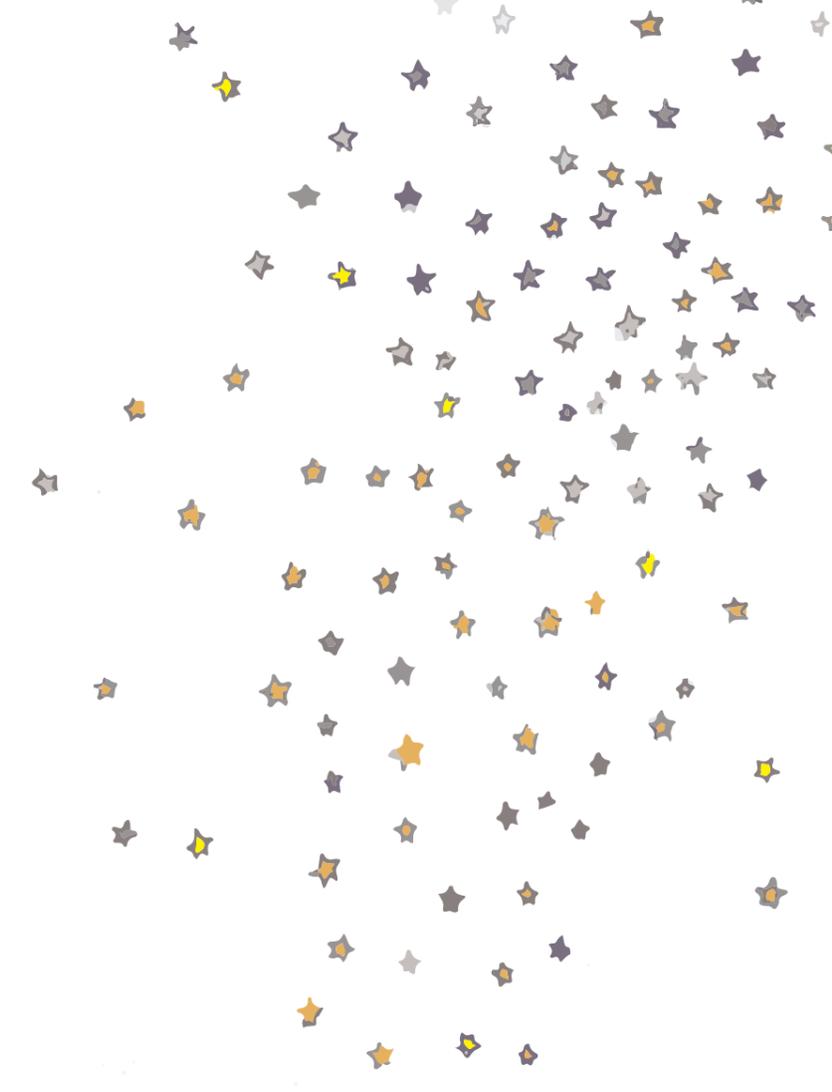


2016-2018: A REVIEW

Exploring & Thinking

A Collaborative Framework for Early Childhood Arts
Provision by Local Authorities in the Dublin Region





Exploring & Thinking:
**A Collaborative Framework for Early
Childhood Arts Provision by Local
Authorities in the Dublin Region**

Submitted by



November 2018

Cover image:
Illustration by Beth O'Halloran

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Executive Summary

Exploring and Thinking, a collaborative framework for early childhood arts in the Dublin region, came about in 2016, when the four Dublin Local Authorities partnered for the first time to collectively consider early childhood arts provision in the Dublin region. Prior to this the Local Authorities in Fingal, Dublin City and Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown had established local early childhood arts programmes with a focus on practice, partnership and policy. South Dublin had identified early childhood arts provision as an area for development in the future.

The project partners made a successful application for Arts Council funding under the ***Invitation to Collaboration Scheme 2016***. The joint proposal focused on commissioning and touring new artwork to the four Local Authority areas with local engagement programmes, in arts and non-traditional arts venues.

An international call for applications was published and 32 responses were received. Five applications were shortlisted and funded to further develop their proposal for presentation at interview. The *Exploring and Thinking* framework culminated in the commissioning of two unique projects:

- » **Anna Newell, *I Am Baba* - A new immersive theatre piece for babies aged 0-12 months. A full commission for the development, creation and tour of *I Am Baba* to the four Local Authority areas.**
- » **Helen Barry and Eamon Sweeney, *Sculptunes* - A modular interactive music-producing sculpture. A research and development commission, which supported the artists to develop one piece of the original six-piece *Sculptunes* proposal and test this musical sculpture with children and early childcare practitioners.**

Over the course of the commission and implementation of *Exploring and Thinking*, the project partners documented developments to facilitate a review of the process, outputs and impacts of the collaborative framework. Additional research was conducted among the artists and key personnel in the partner Local Authorities through interviews and gathering written feedback.

Some key learnings emerged for project partners: the value of pooling resources, sharing experience and contacts, and working collaboratively to achieve enhanced outcomes. The importance of strong local partnerships with early childhood service providers and non-traditional arts venues in terms of delivery of early childhood arts, particularly with under-served audiences was highlighted.

Supporting artists to engage in a developmental process with the target audience, or in an early childhood setting, was very beneficial as it provided access to feedback from parents and childcare professionals and a range of insights to inform practice.

It became apparent that creating the optimum conditions for people to relax and engage is key to meeting the needs of an early childhood audience. Allowing children to interact with the commissions in their own time and on their own terms and making parents or early childhood educators feel welcome and at ease is very important when working in early childhood settings.

Audience feedback about *I Am Baba* was very positive and over half of those surveyed at shows in Fingal were new to attending arts events with their babies. At least half of those audience members surveyed in Fingal and South Dublin lived locally.

The project partners identified a number of key areas worthy of development and had recommendations to enhance future commissions relating to:

- » Sustaining and developing the partnership and collaboration through further joint commissioning, artist development, and communicating jointly with relevant sectors.
- » Developing a local network of non-traditional arts venues for delivery of early childhood arts to diverse audiences.
- » Working together to build capacity for early childhood arts through research on barriers for artists and development of a wider range of art forms.
- » Working together to enhance supports for artists and build capacity for early childhood arts through a range of measures, including professional development opportunities and mentoring.
- » Using the research and development awards model to support new artists to enter into early childhood arts practice and support existing practitioners in early childhood arts to develop practice and collaboration.
- » Considering more formal mentorship arrangements for research & development awards.
- » Continuing collaboration with new local stakeholders such as family agencies who were engaged with early childhood arts on foot of the programme.
- » Engaging a project manager/coordinator to work with Local Authorities to ensure consistency across the partnership and support commissioned and awarded artists going forward.



