

Overview:

Thanks to a second round of funding from the Ocean Regeneration Trust, Half Moon delivered twelve family learning dance and drama sessions for pre-school children and their parents/carers at the Harford Street Multicentre during the autumn term of 2016 (15th September-1st December). The sessions used drama and creative, sensory play to support participating children's emotional and physical development, as well as the development of their creative expression. The sessions covered artforms including drama, dance, music and visual arts. Each session was delivered by two experienced Facilitators, one Lead and one Support with one session being led by a specialist Messy Play Lead Facilitator. We aimed for the sessions to create a strong link between ideas and materials used by the facilitators and objects found at home, so that parents/carers could replicate the activities at home and continue the learning for the children. The sessions built on the reputation created by the first round of the programme in the summer term 2016.



Intended Project Outcomes:

- Children develop and improve their verbal and non-verbal communication skills.
- Parents/carers articulate how they can facilitate the development of these skills at home.
- Children show signs of improved self-esteem and confidence.
- Parents/carers articulate how they can influence their children's problem-solving and how imaginative exploration helps their child to make sense of the real world.
- Parents/carers articulate the value and importance of activities such as play and drama to their children's development.
- Children have positive social skills and a willingness to tackle new challenges
- Parents/carers articulate how they can best support their child in this.

Evaluation:

The weekly sessions were designed to follow the children's lead, having an informal structure that enabled the children to be fully involved in how the activities progressed. Each session was designed to include children and adults in a series of activities encouraging physical activity and exploratory play. The programme explored creative play, using narrative

through physical play with lots of language repetition built into the structure and activities. The twelve sessions included a gradual development of the sense of performance skills, with the participants becoming comfortable being a character and acting things out. The formal session was an hour long, with free play either side where the facilitators interacted with the children and their parents/carers.



Working at the centre was a new opportunity for Half Moon in the summer term of 2016. It was really important to build on this newly developed relationship and continue to offer sessions at the centre so as to keep up the momentum generated in the first term. Parents and carers who had brought their children along in the latter weeks of the summer term were delighted to return in the autumn. Word-of-mouth helped to bring in large numbers of parents/carers and children during the autumn term. Half Moon is now working to lever in funding to enable the project to continue in 2017.

Themes and Skills Explored:

The sessions explored and encouraged the children's use of imagination through storytelling and creative activities. Sessions were also geared towards developing the children's movement skills; gross and fine motor.

The themes explored included journeys to various different environments to encourage the children to stretch their imaginations in their own creative play. In sessions, the children and adults went on imaginary journeys to the seaside and a farm; they did a tour of London to see the sites and journeyed into prehistoric times, to name just a few examples. We also



Evaluation: Journey Together, Harford Street Multicentre

had a session focusing on messy play, which gave the children freedom to get really messy and engage with a variety of different whole body visual art activities.

Monitoring:

In total, 38 children and 34 adults were signed up to the classes. Class sizes ranged from three at the very beginning to 24 children in the latter stages of the project. In total 169 child attendances took place and 148 adult attendances. Parents and carers who attended included mums, dads, nannies and grandparents. The number of dads who attended was the highest that one of the practitioners had experienced for a project of this type. Some parents came together. Some parents came with their children's nannies, having heard how much fun the sessions were! Attendees came from the E1, E14, E2 and E3 postcode areas.

Feedback from parents/carers and children:

We asked parents/carers to respond to a series of questions about the programme:

- **Describe how the project lived up to the words 'including, informing and inspiring'**

Madeline and Amari were both inspiring, their groups were a joy, brilliant fun and are dearly missed!

I loved the way in which the children were encouraged to imagine scenarios and situations. I thought the classes were including, informing and inspiring...and you could add uplifting and exciting too. I think the information element was in the way the stories and adventures had factual information and taught little ones about traffic lights, autumn, dinosaurs and much more. The inspiration came from the way the group used their imagination to turn everyday objects like string and material into castles and caves, rivers and much more.

Enthusiastic, unique, refreshing, fun and different any other classes we attend. I love how every class is different!

Inspiring creative play, equipping and empowering parents and carers to explore imaginative play at home.

I liked that the class was offered in a very inclusive setting and as it was free to attend it attracted a broader variety of families from the local neighbourhood vs some other paid classes that end up very 'yuppy'. The class was led by extremely enthusiastic and caring people who not only put kids and parents at ease but opened the kids' little minds and imaginations.

- **Describe memorable moments**

Our favourite day was when we went back in time to the dinosaur times and slept in a cave around the camp fire and drew dinosaurs on the cave walls. Every week was well thought out and fun.



Evaluation: Journey Together, Harford Street Multicentre

Interactive messy play was our favourite session which took messy play to a whole new level of messy and fun.

Our nanny brought our son to 99% of the classes and she raved about them. I could tell that amongst all of the various activities she does, this one really stood out. Then I brought our son towards the end of term, and was amazed at how confident he was the moment we arrived. He was obviously very happy to see the class leaders and had about 10 minutes of play with one of them, rolling and throwing balls, playing with hula hoops, etc. I was captivated during the entire class and never felt like the instructors were counting down the minutes as so many of them do!

- **Describe something that has changed as a result the project**

We do much more pretend play and my daughter's dance moves are now considerably better than mine!

I think we imagine things more and make up stories. Take the cushions off the settee and make a cave. We also dance more.

Gives me fantastic new ideas on how to play and have fun with my baby

- **Describe the impact of the project on the participating children**

We play and dance so much more

It was Nancy's favourite thing of the week she attended. It was so much fun and a wonderful immersive and creative atmosphere. It made me realise that creative play is all about the imagination. What impressed me the most was how much work went into each week's play and how well run it was

It's opened us up to new ways of play that we would have done before. Allows me to lose my inhibition and be free alongside my baby. They're great. Really love them

Has made my son more imaginative and me much more creative in how we spend our time together.

He's more open to playing with adults and children

83% of respondents would do the project again tomorrow if it were running; 17% would continue as long as it fitted with their schedule.

Some parents/carers have since brought their children to see a show at Half Moon and some have signed their children up to the waiting list to do our Saturday morning Youth Theatre sessions for when their children start Year 1 at school.

Feedback from Facilitators:



The project went exceedingly well. The main success has been attendance – we had such large numbers but there was a consistency too as lots of children came every week and we were able to build on their skills.

A big success was using story – it was so much fun! The children were very focused when the story was being read. And the children and adults definitely

enjoyed our performing for them. Adults were actually quite enchanted and were appreciative of that skill. And we were asking them to get up and act the story out which was maybe different to anything they were doing at home.

We also worked on the development of movement skills: warm-up – jumping and toe-tapping. Paper butterfly – picking it up, blowing it, wafting it and being careful. We did so many activities that the parents could do at home with their children – they even came up with the activity where we were sliding on the organza. You could see the development in the children in the interaction with balls and hoops in the free play session. They started to notice colours, they were picking them up, rolling them and placing them. We took narrative on from the children's lead.

The adults who came were a highlight for us – they were so engaged and took part in all the activities. It showed they valued what the sessions are all about and have an understanding that their engagement facilitates their child's engagement.

Conclusion:

The project was well received by all attendees and facilitators felt that it fitted well into the routine of the centre. Take-up was high with only a couple of low attendance days due to bad weather and illnesses. Half Moon believe that there is demand for a project of this type in a community space like the Harford Street Multicentre. Half Moon will continue to fundraise to be able to continue to deliver these sessions at the Harford Street Multicentre, working alongside the Ocean Regeneration Trust.