

Expecting Something

2021-2022




STARCATCHERS



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About Starcatchers

Starcatchers is Scotland's arts and early years organisation. We advocate for creativity to be at the heart of every childhood, and create magical, playful experiences for all children, wherever they live, alongside the professionals and communities who nurture them. Arts and creativity for 0-5s and their adults supports positive wellbeing, strong relationships and helps give children the best start in life.

About the project

Expecting Something began as pilot community engagement project in 2013/14, established by Starcatchers and the Family Nurse Partnership. The pilot engaged parents under 25 and their babies in creative arts activities, helping to support and encourage parent/baby bonding and, importantly, create a sense of connectedness between these young families and their community.

The pilot was hugely successful, and the project continued long-term with local communities in Wester Hailes, Edinburgh, and Lochgelly, Fife. Expecting Something provides a protected time and space for parents to spend time with their little ones, engage with the creative arts, and build friendships and positive connections in their communities.

stats

101

Children engaged in the Expecting Something weekly group and family play events

22

Families attended Expecting Something weekly

44

Sessions took place from April 2021 to March 2022

Highlights 2021/22

The benefits of outdoor delivery

In-person delivery of Expecting Something recommenced in early 2022, following a brief break during the reintroduction of lockdown restrictions in winter 2021. The decision was taken to continue outdoor delivery, recognising that this not only enabled more continuous delivery and was the safest way to work with families post-pandemic; but also that the freedom of being outdoors had huge benefits for mental and physical health. This decision meant **we were able to deliver even more for our families**, with our artists providing 40 weekly, two-hour long creative play sessions in the garden of Whale Arts. These multi-sensory sessions introduced families to a variety of art forms including music, visual art, movement and performance, utilising the skills of the core Starcatchers delivery team, augmented by the specialised skills of a range of visiting artists, such as Buff and Sheen, the Tinderbox Collective and Morgan Njobo. All Expecting Something sessions are co-created with parents and designed with the needs of the children in mind, **enhancing wellbeing, relationships, and enabling emotional and physical development.**

Up, Up and Away

A particular highlight of this year was our Up, Up and Away session. Part of the Edinburgh Wellbeing Pact's: Summer Season, this session provided us with a valuable opportunity to explore how connected our families felt to their community. To help us explore this question, we brought in visiting artists All or Nothingness Aerial Dance Theatre, Yes Yoga, Madeleine Wood, Claire Docherty and Marion Geoffray.

Watch our families' responses [here](#).



'Childhood memories, I suppose that's what it's all about, creating nice childhood memories and that's what the kids are getting. And also it's free! I can't do this at home.'

Participant



'(Post-Covid) The number of Assessment of Need forms that I complete for nursery placements for younger children has increased significantly and the main reasons are due to social isolation. I have also submitted quite a few for mothers that have poor mental health which again has been exacerbated by the social isolation resulting from a lack of interactions with peers.'

Local Health Visitor



Exploring the community

In response to our participants' suggestions, we also took families on **visits to explore their local communities**, to sites such as Jupiter Artland, the Wondrous Woods at Hopetoun House and Edinburgh Zoo.

We also delivered **four family fun days**, encouraging entire families to join us and expand community awareness and involvement with the group.

A safe space for babies and carers

More important than ever before, in our post-pandemic communities, Expecting Something has functioned as **a safe space for overwhelmed parents**. Our sessions allow for parental space and time, with artists taking a lead in playing with babies. This has allowed parents respite to tend to their own feelings of stress and tiredness, and then re-engage in the creative play in their own time. In doing this we have been **building relationships with both babies and parents**, understanding and respecting the needs of both parties, with the ultimate aim of bringing them together in a positive and supported way.

Change in age range

Again, due to the challenges of the pandemic, and after conversations with local nurseries and healthcare professionals, we recognised that it wasn't only adults 25 and under who were struggling and in need of more support. With an increase in reported mental health issues, not only in parents but also young children, opening up Expecting Something to older parents has meant we can support and offer a safe space for more families to play together. This did not effect the dynamic of the group; instead it helped our families to connect with community members beyond their immediate peers, **deepening community engagement**. It also allowed us to continue to support families who had previously been part of the group, strengthening our ties with the community.



Outcomes

For babies

Greater socialisation and stimulation which in turn helps physical, cognitive social and emotional development.

Strengthened relationships with their parent(s) helps young children with their early development.

