

The Delights Audience Report

Outdoor Adventures @ Hoopla Early Year Festival 2023



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**TURNED ON
ITS HEAD**



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Video



The Delights is an early years sensory dance performance that explores story, music, and movement. Makers of Imaginary Worlds and Turned on its Head joined forces to make this work with and for young children and their grown-ups in Nottingham during 2022 and 2023. We are grateful for the support from Small Steps Big Changes Ideas Fund, Arts Council England and to the children, early years practitioners, storytellers, dancers and artists who helped us develop this work.



About Report

Public parks have traditionally been seen as spaces for recreation and leisure, but their potential for facilitating community building, artistic expression, and child development should be more noticed. To address this, “The Delights”, a special event featuring dance performance, sensory play and installation, was performed at Hoopla! City City Arts’ mini-festival for 0-4 year olds in four local parks in Nottingham Summer 2023. This report aims to examine the multifaceted impact of this initiative on families who attended, focusing on both the parent's and children's experiences.

The primary objectives of this report are to:

- Assess whether the event changed attendees' perceptions of their local parks.
- Understand the event's impact on encouraging children's expression and communication.
- Explore parents' observations on their children's engagement with the dancers and/or installation.
- Determine whether the event has influenced parents' ideas for home-based play with their children.
- Capture what the adults specifically enjoyed about the performance.
- Identify what the children enjoyed about the performance.
- Gauge the overall sentiment and collect further comments from the attendees for future improvement.



Methods

Insights for the
planning and
implementation of
similar community-
centric events

Data for this report was gathered through post-event interviews with parents who attended the events with their children. Seven key questions were posed to the attendees to capture a broad spectrum of experiences and perspectives.

These questions were:

1. Has the experience today changed the way you see your local park?
2. Has today encouraged your child's expression and communication and if so, how?
3. Is there anything about your child's engagement with the dancers and/or installation that surprised you?
4. Has the experience today given you ideas for play at home with your child?
5. What did you (as the adult) enjoy about the performance/play?
6. What do you think your child liked about the performance/play? Have they communicated anything to you about the experience?

By probing into these areas, this report aims to provide insights for the planning and implementation of similar community-centric events in the future.

Voices from the Audience: An Analysis of Parental Responses to "The Delights"

Has the experience today changed the way you see your local park?

"Well, it's in a bit of a rougher area of Nottingham, but it's made us come out and meet new people in the local area, which is really nice."

"Yes, Sir. Yeah. Yes. A lovely addition to the park. It's a nice use of the green space. Got some nice flash of colour. Normally, I guess you just walk past this bit. Not really thinking about it, but it's really in."

"Yeah, a little bit. It's just making better use of the outdoor spaces. I think inviting kind of families in, like with smaller children, feel more comfortable."

"Yeah, it's really nice. Yeah, just way more community vibe than when we're normally here."

The recent event in Nottingham's local parks illuminated a transformative power of art and communal activities in redefining how public spaces like parks are perceived and used. Parents who attended expressed a newfound appreciation for their local park as more than just a "field" or a routine recreational area but a vibrant community space that can be aesthetically pleasing and functionally inclusive. One parent reflected, "Well, it's in a bit of a rougher area of Nottingham, but it's made us come out and meet new people in the local area, which is really nice."

Parks that are sometimes located in what some consider "rougher areas of Nottingham" have been imbued with new energy. For many, parks have transitioned from a space they "just walk past" to venues of "flash of colour," community interaction, and meaningful activity. "Yes, Sir. Yeah. Yes. A lovely addition to the park. It's a nice use of the green space. Got some nice flash of colour," one participant noted, dispelling prior notions of the park having a "dangerous edge."

It's this sense of local community building that many attendees describe the experience as bringing in a "more community vibe" than they usually feel. "Yeah, it's really nice. Yeah, just way more community vibe than when we're normally here," another parent added.