1

Introduction

I Am Baba
Image: Maxwell Photography



***Exploring and Thinking* is a collaborative framework for early childhood arts in the Dublin region, developed in partnership by South Dublin County Council, Fingal County Council, Dublin City Council, and Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council. The framework is funded under the Arts Council's Invitation to Collaboration Scheme 2016.**

Exploring and Thinking came about in 2016, when the four Dublin Local Authorities partnered for the first time to collectively consider early childhood arts provision in the Dublin region. Prior to this the Local Authorities in Fingal, Dublin City and Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown had established local early childhood arts programmes with a focus on practice, partnership and policy. South Dublin had identified early childhood arts provision as an area for development in the future.

The *Exploring and Thinking* framework culminated in the commissioning of two unique projects;

- » *I Am Baba* by Anna Newell
- » *Sculptunes* by Helen Barry and Eamon Sweeney

Throughout the commissioning and implementation process a range of data was gathered by early childhood arts specialist Lali Morris, a review of which is the subject of this report.

The methodology for review, and the background and context for the collaboration are detailed in Sections 2 and 3 respectively.

The application process and an overview of the applications received is set out in section 4.

Section 5 details the successful proposals and the commissioning and implementation process.

Stakeholder feedback from Local Authorities, artists and audiences involved in the successful commission and an analysis of impact themes are set out in Section 6.



2

Methodology



Over the course of the commission and implementation of *Exploring and Thinking* the project partners documented developments to facilitate a review of the process, outputs and impacts of the collaborative framework.

Additional research was conducted among the artists and key personnel in the partner Local Authorities by Lali Morris, through interviews and gathering written feedback.

All data gathered and documentation (including the funding application, commission briefing and guidance materials, records of the application and selection process, and audience feedback surveys) were compiled and supplied to the report writer for review and analysis, along with guidelines on the desired report structure.



3

Background & Context

Project origins & context

In 2016 the four Dublin Local Authorities (Fingal, Dublin City, Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown and South Dublin) partnered for the first time to collectively consider early childhood arts provision in the Dublin region. An application to the Arts Council for funding under the *Invitation to Collaboration Scheme 2016* (category of Young People, Children and Education) was made, based on a common belief that collectively the partners could:

...build greater support structures for artists practicing in early childhood across the region as well as increasing opportunities for the public that wish to engage with and participate in this underdeveloped area of the arts.

Through *Exploring and Thinking - A Collaborative Framework for Early Childhood Arts in the Dublin Region*, the four Dublin Local Authorities collaborated to:

- » Produce and manage an international early childhood arts commission of ambition, scale and depth.
- » Test a Local Authority partnership model that combines resources and services to develop ambitious new work with a touring capacity for audience and context influenced engagement.
- » To challenge and advance current provision.

In describing the policy context for the project in the application to the Arts Council, the project partners referenced the following:

- » The needs identified in the Arts Council's *Making Great Art Work, Leading the Development of the Arts in Ireland (2016-2025)*¹, and specifically the intention to:
...make children and young people a key focus of our relationship with local government.
- » The existing national research by the Arts Council available in *Early Childhood Arts, Three Perspectives*².
- » The manner in which the planned public engagement phase of the project was informed by the international philosophical approach of Reggio Emilia, with a particular emphasis on 'the child as constructor of their own learning' and 'the environment as the third teacher'.

Early childhood arts services provision by Local Authorities in the Dublin region

Each of the four Local Authorities involved in the development of *Exploring and Thinking* were at different stages of development in early childhood practice and provision, ranging from initiation to advanced stages, when the initial funding application was made to the Arts Council in 2016. Some of the initiatives with which the partners were engaged included: residencies with artists working in early childhood settings with children as co-creators; development of early years workshops to respond to exhibitions in gallery settings; and an international early childhood arts festival with a programme of events for both children and professionals in the early childhood sector.

To provide context for the commissioning process the supporting documentation describes the partners' existing early childhood programmes (at that time), as outlined in Appendix 1.

1 Making Great Art Work, Leading the Development of the Arts in Ireland (2016-2025)
http://www.artscouncil.ie/uploadedFiles/Making_Great_Art_Work.pdf

2 Early Childhood Arts, Three Perspectives, The Arts Council (2013)
<http://www.creativeeuropeireland.eu/content/resources/24.%20EarlyChildhoodArts.pdf>

Project aims

The *Exploring and Thinking* proposal focused on commissioning new artwork and touring this work to the four Local Authority areas with local engagement programmes, in arts and non-traditional arts venues. It was intended that the commission would:

Offer artists an opportunity to:

- » Create new ambitious large scale work for early childhood audiences with the potential to tour and present in different contexts, e.g festival, gallery, library.
- » Reflect on practice collectively with other artists and educators.
- » Reflect on context-influenced engagement.
- » Establish relationships with multiple Local Authorities and early years organisations.

Offer Local Authorities an opportunity to:

- » Stimulate dialogue between the Dublin Local Authorities.
- » Test a partnership approach to delivery in the region.
- » Share resources to deliver ambitious high quality work.
- » Build on current research investigating practice across artforms / professional disciplines / contexts.
- » Support the development of new work in early childhood.
- » Generate advocacy in early childhood arts.
- » Reach new early childhood audiences.

