



# STARCATCHERS

Expecting Something  
Wester Hailes 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](http://www.starcatchers.org.uk)

The project was supported by BBC Children in Need, The Robertson Trust, Corra Foundation, Henry Duncan, Scottish Children's Lottery Chance to Connect, Baillie Gifford, Wester Hailes Community Trust, Children's Aid, Tampon Tax, Warburtons, Dr Guthrie's Association, The Maple Trust, Prudential and Stevenson Charitable Trust.

## About Expecting Something

Expecting Something began in 2014/15 as a Starcatchers pilot project, working alongside the Family Nurse Partnership (FNP) 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 Wester Hailes, 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 Wester Hailes?

Wester Hailes is a post-war housing estate constructed in the 1970s. Quality of life in the neighbourhood is affected by a number of issues including housing construction, overall layout and the design of dwellings. These problems are typical for high-rise public housing constructed in the 1970s. The area has also suffered from a major image problem and is identified with high levels of crime, alcohol and drug dependency. The residents of Wester Hailes tend to be young, and are often unable to take advantage of local employment opportunities due to their lack of skills and access to childcare. Together these issues have resulted in an image problem that has affected the social and economic structure of Wester Hailes. Out-migration from the area has contributed to a high proportion of household's dependent on support from social services (The Luda Project).

The area has a current population of approximately 11,500, with a higher proportion of children than Edinburgh as a whole (Edinburgh Council Southwest locality plan, 2017-2022). The percentage of children living in poverty is 44.6% compared to 18.6% Edinburgh average and 18.2% Scottish average.





South West Edinburgh area deprivation, SIMD

Although parenthood is a positive experience for many young people, it is associated with increased risk of a range of poor social, economic and health outcomes for some. Good quality, integrated support for young parents and their families will contribute to better engagement with support services and in the longer term greater engagement in education, training and employment. This in turn will contribute to improved health and social outcomes for young parents and their children.

## Venue

Whale Arts is a community-led arts charity and social enterprise, based in Wester Hailes. Since being set up by local people in 1992, it has firmly established itself as the cultural anchor organisation for the area. Its mission is to be the creative heart of a vibrant, thriving community. We hire the studio space each week, which provides us with two different styles of area (theatre space and café-style area) and also direct access to a shared kitchen and outdoor platform and garden. Although there is a wide range of creative arts activities on offer at Whale, we are the only regular group and provision for young parents and their babies.

## Partners

We work closely with partners in the Wester Hailes community, who we receive referrals from or who we can also refer our participants on to. Families can also self-refer to us.

The young mums group at Edinburgh Council’s Community Learning Hub, Gate 55, is a wonderful combination to have alongside Expecting Something. There the parents are able to have some time away from their little ones, with crèche facilities onsite and a team of support workers who can help the parents access necessary services. Three quarters of our current participants attend there on a weekly basis and this gives the artists confidence to encourage parental play and engagement with their babies when they attend our group, knowing there are other provisions elsewhere.



Fig. 2 Current referral partners

“It’s great for me in my role as a Community Link Worker to have such a unique group to offer young mums in this area. I think the group has something special that other groups don’t have. The activities are always very creative and any mum I know that has attended has thoroughly enjoyed it, as has their little one. To have a group that not only supports mum and baby bonding but also links isolated young mums together is really invaluable.”

*Julie Roxburgh, Community Link Worker, NHS, Healthy Living Centre*

“Expecting something has been amazing for the young mums that I work with. Many mums are isolated in the community & especially young mums, so it’s great to have groups for young mums specifically. We have referred lots of parents to the group, all absolutely love it. The sessions they do are incredible, the mums and babies/toddlers have all gained a lot out of attending & it has inspired their creativity as well as confidence.”

