



STARCATCHERS

Expecting Something
Lochgelly 2019/20



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*Participant names and identifying details have been changed to protect the privacy of individuals.

About Starcatchers

Starcatchers is Scotland's National Arts and Early Years Organisation, specialising in creating exceptional arts and creative experiences for babies, toddlers and young children aged 0-5. We create beautiful live theatre, dance and music performances, and arts installations working with artists who specialise in work for the under 5s; deliver engagement projects across Scotland, placing artists directly into communities; and provide professional development for artists and early years practitioners to develop practice using arts and creativity with very young children. www.starcatchers.org.uk

About Expecting Something

'Expecting Something' began in 2014/15 as a Starcatchers pilot project, working alongside the Family Nurse Partnership to engage young parents and their babies in creative arts activities. The FNP team listed what they hoped young parents would gain from taking part in the project:

- Increased confidence
- Friendships
- Trying new things
- Confidence to attend other groups
- Confidence to go to different places with baby
- Better relationship with baby

After a successful pilot, the project continued on a long-term engagement with local communities in Westerhailes, Edinburgh and soon after Lochgelly, Fife, supporting young families to engage in the arts, providing dedicated time and space for parents to spend protected time with their little ones and build friendships and connections in their communities.

Why Lochgelly?

When Starcatchers began delivering Expecting Something in Fife, an NHS report shared that Fife had the highest pregnancy rate in Scotland for both under-16s and under 18s. Lochgelly High School catchment area had the highest rate of under-16 pregnancies and with high levels among 16 and 17-year-olds.

In partnership with OnFife, the Lochgelly Centre was identified as an ideal location for delivery of sessions, with free travel provisions made for participants travelling from surrounding areas.

The Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation shows Lochgelly and many areas in Fife in the top 5-10% most deprived areas in Scotland. The Fife Child Poverty Report (2019) states that around 1 in 5 children in Fife live in low income families where income is less than 60% of the UK median income.

Fig 1. % of Children living in low income families by Fife ward



Source: Children living in low income families-HMRC, December 2018

The Fife Child Poverty Action Report 2019 also identifies the need for further improvement to provide free or subsidised accessible sport, leisure and cultural experiences to families at risk of, or experiencing poverty. We have found through extensive research that there are very few services which are comparable to what we deliver in Fife, with the few that are available being costly to attend and not reaching out to the demographic of families we are currently working with.

Partners

We work closely with partners in the Fife community, from whom we receive referrals and can also refer our participants on to. Families can also self-refer to us.

Fig. 2 Current referral partners



“I work with children who have been identified as being at risk in some way. The Expecting Something Group in Lochgelly is the kind of therapeutic support that children and parents really need. I am able to refer to this group with confidence, knowing parents and babies will develop strengthened relationships.”
Brian Morley, Supervising Senior Practitioner, Child and Family team, Social work Service

This year we have been rebuilding our partnership with Fife Gingerbread, after a period where they had a loss in funding, which resulted in a downward slope of referrals and contact from them. We have since regained momentum after they received the necessary funding and have identified a clearer need for us to support the young families they are working with.

“Starcatchers Expecting Something provides a service that brings creative arts in early years and is tailored specifically to young parents. From experience with current families as well as previous families involved within the Fife Teen Parent Project, this type of group session can often pose barriers such as financial and highlight the social exclusion and isolation experienced by teen parents. Therefore, having a tailored group for young parents, families supported by us are able to make stronger peer connections and explore with their babies in a safe space.”
Louise Harding Support Worker, Fife Teen Parent Project

Artists

Marion Geoffray

Marion Geoffray is a freelance performer, creative practitioner and theatre maker. Marion was accepted as a Starcatchers’ bursary artist in 2018 and is now the lead artist at Lochgelly. For the past 5 years she’s been actively working with early years looking specifically at language development (both non-verbal and bilingual) as well as relationships dynamics between parents and children within the context of sensory play. Marion enjoys sharing her passion for props and costumes with the participants as well as celebrating wee ones and empowering parents through storytelling and play.



Rebecca Fraser

Rebecca Fraser likes to work alongside people, encouraging them to explore the arts and engage in new cultural experiences. She loves collaborating with communities and other artists, especially on projects which help people communicate creatively and tell their own stories. She is interested in experimenting with baby-friendly printmaking techniques, and alternative ways to illustrate and archive information. Rebecca is currently the assistant artist at Lochgelly.



What we delivered

Starcatchers 'Expecting Something' project provides 40 weeks of artist-led creative sessions per year for young parents aged 25 and under, and their babies aged 2 and under. This is a rolling project (subject to funding), providing regular weekly contact year on year.