Project outputs

The following outputs were described:

- » A new artwork toured to various venues and early childhood contexts in the Dublin region.
 - » A Local engagement programme in each locality to increase public participation and understanding in early childhood arts among the partners.
 - » Evaluation of the collaborative framework.
-

Project timeline

The project partners, informed by their collective experience, made an application to the Arts Council's first iteration of the *Invitation to Collaboration Scheme*, and an award was granted to deliver the following commissioning process:

Table 1. Commissioning process timeline

| Date | Activity |
|--------------------------|---|
| June 2016 | Application submitted to the Arts Council. |
| August 2016 | Award announced. |
| September / October 2016 | Brief and support material developed and circulated internationally. |
| November 2016 | Presentation and discussion of brief https://vimeo.com/191148439 |
| January / February 2017 | Selection panel convenes for shortlisting and interviews. Deadline for submissions, 28 January 2017. Interviews held, 8 February 2017. Successful applicants notified, 15 February 2017. |
| February 2017 | Two commissions awarded: <i>I Am Baba</i> , full award. <i>Sculptunes</i> , research and development award to be delivered in 2017. |
| February - December 2017 | Delivery of commissions in full, both documented. |
| January 2018 | Evaluation data gathered from all stakeholders. |
| March 2018 | Evaluation report to be written. |



4

Application Process

In autumn 2016 a briefing document and a supporting document were developed by the project partners and circulated internationally through the following networks:

<http://www.assitej-international.org/en/>

<http://www.smallsize.org/>

<http://tyai.ie/>

<http://artsineducation.ie>

The context was outlined in a supporting document which detailed examples of previous work in early childhood arts in the Dublin region carried out by the Local Authorities and other stakeholders.

Stated objectives of commission

For the purposes of the application process the stated objectives of the commission were outlined as follows:

- » Support artistic ambition in the research and development of new work in early childhood which can be presented in different contexts – including festival, professional arts space, library and childcare settings.
- » Reach new early childhood audiences.
- » Stimulate dialogue between the Dublin Local Authorities, and with artists, early childhood educators and organisations.
- » Build on current research investigating practice across artforms and professional disciplines/ contexts.
- » Consider how engagement with audiences may be influenced by the presentation of the commission in different contexts.
- » Generate advocacy in early childhood arts.

Criteria for proposals

- » Open to individuals, collectives, organisations or companies in Ireland or abroad (open to collaborative approaches).
- » Audience includes children, parents and early childhood educators.
- » Open to all artforms.
- » Capacity to present within each of the four Local Authority areas over the course of an agreed delivery schedule.
- » Suitable to perform/showcase in a variety of contexts including festival, professional arts space, library and childcare settings. This element will need to be flexible and responsive to each Local Authority programme.
- » Budget of between €20,000 and €50,000 inclusive of VAT, full production costs and all other associated costs including the presentation of work in each Local Authority area.

Public presentation of brief

A briefing on the project was presented during a Dublin City Council Arts Office Development Day at the LAB, Dublin 1, on 3 November 2016. A panel consisting of representatives of the Arts Offices of the four Dublin Local Authorities presented the brief to interested arts practitioners. This involved a question and answer session, which clarified a range of points including the following:

- » The partners' collective priority was to build a partnership based on open dialogue to provide the commissioned artist(s) with support to create ambitious works of art and to further public engagement with the commission.
- » Through the commission the partners wanted to strengthen their respective work in each Local Authority area, while also supporting the development of new artwork. It was envisaged that an exchange of expertise and resources would take place between the Local Authorities, artists and early childhood sector.
- » The completed work could potentially travel outside of Ireland.
- » The target age group for the commission was children aged 0-5 years.
- » Although resources did not stretch to reach out to every early childhood setting or child during the lifetime of this commission, it was intended that the experience and learning be shared via an evaluation piece, public exchange, the arts-in-education portal, and partners' respective websites and communities.

Applications by artforms and geographical spread

Phase 1

In total 32 applications were received: 20 from Ireland; six from other countries including South Africa, Lithuania, Russia, Scotland and France. Six applicants did not provide details of their location at the time of applying.

Art Forms

Visual Arts 35%
 Theatre 31%
 Dance 6%
 Multi Disciplinary 22%
 Multimedia 3%
 Music/Sound 3%

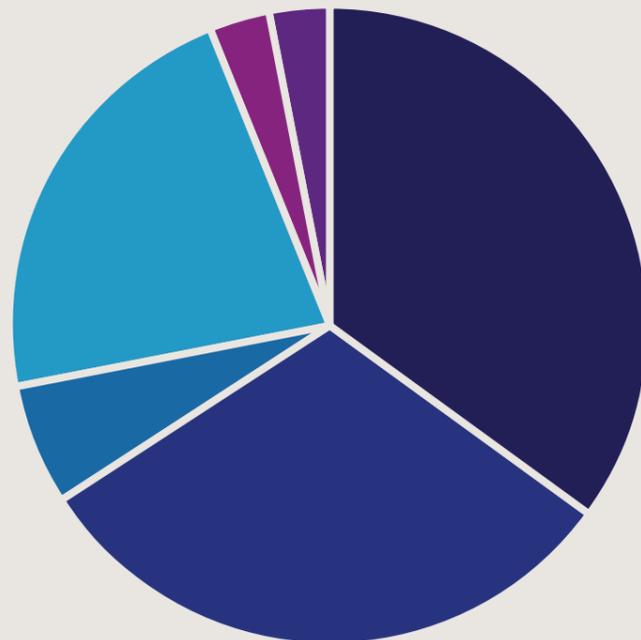


Table 2. Applications by art form and geographical spread

| Artform | International |
|---|-----------------------------|
| Theatre and Visual Art | Lithuania |
| Visual Art | France |
| Theatre | Russia |
| Visual and Performance | Scotland |
| Theatre | South Africa (2) |
| | Ireland |
| Theatre (3), Multidisciplinary (2), Visual Arts (4) | Dublin (9) |
| Theatre, Visual Arts, Multimedia Theatre | Galway (3) |
| Dance | Kildare (1) |
| Visual Music | Kilkenny (1) |
| Visual Arts | Mayo (1) |
| Visual Arts | Sligo (1) |
| Theatre | Tipperary (1) |
| Theatre | Wicklow (1) |
| Performing Arts | Cavan (1) |
| Music Sound | Cork (1) |
| | Unspecified location |
| Dance | - |
| Visual Arts (2) | - |
| Theatre | - |
| Multidisciplinary/multisensory (2) | - |

Phase 2

Five applications were shortlisted and awarded €500 each to further develop their proposal for presentation at interview. A framework of questions was used to explore:

- » Their inspiration for the piece.
- » The work's contribution in terms of understanding of children and their engagement with the arts.
- » The work's contribution in terms of children's sense of identity and belonging, and supporting communicating, exploring and thinking (the themes of Aistear³).
- » The challenges of developing the work and producing it in different contexts.
- » The impact of the proposal on the artist's own practice, and on early childhood arts in the Dublin region, in the context of existing programmes.
- » How the commission would generate advocacy for the early childhood arts sector.