*Claire McGeary, Communities and Family Unit, Gate 55*

By way of reaching out to new participants and supporting the community, over the last 6 months we have also been delivering pop up sessions in different centres around the Wester Hailes area. So far, we have provided extra sessions at:

- Calder Community flats
- Gate 55
- Clovenstone Community Centre
- Broomhouse Health Strategy

We have seen a good success rate of engaging new families in our sessions at WHALE Arts and we plan to deliver more in 2020 in Westside Plaza Shopping Centre, Calder and The Healthy Living Centre.



## Artists

### *Katy Wilson*

Katy is a Starcatchers Associate Artists and has worked with Starcatchers for more than 10 years. She is a magpie for bright colours and has found her visual art background totally compatible with the things babies are attracted to. Katy likes to create new worlds and environments for people to feel good, relaxed and inspired in, often sophisticated and far from conventional baby-friendly spaces, she likes to shake things up!



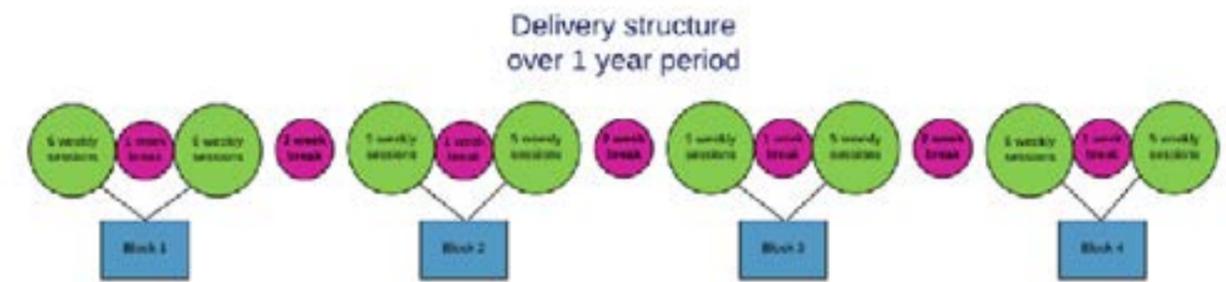
### *Marion Geoffray*

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.



## What we delivered

Starcatchers 'Expecting Something', provides 40 weeks of artist-led creative sessions per year, for young parents (25 and under) and their babies (0-2).



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, Katy Wilson, likes to work fluidly – listening and responding to the participants needs from week to week. Katy is often inspired by the babies and works to ensure each family get the best experience they can from the group.

At Whale Arts, we have explored a wide range of art forms and a good balance of local activities and cultural trips.



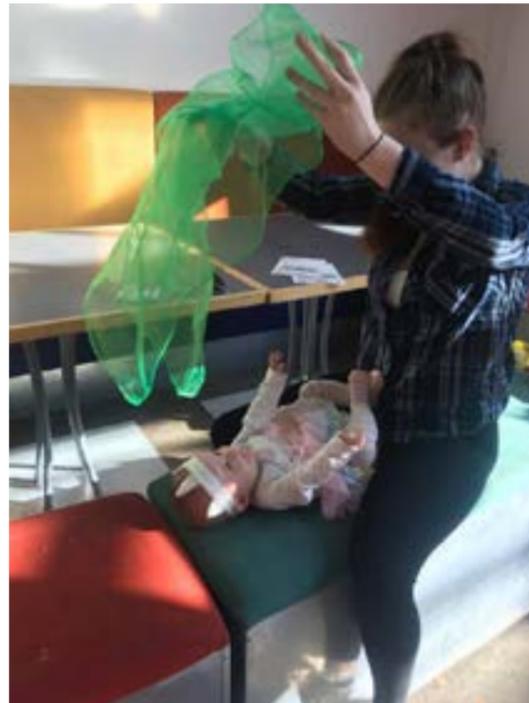


“At Expecting Something, we make every effort to celebrate their children exactly as they are and I think it is hugely important for parents to see the positive side of their children - I think changing these attitudes will affect as far into future generations.”

**Starcatchers Artist**

### 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 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, 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.

“At our other play groups, it’s just the bairns playing!”