One of the most challenging, yet exciting, things about Expecting Something is that no week is the same; each session delivered is completely different, offering unparalleled variety.

Lead artist, Marion Geoffray, likes to work with overarching themes for each block of sessions. Examples of the creative content explored at Lochgelly during 2019/20 include:

Identity

Within this period, we explored the meaning of motherhood and life through the eyes of our littlest citizens, through spoken word, expression of self, storytelling, film making, Kintsugi (Japanese art form) along with creative ways of allowing parents to celebrate themselves and their babies.

During this time, along with our other Expecting Something groups, we worked with filmmaker Becky Manson to capture some of the thoughts and activities that came from this process.

Click [here](#) to watch 'I am a Mother'



Synesthesia

Each week the group would explore one or two of the senses, allowing for more joint engagement between parent and baby and more discoveries to be made by the little ones, with their parents having weekly opportunities to see how their children would interact with the various activities. The theme worked well as inspiration for the artist and although the adult participants lacked interest in the overall theme idea, they were fully engaged and had fun with the many materials and offerings in the sessions.

The finale of the block brought each of the content of the sessions together for a family 'Sensory Escape Room', which was a huge success, although participant numbers were low for this finale session which was disheartening for the artists.

"They enjoyed witnessing the fruits of their efforts and of their explorations during the block culminating in playful activities for both parent and child. They seemed really proud of their achievements"

Marion Geoffray, **Starcatchers Lead Artist**



Of the 11 core families who attended most frequently, six of these families had babies aged 24-months or over. This determined the style of the sessions and, at times, made it difficult to ensure we had a comfortable enough space for new parents and younger babies. We trialled many approaches and ways of resolving this over the last quarter, from session restructuring and room dividing, right through to delivering separate sessions in different spaces. Although there was success with every trial, no setup fully ticked the box for every participant or for the artists involved. Therefore it is still a work in progress and at the forefront of our plans. We aim to strike a balance in order to cater for long-term attendees who are more confident and comfortable with creative arts but have different needs in terms of guidance (and who now have older toddlers), whilst also finding a space to encourage growth in confidence and participation at a gentler pace for newer parents with younger babies.

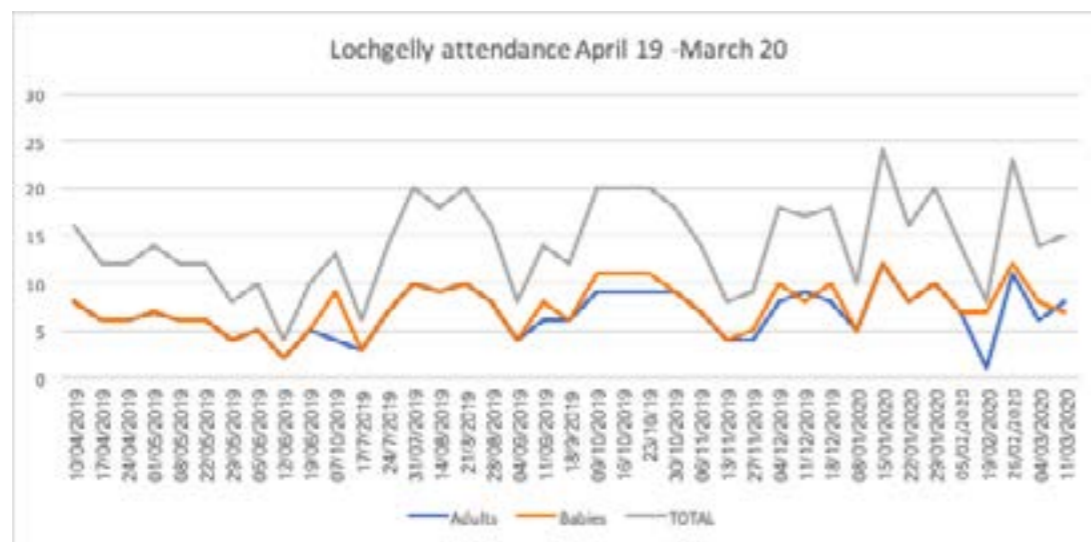
Larger group numbers can mean it is difficult for the artist to tailor to individual family needs, with more work needed to engage parents and their babies who are under 12 months, due to the higher ratio of toddlers in the group.

On one outreach visit the project coordinator delivered a session for a health visitor-led Book Bug group, with two of the young mums thereafter coming along to the main group for two weeks, however they did not return. Feedback from their health

Who with

Parents 25 and under with babies aged 0-2

At Lochgelly we currently have 35 families registered, with 38 babies in total. Attendance varies from week to week, with a core group of 11 parents who are consistent and have built stronger connections within the group and with the artists. Over the year the weekly average of participants attending was 14.