Increased confidence and wellbeing through participation in creative activities.

Improved access to the arts and cultural life, supporting children to fulfil their Rights.

For parents

Life Skills

Greater emotional wellbeing

Increased parental capacity

Strengthened attachments with child

Community Connectedness

Case Studies



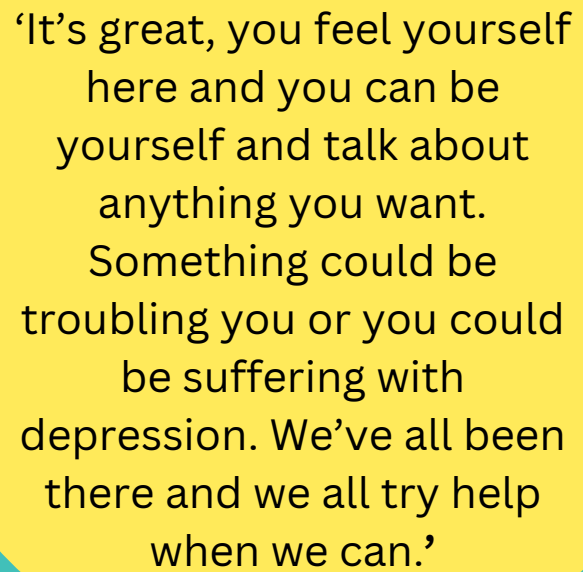
Case study 1

W is a toddler who has been attending sessions since he was born along with his older sibling. W was born at the start of lockdown. His Mum has been anxious about Covid, if it was not for this group, W would not socialise with other children and adults outside his family. W is a shy child, his Mum voices her concern about how 'clingy he is'. W would follow his sibling and engage in activities only when his sibling did so. Several months ago, W's sibling started nursery.

W seemed lost without his sibling. His mother was concerned he was more clingy. Slowly over sessions W forms a trusted relationship with one of the artists, they play together weekly, W being enabled to take the lead. W's confidence developed. He started walking independently into group rather than clinging to his Mum. Slowly he has begun playing with other children and adults who attend the group, including Dads. W has become more confident and playful and more willing to explore new things.meals.

W does not sleep well and Mum states she is exhausted and that is it easier to keep him in his buggy or indoors. There is no garden at home. She finds it too stressful at the park as he runs off. The group provides Mum and W with a safe supportive outdoor environment for W to be active. Mum states that 'the kids love being outdoors. They get to experience all the mud and the sticks and they get to run free. Rather than be couped up inside and be like, no you can't go in there'.

Mum also reports that she values the support of the group 'It's great, you feel yourself here and you can be yourself and talk about anything you want. Something could be troubling you or you could be suffering with depression. We've all been there and we all try help when we can.' In addition to supporting Mum, the group has enabled us to support her with W's healthy eating. His mum has food texture phobias which include almost all healthy food unless it is liquidised. This can have an impact on the food she prepares and buys for her children. By providing lunch at the group, W has tried many new fruits and vegetables and hot healthy



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Participant



Case study 2

S is immaculate, her Mum is super proud of her and loves to dress her in the best of clothes and likes her to look clean and well presented. It takes a good few sessions before Mum has realised that we do not give up on our encouragement for babies to explore and get messy, Mum has really enjoyed the relaxed vibe of the sessions and is keen to meet other parents so keeps returning despite her reluctance for play outdoors or with some of the materials.

Over time Mum enjoys seeing other babies enjoying the experiences and wants the same for S, she finally takes us up on the offer of an outdoor suit for S to wear and thereafter also dresses S in more casual, less fussy clothes so that she can be more free to explore. First stage is not getting too messy at the session, but agrees to take some materials home for play on the high chair table where the mess is restricted.

We are building up each time this family attend, always sharing snippets of knowledge without trying to 'teach' or intrude. It is slow progress and we balance the relationship with this family with regular check in messages and conversations outside of session times.

Case study 3

J has arrived and is raring to go, he is the oldest of two children under 36 months and is a super active and outgoing toddler. M finds it hard to get out of the house and quite often will not come if she has to bring both children – bringing them both out is too much of a stressful challenge so she tends to avoid it if she can and today the younger baby has been left with dad.