**Expecting Something Parent, Wester Hailes**

“I feel as if it’s [Expecting Something] has raised my confidence a bit. Talking to other people, because it’s like great for younger mums. It feels less intimidating and I’ve met a lot of new people and that. And friends and stuff.”

**Expecting Something Parent, Wester Hailes**

### *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 - Leanne & Courtney

When this family started attending our sessions in March 2019, both Mum (Leanne) and baby (Courtney) were incredibly shy. Fortunately, Leanne already knew some of the other mums from the Young Mums Group at Gate 55 and so she was further encouraged to come along each week to try out new activities. Before attending our sessions, Leanne had only visited local playgroups with Courtney and had not experienced anything like the immersive style that we provide. Despite knowing some of the other Mums, Leanne remained hesitant in the initial weeks and although it was obvious she enjoyed watching Courtney engage in the activities, it was hard to ensure she was happy with the group-style in herself. It took time and gentle encouragement from the artists week to week to engage Leanne in the activities too.

“Eight months on, Leanne is now one of our most regular attendees and really pushes herself to play alongside and with Courtney”

Eight months on, Leanne is now one of our most regular attendees and really pushes herself to play alongside and with Courtney. Artists and Starcatchers staff have discussed that she is now such a positive role model for other parents in the group and how rewarding it is to see both Mum’s and baby’s confidence to explore and feel a part of something.

### ***We are engaged and have fun together***

Our current group are really playful and seem to understand what the group is. We often dance and sing together, with baby-led warm-ups and a joyful feel to the sessions. There are many weeks when the participants arrive with low energy levels and low mood, however the bond Starcatchers artists have with this group is the key to turning this around and we often receive positive comments from parents at the end of the group session.



“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 parent’s 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 participant’s 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.

### **Case Study - Janine & Kyle**

One of our families currently attending often struggle to engage in the main activities. The child is showing early signs of autism and is easily upset by taking on the emotions of others, not always wishing to be in close proximity to other group members. For this family, Starcatchers artists make contingency plans and ensure there are other offerings for the toddler, so that Mum (Janine) is given ideas to try and continues to feel part of the sessions. We also ensure that Kyle gets access to the main activity on his own terms, before or after others join. We are continually helping Janine make new discoveries about her child’s likes and to also accept the things he doesn’t, respecting his choices and celebrating him for who he is. We also see that Janine is in need of her own creative output and enjoys being creative alongside her little one.

“Kyles mum said that 6 months ago he wouldn’t have registered anyone in the room and that now after around 6 months of being at Expecting Something he was holding a room and connecting with people in it, making things happen the way he wanted it to be and that she was proud of him.”  
***Starcatchers Artist***

“Janine loves an opportunity to express herself and create, I think making her mark makes her feel empowered. She has a lot of people around her disapproving of her the way she lives or her child’s behaviour, so she has her defences up. She thrives on her time at Expecting Something – being valued and contributing. I think this group is a lifeline for her, a space where we are warm and supportive to her and Kyle is more than accepted. He is celebrated and encouraged and we think about how to engage with him.” Lead Artist

One of our recent discoveries is that although Kyle often struggles to clearly communicate with others and often shows distress with certain instruments and music, he can thrive on music too! At a recent session, we welcomed back African drummer, dancer and singer Morgan Njobo, which brought us the opportunity to see Kyle interact in a whole new light.

“One of our children can be very sensitive to music – it can sound painful to him... but not this music. We watched with his mum as he walked slowly towards Morgan and his Djembe drum, you could tell he completely approved from his body language and how close he was. When Morgan stopped drumming to chat with us – Kyle picked up his hands and put them back on the drum, when he started playing again Kyle did a little circle dance to show that this was what he wanted. Such clear communication and no words! It was beautiful – his mum beaming and us too. The sound quality and tone was good, the rhythm was satisfying and Morgan’s

singing voice is really lovely. It is one of those voices that makes you feel lucky to be in the room. His voice provides a feeling of magic and positivity– this sort of experience with artists sets Expecting Something apart from any other group.