Between January and April 2020 we received eight new families as referrals from Fife Gingerbread.



visitor confirmed that the mums felt it was not suitable for their babies who were under 6 months, saying they would like to come back when their babies are older. After hearing this feedback, the artists and the project coordinator trialled some different ways of re-working the sessions to make it more inviting for the youngest of participants too, but unfortunately the combination of the large space and older children meant we were unsuccessful.

In January 2020, we are expecting four new families as referrals from Fife Gingerbread, all with babies under 12 months, therefore we will be renewing our efforts, with the project coordinator making separate session plans for the younger babies and on some occasions additional spaces within the Lochgelly centre will be used to separate the age groups.

How our participants feel

Parents who attend Expecting Something for long periods of time show greater confidence and willingness to try new activities. For new participants, we take a gradual approach to ensure they always feel listened to and comfortable within the group. The participants are very supportive and encouraging of one another and we see parents who have been with us for a longer period of time, taking on a caring and responsible role with the new parents who join us.

Some of our parents attend play groups within their communities, however the structure of those and the outcomes are different, with babies and toddlers mostly playing with close-ended toys and parents take an observational role, rather than immersing themselves in play alongside and with their little ones, as they do with us. Other services we have found in Fife, which do offer more specialised play, (seeking to engage both parent and baby together), come at a cost, which the majority of our participants would be unable to afford and may not feel comfortable accessing.

“They can look down on you or they have opinions and they’re not very nice. I think here [Expecting Something], it doesn’t matter where you are from or how much money you’ve got. Everyone comes together and that’s nice.” Expecting Something Parent, Lochgelly

“Older mums can look down on young mums...like they feel if we’re not doing a good job, obviously cause we’re young. You always get looked at, ah that’s kids having kids n’ stuff.” Expecting Something Parent, Lochgelly

I have more confidence being creative with my baby

The artists aim to create content which suits the whole group, but also with consideration for each baby/toddler, taking into account their personality, cognitive stage and ability. Activities are often tailored to the individual child with knowledge subtly and practically shared with parents. Sessions are created not only to promote parent-child engagement but also to allow time and opportunity for artists to model positive behaviour. We observe parents learning from artists and other participants in the group and over time gaining a greater understanding and confidence of their child’s capabilities.

“The conversion from pursuing closeness to moving away from dependence, is the core of attachment theory. In other words, when a child is securely attached to his mother and the feeling of closeness is restored, the seeking of proximity and closeness recedes and the child turns to other interests, comfortably using the caregiver as a base of operations from which to explore.”
Bowlby, J (1958)

Case Study - Ali & Max

Teenage mum Ali was encouraged to come along to our sessions by her support worker at Fife Gingerbread. Ali was incredibly shy and it was really important that she was accompanied by her Fife Gingerbread key worker at sessions, until she got to know the artists and other participants.

Baby Max was 20 months when he began attending and immediately struggled with having other children in the room with him. After chatting to the parent, we discovered that they had never attended any groups until now and spent much of their time in the house. Engaging Ali and her son together was incredibly difficult to begin with as mum did not wish to play and Max was easily upset and frustrated by other toddlers and babies in the group.

Each week we planned elements of the sessions focussing on how we could engage mum to become more playful and artists spent time playing with Max, allowing him to lead the play, following his interests and gradually bringing other babies and toddlers into the mix. Max very quickly grew in confidence, going from only

“It was wonderful to see Max grow into a little adventurer with us, and over a period of time become confident to engage in the activities alongside and with his Mum.”
Expecting Something Project Coordinator

playing with one type of activity and in one way (in close proximity to his parent), to exploring the room independently with everything on offer. Ali spent the early weeks observing the artists and other participants playing and enjoying the activities with Max, until eventually she was able to engage too and has been gradually building her confidence in the group each week. Ali was able to attend without her key worker after a few weeks, building a good relationship with the artists and making friends with other participants.

“It was wonderful to see Max grow into a little adventurer with us, and over a period of time become confident to engage in the activities alongside and with his Mum.”
Expecting Something Project Coordinator

We are engaged and have fun together

We are continually working with the structure at Lochgelly to try and improve parental/child engagement. Perhaps the more rural nature and limited access to other free activities in Fife areas means there is a real want and need for the parents to have time with each other and to chat. This can often be difficult to overcome in sessions and can also be disheartening to artists and deflating! Some of the participants have been attending for a long period of time and are very comfortable in the space and with the artists. There is a sense of ownership with the group which feels like a positive outcome, however when these participants choose not to fully

engage with their little ones there is a knock-on effect with newer participants and so the saga continues!