Applicants were invited to give examples of previous commissions of a similar scale.

Phase 2 Selection Criteria

- » Artistic merit and distinctiveness of the proposal (40 marks)
- » Perceived ability to realise the commission within the budget and timeframe allocated (30 marks)
- » Suitability and responsiveness of the proposal for presenting within the four Dublin Local Authorities (30 marks)

³ Aistear, the NCCA's Early Childhood Curriculum Framework celebrates early childhood as a time of being, and of enjoying and learning from experiences as they unfold.



5

Award & Implementation of Commissions

Successful proposals

Two proposals were selected to proceed to the commissioning stage:

- » Anna Newell, *I Am Baba* - A new immersive theatre piece for babies aged 0-12 months. Full commission for the development, creation and tour of *I Am Baba*.
 - » Helen Barry & Eamon Sweeney, *Sculptunes* - A modular interactive music-producing sculpture. Research and development commission, which supported the artists to develop one piece of the original six-piece *Sculptunes* proposal and test this musical sculpture with children and early childcare practitioners in a crèche of the artists' choosing.
-

Image: Taken at Draíocht, Blanchardstown by Neil Harrison.



I Am Baba by Anna Newell

I Am Baba is a new, immersive theatre piece for babies aged 0-12 months, which was developed in collaboration by artists Anna Newell, David Goodall (Musical Director), Judy Kay (Costume Designer) and Jen Shepherd (Designer). *I Am Baba* is a mobile and adaptable show for babies and their adults. Anna talks about exploring agency, identity, and personhood for the very young (first year of life) in her artistic approach, which is comprised of live harmony singing, interactive objects, and gentle play with shapes, textures and reflections woven together in a 20-minute show. Development of the show took place for one week in each Local Authority Area, with babies present at rehearsal. *I Am Baba* was a loose title so that the show could be heavily informed by the engagement with its audience.

Anna's work is inspired by Early Years Research Psychologist Dr Suzanne Zeedyk and the neuroscience of the first three years of life, which shows that early experiences influence how the brain is formed and impact on well-being throughout life in terms of both physical and mental health. Experiences of the first three years of life influence development of connection and resilience.

...it makes absolute sense to me that if you can make some of those experiences lyrical and magical and creative then that is a good thing.

I Am Baba is a piece of art, underpinned by neuroscience, modeling good parenting and speech language development therapy. It opens up conversations for parents on topics such as attachment theory, singing, or reading to their baby, and facilitates parents sharing a beautiful, relaxed, connected moment with their baby.

For me the shows are all about connection. And all the little objects that we use in the shows are a conduit of communication between the performer and the baby rather than a lovely object in itself...we are working with the performers to make sure that they are listening in every possible way. Visually, orally, kinaesthetically.

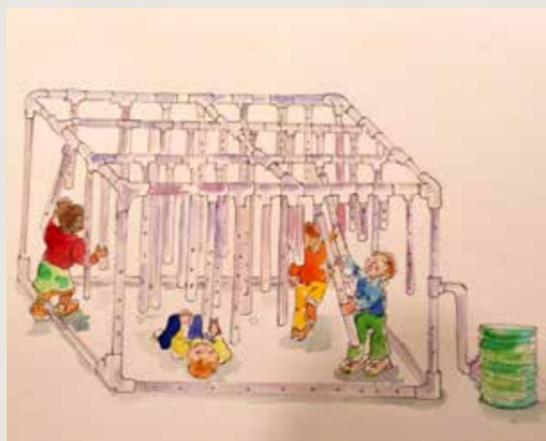
Anna sees her job as creating optimum conditions for communication between baby and parent. The artists and performers work to create a distraction-free environment, where parents feel relaxed and safe. Anna feels that employing simple strategies that are sensitive to the needs of the parent is a fundamental part of working in an early years setting.

Sculptunes by Helen Barry & Eamon Sweeney

Sculptunes is a modular interactive music-producing sculpture, adaptable in size and suitable for various settings, both indoors and outdoors. It is a safe, interactive and multidisciplinary artwork aimed at pre-school children and comprised of six pieces or modules (boat, sail, buoys, funnel, periscope and propeller) each functioning independently or conjoined.

The main idea behind the installation is to explore music and children's interaction with music using a non-traditional musical structure that provides an opportunity to listen to one's heartbeat or hear the sound in oneself. These are the basics of music and can be explored through discovery and play. Engaging with the *Sculptunes* installation will provide children with an immersive, kinaesthetic, multi-sensory experience in which they can freely interact with and transform the surrounding built and auditory environment. The artists were awarded a commission to research and develop one module of their choice. They selected 'periscope'.

During the development phase the artists sought advice from Associate Professor in Developmental Psychology and Vice-Principal for Teaching and Learning in the UCD College of Social Sciences and Law, Dr Eilis Hennessy, who specialises in child pedagogy. The testing phase was conducted in a Wee-Care crèche.



Drawing of Periscope by Helen Barry



Image of Periscope in progress. Photograph by Helen Barry

Communities and local stakeholder engagement

A range of stakeholders, including venues and local partners organisations operating in the early years sector, were engaged in the implementation of *I Am Baba*. These local partners played a pivotal role in reaching local communities and presenting early childhood arts in non-traditional settings.