Beyond merely being a venue for a one-off event, parents expressed how their perceptions of what the park could be have evolved. Many said they now see it as an interactive community space, a place for individual recreation and community gatherings. "It's nice to use it as a community space for events like this", expressed another attendee, emphasising that the park has the potential to host events that cater to the entire family. Children were not merely passive participants but also beneficiaries of this newfound focus on community engagement. Many parents found that the event encouraged their kids to get out and engage in activities other than "the same activities as using the swing." The event also received praise for making "better use of outdoor spaces," helping families "feel more comfortable" in what they now see as a more interactive and child-friendly environment. Parents appreciated the event's setting, with many comments pointing out that even the physical environment felt transformed. "It feels quite magical under the tree," one attendee said, highlighting the event's attention to artistic quality and ambience.

In conclusion, the sentiment was positive, suggesting a successful event and the potential for future endeavours to transform further and elevate the role of local parks in the community. Many parents found value in their children and themselves experiencing art and community in an open, public space.

"Something new for them to try. It gives them that chance to explore different things,"

Has today encouraged your child's expression and communication and if so, how?

"She's learned to play with nature. But she doesn't usually do. She always needs entertainment with toys and things. So it's nice that she's expressing herself differently."

"It's encouraged both of them to get involved with people they don't know. So that's quite nice... One of my children put his hand up, which he's normally really shy to do."

"Yes, by wanting to get involved in things and showing like willingness and initiative."

"Yeah, definitely. Confidence as well... so he's just sort of up there now running around, so yeah."

Participation in the performance has evidently provided much more than just an afternoon of diversion; it has fostered a space for developmental growth in children's communication and expression. Parents wanted to note how the event impacted their children's interpersonal skills and creativity.

One parent remarked that their daughter "learned to play with nature," highlighting a shift from the child's typical dependence on toys for entertainment. This indicates the event's potential to broaden children's scope of interests, which aligns with fostering a more balanced approach to leisure activities.

Regarding social engagement, parents noticed their children interacting more openly with unfamiliar faces. "It's encouraged both of them to get involved with people they don't know," one parent proudly mentioned. This particular piece of feedback points to the event's ability to serve as a social catalyst.

Especially in a society increasingly moving towards digital interaction, face-to-face engagements have become more valuable, and the event has created an atmosphere encouraging this. Another recurrent theme from the parents was the idea of children taking the initiative. One parent summarized this by saying their child showed "willingness and initiative," a behaviour that underscores the importance of active participation in community events. "Something new for them to try. It gives them that chance to explore different things," another parent added, offering a secondary layer to the initiative concept by tying it to exploration and discovery.

A further compelling aspect was the significant boost in children's confidence. As one parent stated, their child went from shy to "up there now running around." This is no small transformation, given the limited time frame of the event. "Yeah, just the fact that they get to play with other children, they may not know and just socialise and obviously make new friends," another parent noted, alluding to the broader social implications that such a confidence boost can offer. The event even touched on more complex social themes. "Especially with him being the black child, he needs to be exposed to different cultures and different ways of life," one parent stated, emphasizing the importance of events like this in fostering a diverse and inclusive community.

Overall, the event demonstrated the transformative power of communal activities in both subtle and overt ways. It provided a playground and a canvas for children to express, communicate, and grow. Doing so entertained and enriched, creating a valuable community experience that many parents found beneficial for their children's development. The event thus signifies the potential for public spaces to serve as fertile grounds for community-building, cultural exchange, and individual growth.

"He actually concentrated through the whole thing, and he normally doesn't...He was literally following them around, which was nice."

Is there anything about your child's engagement with the dancers and/or installation that surprised you?

"She sat and watched it all, I was so surprised... kind of mesmerized, concentrated on it, which is not usual."

"Yes, you can see he was performing with the two performers. At first, I was so worried that he could interfere with the show, and Roma said, 'Oh, don't worry. The performer can handle it, and he's part of the show now.'"

"He actually concentrated through the whole thing, and he normally doesn't...He was literally following them around, which was nice."

"I mean, like, that confidence. To go straight up to the people."

When asked whether the recent dance and art installation in Nottingham's local parks had any surprising effects on their children's engagement, parents offered a range of insights that spanned from an unexpected shift in attention span to newfound confidence.

Several parents were pleasantly surprised by their children's focused engagement with the dancers and the art installation, a departure from their usual behaviours.