Regular introductions and warm-ups have been suggested and have been used from time to time, to help set up the tone of the session and bring focus, however we need to be more consistent with this and ensure it is planned and executed on a weekly basis, in order to see the long-term benefits.

We have full use of the large studio space each week, which allows for the set-up of multiple activity stations and gives the toddlers freedom to be active and make choices within a safe environment. Each week we also set up a cosy, chill-out space for parents with younger babies and for feeding purposes. We made the decision to take away tables and chairs (until lunchtime) as we found they were becoming a barrier and parents were less likely to actively engage with their little ones. Instead we have replaced them with cushions and mats to bring everyone in the room to the same level.

Some of the most fun and engaged moments we have seen have been when there is a physical activity such as dancing and games. Although parents don't often ask for dance, the project coordinator and lead artist have discussed that for the next block we would like to surprise them with an invited dance artist to get everyone active together!



“Taking part in artistic and creative activities together is protected time for parents and their children, when they can really focus on being together, strengthening relationships and encouraging deeper bonds.”

Expecting Something Project Coordinator



We feel we are collaborating in the artistic process

The choice of activity from week to week is continually informed by the needs and desires of the young parents and their babies. Each week we chat informally about the parents' preferences and desires for what we would do next, also taking into account the type of activities that artists have noticed worked well for promoting engagement with these particular families and that would continue to play on the participants' strengths to increase confidence.

By involving the participants in session content and the creative journey of the project we are actively empowering them, giving ownership of the project and gaining a higher level of engagement.

Two families who have been attending Expecting Something for over 2 years (and who are due to exit the programme), were offered by the lead artist to help lead a session and choose the activities, they worked together to bring creative ideas to the artists and helped deliver a session with our support. This felt like a really strong choice to involve these participants even more than usual, with the activities being



We are confident to try new arts activities

We see families, who attend regularly, going on a creative journey with their little ones and growing in confidence from week to week. Many parents discover a new found playfulness and continually make new discoveries about their baby's capabilities and interests, due to the variety of what we offer and inspiring, playful artists.



**"I liked making the dreamcatchers. I liked it cause Gregor would go and get me a piece of material and he would wait until I'd cut the piece of material and put it on and then he would go find me another piece. So it was really working together, he's still got it in his room now. That was really nice to be able to design that and do that together."
Expecting Something Parent, Lochgelly**

What our participants learn and gain

We understand how creativity improves relationships between adults and children.

By delivering a wide variety of creative arts activities, parents gain a better sense of their child's likes and dislikes which, in turn, improves their ability to read their child's cues and respond to these.

With many parents who attend at Lochgelly, we have seen great improvement in how they engage with their babies during the activities, in comparison to when they started attending. The lead artist uses a wide variety of craft and materials and is not afraid of providing the participants with huge opportunities to make lots of mess! When parents begin their journey with us, there is often apprehension with mess and letting their babies enjoy freedom in the space with the materials, however overtime we see parents become more open to these opportunities and embrace them.

[Click here to watch toddler spray painting!](#)



“Messy play is extremely important for a child’s development. It provides children with an exciting tactile and sensory experience that inspires their curiosity, allows them to explore the world around them and enhances their learning, language and creativity. Children learn through experimentation and discovery and messy play encourages children to explore new textures and manipulate different materials through touch.” Early Years Resources 2019

What they do differently

More families make arts and creativity a daily part of family life

By attending weekly sessions, our artists nurture interests and help creative confidence develop. We believe the arts are for all and we encourage participants to build on ideas during sessions and at home, elevating creativity into other parts of their life.

We endeavour to include accessible materials in our sessions, so that parents can

easily replicate activities. 90% of our participants agreed that sessions have inspired them to be more creative at home after attending Expecting Something.

“There was one day where they had a sheet, we had paint and we decorated the thing and we put over another piece of like sort of clearish sheet on top and that made an entire den and I thought, that’s something that I think I could do at home. So we did our own version!” Expecting Something Parent, Lochgelly

“It’s kind of made me realise that being creative is something I really enjoy doing. Like it’s been so much fun. The things we have managed to make, especially the things that me and my child can make. I didn’t realise I enjoyed doing it until I came here.” Expecting Something Parent, Lochgelly

“This group give me lots of new activities to try at home, or even outside like the flower pots.” Expecting Something Parent, Lochgelly

Playing, learning, discovering and exploring together

A wealth of evidence now shows that secure attachment and adequate bonding with a parent is important for a child’s emotional wellbeing. We provide a safe, stimulating space for the littlest participants to engage in new arts activities with their parent(s) and also bring experiences that they would not otherwise have access to.