Table 4. Local partners and venues

| Local Authority | Venues | Local partner organisations |
|-------------------------------|--|--|
| Dublin City | October 2017 Development week with 3 public sharings in The Bell Building, Darndale/Belcamp 3 shows at FamiliBase, Ballyfermot, Dublin 10 3 shows at The Bell Building Darndale/Belcamp Village Centre Dublin 17 3 shows at the National College of Ireland | Dublin City Partnership Preparing for Life, Northside Partnership Family Matters, Ballyfermot Chapelized Partnership Early Learning Initiative, National College of Ireland |
| Fingal | October 2017 Development week with 6 developmental sessions and 3 shows, Draíocht Arts Centre, Blanchardstown 3 shows, Flemington Community Centre, Balbriggan 3 Shows, Liam Rodgers Centre, Swords | Fingal Partnership Draíocht Arts Centre, Blanchardstown The Liam Rodgers Community Centre, Swords Flemington Community Centre, Balbriggan |
| South Dublin | September - October 2017 2 developmental sessions, 1 informal sharing session and 3 shows at the Civic Theatre. 1 development session at Clondalkin Healthy House, Neilstown 3 shows, Quarryvale Community Centre 3 shows, Ballyroan Library | Civic Theatre, Tallaght South Dublin Partnership South Dublin Libraries Quarryvale Community and Leisure Centre |
| Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown | October 2017 2 developmental sessions, Mounttown Community Centre 3 shows, DLR LexIcon 3 shows, Samuel Beckett Civic Campus 1 developmental session and 3 shows, Shanganagh Park House | Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown Partnerships DLR 0-3s Parenting Support Initiative Southside Partnership Barnardos Cottage Home Shanganagh Mounttown Early Years Service Ballyogan Family Resource Centre |

Publicity and Promotional materials

Prior to the development sessions promotional material was created in order to gain buy-in from local organisations and potential participants with clear descriptions as to what would happen at the sessions. This was then distributed by local services, particularly focusing on under-served audiences to provide parents and babies with opportunities to engage with the arts.

Sample flyer from development stage in Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council.

A flyer and a poster were used to assist in promotion of the *I Am Baba* show. Each Local Authority produced a version of the materials with details of venues and dates of performances (See Appendix 3).

Sample publicity poster from Fingal County Council for performances.

I AM BABA



Mounttown Community Centre

Wednesday 27 Sept
Times: 10.30 & 11.30am
Contact Laura Baker,
Childcare Manager for more info

TWY: created by Anna Newell in collaboration with David Goodall. Designed by Jen Shesherd (all photos by Neil Hemmant)

Would you like to try something different with your baby?

Anna Newell and her team are making a show especially for babies in your local area. The show is very interactive and so the performers need to practice working with babies, she would like to invite you and your baby to help them.

What will happen at this session?

Everyone will sit on the floor on soft blankets in a circle with their shoes off. The performers will sit in the circle and will sing lovely harmony songs and gently play with your babies.

All you need to do is sit back and relax!

It will last about 15 minutes and if you'd like to stay around for a bit afterwards to tell us about how your baby responded, that would be great!

It's very relaxed – and if your baby cries or needs to go out and then come back in again, that's fine, or if you need to feed, that's all totally fine.

I AM BABA is commissioned under **Exploring and Thinking: A Collaborative Framework for Early Childhood Arts in the Dublin region**. **Exploring and Thinking** is an initiative generated in partnership by Fingal County Council, Dublin City Council, South Dublin County Council and Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council.

Funded under the Arts Council's Invitation to Collaboration Scheme 2016.

Supported locally by DLR 0-3s Parenting Support Initiative, Southside Partnership, Barnardos, Cottage Home Shanganagh, Mountown Early Years Service and Ballyogan Family Resource Centre.

I am baba

I am baba is a beautiful new piece of theatre for babies aged 0-12 months.

October 10 - 14th, 16th and 21st



Comhairle Contae
Fhine Gall
Fingal County Council



6

Stakeholder Feedback

Local Authority partners' reflections and feedback

Key staff from the Arts Offices at the four Local Authorities were asked to reflect on the experience of collaborating to commission and deliver *Exploring and Thinking International Early Childhood Arts Commission*, and their feedback is summarised below. Perceived strengths and challenges of the collaborative way of working to develop practice in early childhood arts were identified. The partners were also asked to reflect and give their views on areas worthy of development and recommendations to enhance future commissions.

Image: *I Am Baba*, Maxwell Photography



Strengths

Benefits of collaboration and partnership

The project partners outlined a variety of benefits to this model of collaborative commissioning in early childhood arts as follows.

- » The financial benefit of coming together to pool resources and apply to the Arts Council provided a larger budget than individual partners would have access to and resulted in enhanced ambition, development opportunities and outputs.
 - *There is strength in numbers, at a basic level we would never have the amount of funding that the collaboration allowed us to work with to develop this area of practice*
 - *Greater resources allow greater ambition e.g. development week in each area, production value and cast numbers.*
 - *Opportunity to take risks and to be ambitious in scale.*
 - *The Arts Council funding provided an opportunity for the four LA's to be ambitious in commissioning new work for an early years audience on a scale never before afforded to the Local Authorities within early years programming.*

- » Provided enhanced support for artists in terms of scale of funding and support available. The initial award of funding for the shortlisted applicants was welcomed, and the support and funding for research & development for both successful projects was deemed important.
 - *I think the development award allowed them time to test it out and see what the potential and pitfalls are in developing this kind of work.*
 - *Increased support for artists.*

- » Supported and facilitated collaboration across art forms.
 - *...young children do not distinguish between artforms and so providing time and space for artists to collaborate across artforms allows for a more holistic child-centred approach.*

- » Provided space to engage in the process of working together, sharing collective knowledge, experience and practice in early childhood arts and approaches to local partnerships.
 - *Initially, we got time to share our practice in early childhood arts within our local context. This is rare... time to share this expertise and reflect that in the development of a strong project proposal, with a feasible pathway for implementation, was a very valuable process in itself.*
 - *...this collaboration between the four Local Authorities really gave us a chance to hear what way other Local Authorities are developing in this area of work and what partners they are working with etc. This was informative and useful.*
 - *Each Local Authority benefits from hearing the experience of the others in delivery and partnership-building, while concentrating on their own needs from a practical point of view.*

- » **Working collectively allowed a focus on the broader picture.**
 - By agreeing a shared approach to commissioning for a sector with multiple potential contexts, each Local Authority can to some extent pull back from the specifics of very localised need in the conceptual stage.
- » **Building a foundation for potential for sustained collaboration by the Local Authorities.**
 - The process of regular communication across region (between Local Authorities), for common purpose, encourages future sharing of opportunities/networks – builds the potential for deeper partnership over time.
 - Established good personal relationships across Local Authorities.
- » **Positive effect on longevity of impact.**
 - We then had time to consider how best to ‘embed’, rather than ‘land’ contemporary arts practice into a community environment.