Kyles mum said that 6 months ago he wouldn't have registered anyone in the room and that now after around 6 months of being at Expecting Something he was holding a room and connecting with people in it, making things happen the way he wanted it to be and that she was proud of him." Starcatchers Artist

### ***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 newly 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.



### **What our participants learn and gain**

***We understand how creativity improves relationships between adults and children."***

At Expecting Something we seek to excite the families we work with each week, challenging them to explore new environments and go on a creative journey together. 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.

We are able to follow and track the changes in level of engagement between parent and baby, from when they begin their time with us. We see relationships strengthen over long periods of time, but also, we see rapid changes parental attitudes and choices.

### **Case Study - Neshla and Jaden**

Neshla and Jaden are one of our newest families to join the group, with Jaden being our youngest participant, joining us when he was four months. Neshla had heard about our group from her health visitor and decided to come along.

On her first week, Mum Neshla spoke with the project coordinator to say that she felt that the activities were for older babies and toddlers and not for little ones such as Jaden. The project coordinator reassured her that we cater for individual needs as well as the whole group and persuaded her to come along again the following week. This time the lead artist had incorporated some session elements which were perfectly pitched for Jaden's age, however, Neshla was still to be convinced, insisting that he only liked toys and that she preferred a traditional play group format.

The family returned the following week, intrigued by what we would offer next and artists took a more forward approach to engaging Jaden with the activities and modelling positive play, we also discovered mum's own creative interest in henna painting and set up a station for her to paint with other parents, allowing time for group bonding and a creative outlet for her. This time we witnessed a shift in attitude towards what her baby should and could be exploring with positive engagement together and a happier response to the group as a whole. Next up we

"Responding to what her son was interested in, making him feel more powerful, to know he can make an impact and is being heard, to know his thoughts and choices are worth something!"

provided a music session which brought about some lovely moments for the family.

“Sometimes we have to listen more carefully to the cues from little babies. One 5-month-old baby looked wide-eyed at everything, staring for long periods of time and taking everything in. I asked his mum if she would like a play with the Djembe, to which she replied “no, not just now...” so I placed it near them. You could see him tracking things with his big beautiful eyes. Starcatchers artists helped gently encourage mum to gradually join in, responding to what her son was interested in, making him feel more powerful, to know he can make an impact and is being heard, to know his thoughts and choices are worth something! By the end of the session this baby was drumming on his own on the Djembe. His first ever time and he continued making the rhythms on his high chair at lunch. He was happy and his mum was happy too.” Starcatchers Artist

This family are continuing on their journey with us and we are excited to see what more we can do to bring them closer together through creative arts.

### 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. One of our participants, who has been with us for over a year, was recently keen to tell us how she had been inspired by the work we do in the group, and how she has created a space at home for her daughter to continue exploring her love for art.

At Wester Hailes we are lucky to be able to access many cultural activities within a short distance of our base at Whale and the Starcatchers team have been working hard to continually feed information to participants about other offerings and take them on a variety of trips, to build their confidence accessing free activities, in and around Edinburgh. This year we have visited Gorgie Farm, National Art Galleries, Edinburgh Botanic Gardens and Jupiter Artland along with the Festival Theatre on a number of occasions. Participants have since visited a number of these venues outside of the group and have also been along to support one of our regular invited artists at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival.

“This group give me lots of new activities to do at home, or even outside like the flower pots”

***Expecting Something Parent***

“We do more painting party things at home”

***Expecting Something Parent***

### ***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 three 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***



## What difference does this make?

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

We regularly witness times when parents arrive at 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 offered, enables parents to increase their understanding of their child's likes and dislikes, whilst giving the babies and toddlers opportunity to prove 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 out with sessions.

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.

"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 Coordinator***



## 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 sculpture parks to theatre shows for babies, we are increasing parental confidence in taking their babies not just in and around their local community and out-with. 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.

## 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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