Sessions offer a platform for artists to play alongside participants, enabling them to share their experience and knowledge and model positive parenting techniques. This results in opportunities for both mums and babies to experience new things and explore their own capabilities within a safe and relaxed environment.

Early in life, social connections make neural connections. The brain’s architecture is partially shaped by early interactions with others. Positive, responsive interactions between birth and 3 years of age (the most active period for establishing neural connections) can provide a strong foundation for connections that form later. The absence of responsive caregiving or if responses are unreliable or inappropriate alters the development of the brain’s architecture and impairs learning and behaviour.”

Developing Child, Harvard Edu, 2019

“Taking part in artistic and creative activities together is protected time for parents and their children, when they can really focus on being together, strengthening relationships and encouraging deeper bonds”

Expecting Something Project Coordinator

What difference does this make?

Develop strengthened relationships, improve parental capacity and in turn improve attachment

We regularly witness times when parents arrive to a session struggling to cope. We use our creative space to help them reconnect with themselves and thereafter with their children.

Expecting Something provides a positive, open space with gentle encouragement towards parents and babies engaging in creative activities together. Both parents and babies build confidence in how they communicate with one another, improving parental capacity and ability to respond to their child's needs.

The variety of sessions on offer provides parents with greater understanding of their child's likes and dislikes, while giving the babies and toddlers opportunity to explore their capabilities within a safe environment.

Participants who regularly attend show ongoing improvement in their ability to connect with their child, resulting in greater parental capacity and ability to nurture. The continual delivery of the sessions is key to building both parent and baby's confidence with other people in the group. In both areas, strong friendships have been made, bringing further support in and outwith sessions.

We followed the journey of one participant who had recently moved to the area. When she first joined (referred by new health visitor), she did not know anyone and found it a daunting experience to join a new group. Six months on the same participant regularly attends the sessions, has made new friends within the group and they all meet up regularly for walks and swimming!



Our sessions are set up so parents and babies have fun together. We see play as the key to connection. Over each block we provide attachment-based activities, from sensory maze explorations, copycat/mirroring techniques in circus skills sessions to achieving physical connections through dancing and games. Each week there are opportunities for parents to play, support or create something with their child, with participants regularly speaking of their happiness to see the little ones thrive and enjoy themselves. With participants who regularly attend our sessions, artists, staff and other partners have observed strengthened and secured attachments.

Parents will benefit from a reduction in isolation and develop friendships and connections in their community

Whilst Expecting Something primarily focuses on the relationship between parent and baby, we also seek to provide opportunity for parents to build friendships and gain peer support through the group.

We see ourselves as an important part of the community and participants have reported that the group has provided them with a space to be themselves and the opportunity to develop friendships.

By providing cultural trips, from visits to local nature reserves to theatre shows for babies, we are increasing parental confidence in taking their babies in and around their local community and outwith. This can be a big step for some young parents and it is important that they are given these opportunities, within a group where they feel safe and supported.

The shared lunch each week provides much needed rest and recuperation after each activity. Parents enjoy the time to chat with one another, whilst it also gives the opportunity for us to provide all participants with healthy, nutritious food.

Our core group of participants are in regular contact with one another and meet up out-with the sessions.





“My first experience of taking Joey on a train was with this group. I had never taken my child on a train. I have got such anxiety and I was like I can’t do it...but we were going to see one of the shows in Edinburgh...so we went on the train and...it was busy but we managed it. I thought that was something that I never ever would do...I was quite proud of myself that I coped with that. Especially in Edinburgh”
Expecting Something Parent, Lochgelly

Conclusion

Our evaluation of Expecting Something consistently shows the positive impact the weekly sessions are having on the young parents and babies who attend.

Expecting Something provides a safe place and protected time for parents and their children where they can focus on exploring creative activities together, strengthening their relationship with their child and encouraging deeper bonds.

Among those who attend regularly, we have observed their creative journey with their little ones and seen them grow in confidence from week to week. Many parents discover a newfound playfulness and continually make new discoveries about their baby’s capabilities and interests. Feedback from the participants show that the ideas and confidence they develop during these sessions has an impact outwith project as they are inspired to engage in more creative activities with their child at home and to attend other cultural activities.

The friendships that parents have built with others who attend has also been a positive outcome, helping reduce feelings of isolation.



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STARCATCHERS

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