Increased engagement with artists, audiences and local partners

- » **The partnership of the four Local Authorities resulted in the original brief reaching a wide audience of creative practitioners promptly. The ‘net was cast wider’ with positive results.**
 - Responses to the Brief and public sharing event introduced the Local Authorities to artists and companies internationally that they otherwise would not have known, illuminating the early years scene for each Local Authority.
- » **A more diverse audience was reached, through the channels and venues available to the partners collectively.**
 - Each Local Authority has / or made unique local connections with local venues, communities and agencies, resulting in ‘I Am Baba’ having a diverse audience.
 - Opportunity to extend the reach of programmes in a focused way.
- » **Local relationships with stakeholders in the early childhood sector, which were central to delivery of the project in non-traditional arts settings, were enhanced and developed.**
 - When the placement for ‘I Am Baba’ was being proposed, Dublin City Council Arts Office was developing and implementing an early childhood arts CPD programme through the Dublin City Council’s Children’s Art in Libraries programme and Northside Partnership/Preparing for Life. ‘I Am Baba’ offered a further quality arts opportunity to this programme while also highlighting arts practice for a targeted age group of 0-12 months. The programme had not yet explored arts experiences for this age group.
 - Relationships at local level of provision of early childhood settings – existing and aspirational – were a key strength for us to bring to this project. But this also takes time to develop.
 - Provided an opportunity to work with the Area Based Childhood Programmes⁴ (ABCs) and to scope and develop an enhanced understanding of these organisations and the many, sometimes fragmented, services operating at local level.

4. The Area-Based Childhood (ABC) Programme aims to improve outcomes for children, young people and their families in some of the most disadvantaged areas of the country. The programme has a particular emphasis on improving health, educational and social outcomes for children and young people, and on improving the effectiveness of existing services for them.

...the opportunity to ‘get to know’ the ABC was valuable in terms of building a more co-ordinated approach to this work in the future.

- Relationships with those working in the early childhood sector have been of great importance to Fingal Arts Office as we aim to build on our early childhood arts festival, and our developmental arts programme that includes CPD for educators within crèche settings. ‘I Am Baba’ offered an opportunity to reach out, connect again, and connect anew with those specifically working within this nuanced sector and engage with the 0-12 month age group that was not a focus of our work previously.

- » **Capacity was built within local early childhood providers for supporting early childhood arts at community level.**
 - The ABC partnerships offer a coordinated, neighbourhood-specific service, and are a valuable structure in terms of positioning arts practice in specific communities. ‘I Am Baba’ opened the door and allowed the artist to prepare the home visitor staff who support the local community, for recruiting local families when the tour arrived...
 - The ABC and local area partnership offered the opportunity for the Arts Office to engage for the first time with specific communities.
- » **The programme increased the profile of Early Years Arts in the region.**
 - Very few of the organisations/service providers were familiar with creative work for babies. ‘I Am Baba’ has certainly increased not only the profile of this work but has also created possibilities to share/develop work of this nature in the future.
- » **The programme offered an example of quality early childhood arts provision in line with local policies and County / City arts plans.**
 - In terms of Dublin City Arts Office Arts, Education and Learning Policy, The Early Childhood Arts Commission has offered a concrete example to evidence the action list set out and passed by Council in November 2016.
 - Early childhood arts provision within Fingal’s Youth & Education Programme and the upcoming Arts Plan 2018 - 2025 is a policy priority going forward, this programme advocates on behalf of and advances our work in this area.
 - The current Arts Plan 2016 - 2020 in Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County identifies that access to the cultural life of the County is a key priority for all, regardless of age or circumstance. Access to early childhood arts forms part of the targets set out in the plan.
 - South Dublin County Council Arts Development Strategy 2016 - 2020’s commitment is to provide opportunities for children and young people to explore their creative potential and expand their experience of the arts.
- » **The artists themselves were regarded as a strength of the programme.**
 - [Artist] has a very clear idea of where [they] position [their] practice. This complemented what we were seeking to unpack – artists in non-traditional community spaces... has a significant amount of touring production and project management expertise... hit the ground running and [their] energy really pushed us to keep the project moving forward.

Challenges

Most of the challenges identified by the project partners related to the logistical challenges of working collaboratively, from within different organisations at different locations, such as time constraints and communication.

- » Diverse work practices, different agendas and broad work programmes of partners required time, compromise and travel.
 - Commissioning in partnership requires greater time spent on communication (internal and external) and final agreement throughout each stage of a delivery process.
 - Local Authorities by their nature are extremely busy organisations, and all partners are located in different geographical locations throughout Dublin.
 - Communication was reliant heavily on email contact. On occasion a meeting face to face could not be arranged due to one Local Authority unable to travel to another.
 - Time management and time travelling for meetings required a lot of consideration.

 - » Aspects of project management and coordination were challenging e.g. clarifying structures, roles and processes.
 - Establishing structures and processes to facilitate collaboration.
 - Details can get overlooked where there is a lack of clarity around roles.
 - When roles are split, it can be more difficult to ensure overall command of the project's processes (particularly as each Local Authority will have different calendar stress points).
 - Difficult to coordinate meetings.

 - » It was important to manage expectations created among stakeholders as a result of attempting to bring artistic work into non-traditional arts settings.
 - This is a tricky balance to communicate without raising major expectations beyond the resources that exist for the project.
-

Areas worthy of development

- » Sustain and develop partnership and collaboration through further commissioning, artists' support opportunities and communicating jointly with early childhood educators and the health and well-being sectors.
 - *The sharing of resources and knowledge among the Local Authorities was most useful and worthy of further opportunities to allow this level of exchange to occur. ...a larger scale commission than this would push everybody to be more ambitious for this practice. It is feasible especially if the partnership and complementary resources had potential to grow with the Arts Council.*

 - » Develop a network of non-traditional arts venues for delivery of early childhood arts to diverse audiences.
 - *To reflect on the development of a relationship with venues, public spaces, libraries, crèches, museums etc to inform strategic approaches to early childhood arts, support future partnerships and encourage diversity in these venues.*

 - » Work together to build capacity for early childhood arts through research on barriers for artists and development of a wider range of artforms.
 - *Investigate the barriers for artists making work for an early years audience – how can we encourage and support more artists to engage?*
 - *A lot of the applications were theatre based ...It would be interesting to explore the development of other artforms, and collaborations.*