A common sentiment among the parents was amazement at their children's unusual concentration levels. As one parent noted, their child was "kind of mesmerized, concentrated on it, which is not usual." The ability of the event to captivate children's attention in such a profound manner underscores its impact as more than just a recreational outing. Another parent noted that their child "concentrated through the whole thing" and was "literally following them around," emphasizing a similar unexpected boost in attention span and playful engagement.



"It feels quite magical under the tree."

The theme of unanticipated confidence also emerged. One parent explained that their child engaged so well with the dancers that they essentially became "part of the show." The integration of children into the performance not only surprised parents but also reassured them that performers were open to this level of interaction, offering a sense of shared experience. "To go straight up to the people," another parent remarked, highlighting a surprising burst of confidence in their child's approach to new faces and experiences.

The improvisational play some children engaged in was a more complex element, which seemed spurred by the installation. One parent said their child used part of the lyra as "a canoe" and was "down the river on the canoe in it." Such imaginative play indicates that the installation may catalyze children to think outside the box, challenging and expanding their regular play patterns.

While some parents stated that their children were generally outgoing and they had expected them to engage openly, they were nonetheless impressed with the collective enthusiasm. One parent found it "brilliant" how "all the children got just up at the same time," highlighting a sense of community and collective action that may not always be evident in other settings.

In summary, the dance and art installation gave parents fresh insights into their children's capacities for focus, social interaction, and imaginative play. While not every parent was "surprised" per se, many found aspects that exceeded their expectations, whether in the form of prolonged attention, unexpected initiative, or creative improvisation. Therefore, this event served as entertainment and a mirror reflecting sometimes unnoticed or latent aspects of children's personalities and capabilities.



"Love the fabrics. Low-cost ideas of how you can get some material and make different things out of them."



Has the experience today given you ideas for play at home with your child?

"Oh yeah, definitely, especially the Lycra. That's brilliant. Yeah, I'm definitely gonna give that a go at home."

"What has made me think is so I've been ill this past week, so I've not actually done that much. But we've got a small yard, which I'm trying to make fun for her. So I'm thinking maybe there are some more hanging things. Just made me think."

"Love the fabrics. Like we came last year, and we were really hoping that this would be here again... low-cost ideas of how you can get some material and make different things out of them."

"And watching them engage really just like show you that you can have a bit of fun with like.. a bed sheet."

The recent park event not only offered families an interactive experience but also sparked inspiration for parents on how to get creative with playtime at home. Parents were particularly captivated by the materials used in the installations, offering them fresh perspectives on how to innovate within their domestic settings.

Using lycra in the installation was a hit, with several parents excited to try similar activities at home.

"Oh yeah, definitely, especially the Lycra. That's brilliant," said one parent, while another pondered, "We could have something like this? The lycra. I mean, she will go crazy." For parents looking for safe and interactive materials for play, Lycra has proven itself to be a versatile and engaging choice. The event also led some parents to reconsider their spaces for their children's playtime. One parent, who had been ill and confined to a small yard, found the event eye-opening. "It just made me think. Bring her to parks more where there are bigger areas of grass that you can just run around in."

THE DELIGHTS REPORT

It's encouraged both of them to get involved with people they don't know. So that's quite nice... One of my children put his hand up, which he's normally really shy to do."

The experience underscored the value of public spaces as a supplementary venue for enriching a child's recreational life, mainly when home settings might be limited.

Parents were also struck by the low-cost, high-impact possibilities the event presented. As one parent summed up: "Love the fabrics. Low-cost ideas of getting some material and making different things out of them." Whether it was making use of simple fabrics or reimagining everyday household items like bed sheets—"And watching them engage really just like shows you that you can have a bit of fun with like a bed sheet," said another parent—the event provided a springboard for creative play in the home learning environment that doesn't have to break the bank. There was also a recurring theme of imaginative play. As one parent said, "Yeah, cause at home, if I did something like that...But yeah, having soft things that you don't hit each other with but you use it in different ways, like imaginative ways, it is good." The event affirmed the power of simple materials to enrich a range of imaginative activities.

