived backgrounds and would not get to see theatre or museums if we did not take them. They might not have these opportunities. With the Travelling Light show, I targeted parents and families who are more deprived. If we were to do other work, I would be keen to target certain children and families first'....

'Working on the project has helped the children express themselves. They were able to lead what was happening. Giving the children time and space was really important as it helped build their self-esteem. Being able to lead and being listened to helped the children feel they were being valued'.

Through detailed case-study evidence which this evaluation has explored, it is clear that the projects aims have been met:

- Watching the performance of *IGLOO* had a positive impact on the large majority of young children, aged between 0-3.
 - Parents and EY practitioners reported the performance supporting the children's language and emotional development.
 - Children and adults enjoyed watching the performance and this may have contributed positively to their well-being.
 - There was an appreciation for the performance's non-verbal style which made it highly inclusive and accessible for all.
 - Adults and children appreciated the acting and production elements of the storytelling, particularly the music, scarves, mats and the 'reveal' of ribbons.
 - The production was considered highly appropriate for Early Years children, although a few parents would have liked there to have been further opportunities for interaction.
- Overwhelmingly the 'stay and play' was a great success. Adults and children enjoyed the opportunity for imaginative and sensory play created by Travelling Light.
 - It helped children with the transition from the performance to home;
 - it encouraged and enabled children to explore sensory play opportunities with other children and their parents;
 - It provided a community opportunity for children and adults to be creative together.
- *IGLOO*, through being performed in a community setting, enabled children and parents to have an opportunity to experience theatre specifically designed for young audiences that they otherwise would not have had. This performance increased access to non-theatre going audiences and hopefully broke down barriers for further attendance.
- Over time children remembered the performance above adult expectations.
- Post- performance, children regularly mentioned enjoying the play activities, however, these were not mentioned over-time, instead children privileged recalling the feelings of the characters portrayed.
- Through the use of accompanying resources, the performance and the 'stay and play' were remembered well over time.
 - The portrayal of conflicting emotions by the characters helped children recognise and understand varied emotions and was remembered well over time.
 - The provision of the picture book and play activity leaflet was welcomed by parents and children. The resources helped the children recall the performance

and also enabled greater opportunity for imaginative play between parents and children.

- EY Professionals reported the performance and stay and play having a positive impact on children's language development and wellbeing.
- Effective partnerships have been formed with local nurseries which are keen to develop the relationship with Travelling Light further and have identified a need for future work.



IGLOO – Wellspring Settlement photo by Edward Felton

Accompanying Additional Information

Appendix A – Additional quotations which provide supporting evidence.

Appendix B – Audience Feedback from the Online Questionnaire