 - » Work together to enhance supports for artists and build capacity for early childhood arts through a range of measures including CPD opportunities and mentoring.
 - *Most of us are all working with similar artists (the pool is still relatively small) it would be interesting to work on some mentoring for artists that would like to work in this area.*
 - *Artist /Educators training opportunities.*

 - » Use the development awards model to support new artists to enter into early childhood arts practice and support existing practitioners in early childhood arts to develop practice and collaboration.
 - *Development commissions, smaller scale commissions, and/or the possibility of mentorships through more ambitious commissioning process could be considered – these might be developed on a regional basis?*
 - *I think the 'Development Award' is worth further consideration and could be a feasible outcome for the four Local Authorities to explore. In order to support new artists to enter into early childhood arts practice and test their ideas. Also, to support artists with existing early childhood arts practices to take risks and try out new ideas and collaborations.*
-

Recommendations to enhance future commissions

- » The collaboration shows the value of forethought at all stages of conception, development and production in creating a high-quality touring arts experience for very young children, for both arts and non-arts venues.
 - » Outsource communication/public relations.
 - » Apply more robust procedures for PR and publicity materials, development and distribution.
 - » Engage a project manager/coordinator to work with the Local Authorities to ensure consistency throughout partnership.
 - » Continue to develop a network of non-traditional arts venues for delivery of early childhood arts to diverse audiences.
 - *It was also an opportunity to test if there is a demand for Early Years Arts in the County. It has also highlighted the interest of the Civic Theatre in the commissioning and programming for Early Years audiences, which I expect will develop further with funding support from the Arts Office rather than becoming a collaborative partnership.*
 - *What was interesting as well was that the community venues' footfall was just as popular as dlr LexIcon. We would definitely look to work more closely with the community venues in the future will be informed by our newly formed local contacts.*
 - » Continue to collaborate with new local stakeholders such as family agencies who were engaged with early childhood arts on foot of the programme. Strong local partnerships are extremely important for delivery of early childhood arts and lead to greater success in terms of attendance and local buy-in.
 - *We will reconnect with local groups in Fingal who were not previously engaging in early childhood arts but have since expressed an interest in the arts ignited by 'I Am Baba'.*
 - *The development and touring of 'I Am Baba' presented opportunities to develop relationships with community organisations in specific areas to establish a starting point for the development of the Arts Service in that part of the county.*
 - ... *we have had the time and opportunity to work with the early years sector outside of the childcare committees and community childcare settings within the County. We would hope to build on this work in the future in tandem with the new contacts that we made as a result of the collaboration.*
 - » Consider having more formal mentorship arrangements for development commissions.
-

Artists reflections & feedback

Anna Newell, Helen Barry & Eamon Sweeney, the artists involved in *I Am Baba* and *Sculptunes* provided feedback about the process.

Anna Newell, *I Am Baba*

The process and value of partnership and collaboration:

- » The application process was clear and ran to schedule.
- » Working with four partners was more straightforward than anticipated by the artist, as the roles and responsibilities of each were divided and made clear.
- » Partnership, connection and collaboration, both new and existing, with a range of diverse stakeholders in the childhood sector, were key to the success of the project.
- » Local partners are critical to engagement at a community level, particularly among harder to reach audiences, with whom they often have established relationships.
 - *With lots of those new partnerships and connections, I would anticipate (or at least hope) that the project served as an introduction to very early years arts provision from their Local Authority and will be a slow burn to success and further connections.*

The reaction from service providers to the show was also positive:

- *Anna, the director is coming from the perspective of building attachment and neuroscience of the infants' developing brain, but it is done in a really lovely way to introduce the ideas to parents and the babies – it is done through music and sound and use of mirrors and material – it is mesmerising. - Project Leader Southside Partnership.*
- *I have received some great feedback from everyone that took part, I haven't stopped talking about it since Thursday. I have to say the performers did an amazing job at putting every parent at ease and making each performance special for each child. Our team have also got a lot of ideas on adding props to the groups they are involved with, we have already sourced a large mirror to bring to groups. - ABC 0-2 Years Coordinator, Early Learning Initiative, National College of Ireland.*
- » The artist commented on feeling well supported on the ground by the Arts Offices in the four Local Authorities and felt they had a strong connection with the partners as a result of the commission.
 - *I feel very strongly connected to the four Local Authorities following the project and already have had further conversations with individual Arts Officers about future projects. This is really valuable to me.*

» The commissioned show will act as a catalyst for more of this type of work on how parents communicate with their babies; the Civic Theatre has expressed interest in acting as a hub for this sort of work and in hosting a conference. The artist also feels the commission has positioned them well to seek other funding for working with early years audiences.

- In terms of ongoing results, in addition to getting [funding] ACI T&D money for a 6.5 week tour of Ireland this autumn for 'I Am Baba' (in arts venues and also two weeks in health settings), I have recently been delighted to receive substantial Arts Grant Funding which will allow me to create a new show called Baby's First Xmas (with a distinct version for children under 5 with complex needs as well as the version for 0-12 months), to finish a show for 3-6 years started last year called BigKidLittleKid and to take out again a show for children with complex needs that takes place in hydro pools. This was pitched as a programme of work for the under-served audiences that are early years and children with complex needs and was submitted in partnership with Draiocht, the Civic and the Mermaid and each project will play these venues or satellite community venues.

- In terms of establishing myself as an artist in the south (I only arrived in June 2016), the 'I Am Baba' commission was absolutely key and, directly and indirectly was very much part of the journey to this recent successful funding.

The Developmental Phase

- » The development phase was very welcome and seen as a valuable investment given the time spent on applications.
- » The initial development weeks for *I Am Baba* facilitated working with babies to identify objects that were rich as conduits for engaging and communicating the development of a narrative, poem and music around this to create the story of the piece. This phase also allowed performers to learn how to listen, gauge babies' level of engagement and needs and respond accordingly. It also provided logistical insights in terms of performers working with more than one baby while singing complex harmonies.
- » The developmental process facilitated parents giving feedback and making suggestions, which were taken on board by the artist.

...we were using little mirrors and one of the parents came back to me with the suggestion to use a big mirror in the centre. Which now we will have for this production. What I love about it, is that the mirror will be revealed at the end, the babies having seen themselves in the smaller mirrors earlier in the show, then see themselves as part of the group. So, it is about their identity individually and then as part of a group. I love that it was suggested by a parent and that it was a perfect moment to take the suggestion.