In summary, the park event served as a fun day out and a treasure trove of ideas for parents keen to enrich their children's play experiences through art. From introducing new materials like lycra to rethinking the use of existing spaces and household items, the event was a reminder that creativity in children's play often requires little more than a fresh perspective.



"I think the energy of the people, the enthusiasm and the energy of the people doing it."

What did you (as the adult) enjoy about the performance/play?

"Just smiling, watching the kids play. It was lovely."
"I love Kate Bush, so it's always great to hear Kate Bush as a soundtrack."
"I think the energy of the people, the enthusiasm and the energy of the people doing it."
"It feels like it's quite magical under the tree."

The event offered various experiences for the children and the adults in attendance. From the carefully chosen music to the imaginative use of space and materials, parents found different elements to appreciate and enjoy. Many parents expressed sheer joy in simply watching their children engage with the performance and installations. "Just smiling, watching the kids play. It was lovely," said one parent, capturing the sentiment of simple joy that seeing one's child happy can bring. It wasn't just about the children having fun but also about the adults getting a unique pleasure from watching them explore and express themselves. Music played a role in elevating the experience for adults, with some explicitly mentioning their love for the soundtrack that included tracks by Kate Bush. "I love Kate Bush, so it's always great to hear Kate Bush as a soundtrack," one parent said, emphasizing that well-chosen music can enhance not just the kids' experience but also the adults' enjoyment.

The energy and enthusiasm of the performers were another highlight for the grown-ups. "I think the energy of the people, the enthusiasm and the energy of the people doing it," remarked one parent, appreciating the dedication and passion that went into making the event a success. Then there was the setting itself, with one parent commenting: "It feels like it's quite magical under the tree."



What stood out the most for families was the holistic experience—how different elements came together to create a comprehensive, enriching event. "I think it's really lovely so far. The music definitely is a real plus; it kind of ties it all in together and is really immersive in that way," another parent said. Many adults also admired how the event was structured, allowing for a wide range of engagement levels—from full participation to simply observing. "It's pitched very well, so even little ones or older ones can all enjoy it, and it's nice for the adults to sit down and enjoy it as well," one parent said, appreciating the event's inclusivity.

The performance and play installations were more than just a day out for the kids. They allowed adults to connect with their children, the community, and even with their inner child. With everything from the music and performance energy to the magical setting, the event served as a joyful experience that transcended age.

Just smiling, watching the kids play. It was lovely."

What do you think your child liked about the performance? Have they communicated anything to you about the experience?

"I think engaging with the dancers, she really enjoyed that."

"I think it was the use of the Lycra and the music. I think they really liked that."

"Watching performances, she really likes watching and she doesn't usually just sit and watch something."

"Yeah, but I mean my little daughter said: they're very talented"

Children have their unique ways of engaging with the world around them, and the performance and play installation proved to be a versatile platform for their varying fascinations and preferences. Many parents were keen observers of what their children particularly enjoyed during the event.

For some kids, the dancers were a highlight. "I think engaging with the dancers, she really enjoyed that," one parent shared. The opportunity to watch and interact with the performers resonates with children who love active involvement. The dancers weren't just distant figures on the stage but became relatable entities for the children, inviting them to become part of the performance. Material and music were also big hits among the small attendees. "I think it was the use of the lycra and the music.

I think they really liked that," said another parent. The tactile experience of the lycra, combined with the music, provided a sensory-rich environment that captured the children's imagination.



"Watching performances, she really liked watching, and she doesn't usually just sit and watch something,"



Surprisingly for some parents, the event also captured the attention of children who aren't usually keen on sitting still. "Watching performances, she really likes watching, and she doesn't usually just sit and watch something," one parent noted. Whether it was the storytelling, the music, or the vibrant colours, the performance managed to hold their fleeting attention spans. It wasn't just the 'what' but also the 'how'—the manner in which the artists engaged with the children—that stood out. "I mean, all the colours, like the people, all the artists and staff are really engaging as well. So that's really helps. Like they've all been really friendly and tried to encourage her to get involved, even when she didn't want to," shared a parent.