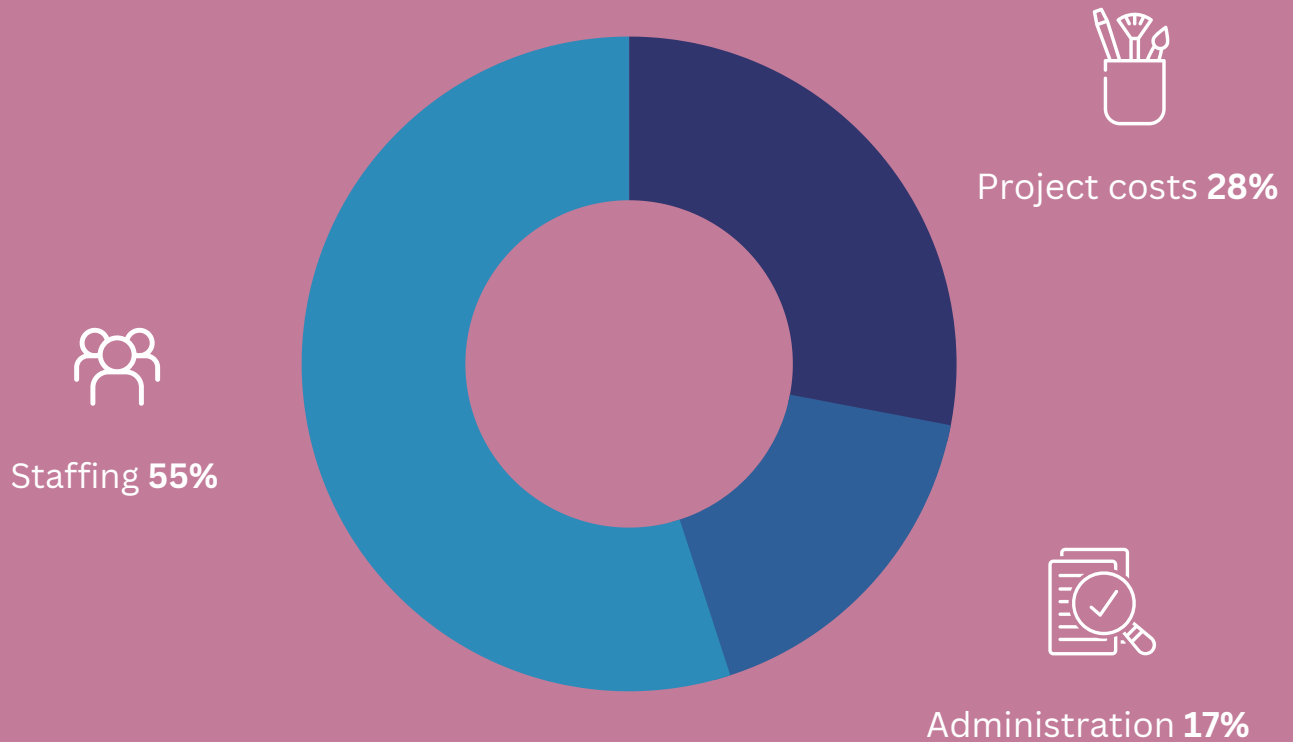
J runs to N who is his friend at the group and the two toddlers jog around each other before heading off into the wooded area to jump on every different surface they can find, dried up leaves, rocks and tree roots. J stamps each of his feet back and forth on a tree root, N watches and when there is space he responds with a stamp of his feet in a faster more wobbly version. J spots the array of materials we have laid out across the tarpaulin and chooses to explore each one slowly, N follows and they throw the cloth pieces up and watch them float back to the ground. A friendship has been struck up between these two little ones with communication through sounds of stamps, experiencing textures and giggling grins of delight.

The combination of art and outdoors allows these two toddlers such a chance to explore on their own terms, choosing the art materials if they appeal and seeing how they fit and work in the natural surroundings.

Expenditure

It cost **£40,927** to deliver the Expecting Something activity in this report, **5%** of the organisation's total expenditure for 2021/22.

The chart below shows the breakdown of Expecting Something costs this year.



Funders:



Partners:



- Baillie Gifford
- Organised Outdoor Community Play Fund
- Dr Guthrie Association
- Henry Duncan Grants
- Perinatal Infant Mental Health Fund
- Police Scotland
- Community Resilience
- Edinburgh Voluntary Organisations' Council
- Edinburgh Health and Social Care Partnership

**Thank you for
your support**