And in some heartwarming instances, the children themselves offered their critiques. "Yeah, but I mean, my little daughter said: They're very talented". This remark encapsulates how even the youngest audience members have their perceptions of talent and skill and aren't shy about sharing it.

In summary, from the freedom of interaction to the variety of sensory experiences and the sheer creativity on display, the children found their pockets of joy in the event. In doing so, they also provided their parents a window into their worlds, illuminating what excites them, what holds their attention, and what they consider "very talented."

Overall sentiment and further comments

The overarching sentiment expressed by attendees about the performance and play event was positive. The event engaged children and resonated with adults, highlighting its universal appeal across age groups. "I loved it. It was nice. Yeah, it was good," one attendee summed up their experience, embodying the overall positive sentiment towards the event.

While satisfaction was the general tone, some feedback also hinted at areas for potential expansion and improvement. A recurring comment was that such events should be organized more frequently. "It's really good, and there should be more of that, so yeah," said one parent. Some had attended similar events in the past and hoped for their continuity. "To add, this is very nice, and have this continue. It's like I'm... I'm hoping it happens again next year because it's the second year now," noted one returning attendee. The same person also mentioned that their child had attended workshops previously and remembered specific sensory items, underlining the lasting impact of these experiences.

Regarding the nature of the activities and the setting, one attendee appreciated the focus on natural elements, saying, "It's just very natural like it's not all big toys. It's literally just bits of natural stuff like the cloth and the twigs and things. And like, it's just all outdoors." This sentiment showcases a collective appreciation for the event's alignment with holistic, nature-focused play philosophies.



However, some attendees felt there needed to be more room for improvement in terms of event awareness. "I only heard of it yesterday. So yeah, I don't, I didn't...I don't feel like it was well kind of known. Yeah," said one attendee, highlighting a need for better publicity and information dissemination.

In conclusion, the event was well-received, appreciated, and seen as beneficial for children's exploration and adults' enjoyment. However, attendees did point out that there could be broader outreach and frequency of such enriching activities. The overarching sentiment can be summed up in the words of one satisfied attendee: "The future? Just more. They're just brilliant, just more. That would be great if you can. Obviously, they're free, so they're great for that as well."





Makers of Imaginary Worlds

Nottingham-based company that designs and makes immersive experiences and sensory performances, installations, and storytelling spaces for children 0-10 years. Visit our website for arts and crafts resources and information on our touring installations and performances.



Turned on its Head

A Loughborough based dance company creating life-affirming, immersive, participatory performances and projects for young children under 4 and their families. The company exists to take people on a journey of discovery and imagination that builds relational bonds full of joy.



Roset Hill School Staff Feedback

THE DELIGHTS R&D OUTDOOR ADVENTURES WORKING

This feedback is from the school staff involved with the installation. It illustrates the power that this opportunity had for the children's development in communication, emotional regulation, proprioception and vestibular perception.

The curiosity of the created environment and props offered was immense. **Seeing our youngest children investigate the sounds, textures and cause and effect elements around them was monumental.**

The opportunities for early literacy, communication, early maths, science forces understanding and physical development was boundless and done in such a fun way that the children were engrossed and engaged naturally. To motivate our significantly autistic pupils in such an all-encompassing way was a delight to behold.

Thank you to the creatives and dancers involved. Your understanding of our children and their needs was incredible. Your sensitivity and gentle approach enabled our children to become fully immersed in this wonderful opportunity and gave our staff excellent ideas to take forward.

WHAT THE STAFF SAID:

- "The children absolutely loved it. When can we go again?"
- "He's so involved (child) I've never seen him make eye contact for so long."
- "It's great to see the engagement!"
- "The children were so calm when they came back, it really supported their wellbeing."
- "This is a great way for the children to learn self-regulation".
- From a teacher in the Upper school- "When is it our turn? This looks amazing. X would thrive in this space."
- "This needs to be a permanent installation for our children".
- "He's never smiled this much!"
- "It was great to see their confidence grow through the session and their curiosity develop."
- "The trust that developed between the children and the dancers was so special, a real joy to see."
- "The opportunities for communication development are endless - what an amazing opportunity for our children".
- "Perfect for intensive communication interaction!"