Useful learning for future early childhood arts commissions

» The artist was cognisant of the need to develop a flexible model suitable for roll-out in various contexts with various audiences, including some more under-served communities. Creating optimum conditions so people are relaxed and can engage is a key part of producing a show for an early years audience; making people feel welcome and at ease is very important when working in early childhood settings. Being sensitive to the needs of the parents is as important as how the performers engage and connect with the babies. This involves providing clarity about what to expect and using a range of simple strategies to put people at ease e.g. what you'll be asked to do (nothing embarrassing); being able to leave with a crying baby and return; being accommodating and understanding if someone is stressed about parking or the baby needs to be changed.

- I believe that the biggest barriers to access are not financial nor about transport.

Though those two things do play a part, the biggest barriers are about people's perceptions and their fears of what is for them and what is not for them.

- » Having a front of house or liaison person at each venue is valuable, once they are the right person for the role.
 - » Consider running the project in spring or start toward the end of September (a week or two later) when early years services are starting out on their programmes.
-

Helen Barry & Eamon Sweeney, *Sculptunes*, Research & Development and Audience Testing

The following is feedback from the artists on the development of *Sculptunes*.

Prototype Two

Helen and Eamon facilitated structured introductory sessions with each of the seven rooms in Wee Care Day Nurseries, a childcare setting over a period of five weeks commencing in October 2017. The children were aged 4 months to 5 years. Each session was approximately 40 minutes. The lead childcare educator of each room was interviewed directly after each session. Helen finished Prototype Two in direct response to their observations and feedback from the early childcare educators. On completion the piece was left at Wee Care Day Nurseries for the children to engage and play with the piece during self-directed play for a period of three weeks. During this time the early childcare educators observed the children's interaction with the piece and gave feedback to the focus group in December (See Appendix 2 for details).

It was necessary to design and build another piece to further explore the potential of the learning to date and add further interactive elements. It was not possible to modify Prototype Two as it was permanently glued together to ensure the piece was completely safe to leave at the crèche for the observation sessions without the artists present. Whilst on site at the crèche it was rigorously tested by the childcare educators for health and safety reasons. Their feedback was a key factor in the discussions with the insurance company.

Prototype Three

Each prototype was initially built to test the different interactive elements of *Periscope* in a practical and portable manner. In the original design for *Periscope* the piece was to incorporate a bellows type of system similar to that of an organ allowing the flow of air to be constant providing a definite note to be defined by each pipe. This would require foot pedals and Helen devised a valve system to allow each pipe to be played independently of each other. Prototype Three allowed Helen and Eamon to test out the foot-peddle components with the children.

During the testing of Prototype Two it was noted that many of the children did not connect the action of the pump to the sound of the pipes. As an ambition for the piece was to support learning it was essential that the piece itself would provide the instructions to the child rather than being shown by an adult. The 'cause and effect' learning was demonstrated by inserting a transparent pipe filled with sponges. The action of a pump caused the sponges to rise up the pipe providing a visual 'cause and effect' for the child to witness. This new learning could then be applied to the other pumps/pipes that did not have visual links, only audio. Prototype Three also added a wider range of visual elements to challenge and stimulate the children's visual dexterity. It was also made from a slightly larger piping to provide a more solid piece.

Helen and Eamon did not lead structured sessions with Prototype Three. The piece was left in Wee Care Day Nurseries for a period of three weeks to enable each room in the childcare session to interact with it during self-directed playtime.

*- Can't express how good it was... if you were selling it I'd be recommending buying it –
Wee-care childcare professional.*

Helen found working with staff at early childhood settings builds capacity for arts in non-traditional spaces.

*- What I like to see happen in the crèches is see how I can contribute skills to the
crèche workers.*

Future Plans

A lot of parallel interest in *I Am Baba* has grown from the project from other countries and the artist is working with the Civic Theatre in Tallaght on a national tour in autumn. Draíocht in Blanchardstown and The Pavilion Theatre have booked the *I Am Baba* tour for late 2018.

The National Concert Hall has expressed interest in *Sculptunes* for a Teddy Bear's picnic event. *Sculptunes* will also tour in Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown from September to December 2018 to the community settings involved in *I Am Baba* and the local homeless hub, as well as to residential care settings (intergenerational settings).

The two workshops that were part of the *I Am Baba* commission to build capacity in each Local Authority Area will be delivered in dlr via the CYSPC network. One will be delivered in the homeless hub run by Peter McVerry in Monkstown to build the creative play capacity of services working with homeless families with young children, and one for the community-based services that previously engaged in the *I Am Baba* performances in dlr. Between 10 and 25 people will be offered the opportunity to engage in this workshop, and the invitation will also extend to parents in homeless services with young children aged 0-5 years, pending interest and childcare support capacity. Anna will offer ways that parents and services providers can engage with babies, wobblers and toddlers in imaginative play using free or cheap props such as voice, movement, sound, scarves, mirrors and more.

Within the *I Am Baba* follow up workshops there is scope for Fingal Arts Office to deliver professional development workshops for educators which could assist the artist in building on connections initiated within Fingal.

Helen Barry and Eamon Sweeney were invited to exhibit 'Sculptunes' at The LAB Gallery as part of a group show, 'I Slept Like a Stone' (18 June – 19 August 2018), bringing together significant past and current Irish collaborative and socially engaged artworks alongside a selection of recent works commissioned from across Europe through Collaborate Arts Partnership Programme (CAPP) led by Create.

The four Local Authorities would now like to share their experience of commissioning new work for an early childhood audience and its presentation in different contexts (community centres, arts centres, crèche services) and provide a platform for the artists (Anna Newell, Helen Barry and Eamon Sweeney) to share and discuss the development of their research and work with a wider audience. This sharing will take the format of a public seminar aimed at both the early childhood sector, and wider arts sector, in January 2019.

I Am Baba audience feedback

Audience feedback was gathered in Dublin City by the coordinator of the Early Learning Initiative of the National College of Ireland, where the *I Am Baba* development week was hosted by Preparing for Life in the Darndale Belcamp Village Centre. Anecdotal feedback from staff found that families who attended the early test performances were enthusiastic about returning for the touring date and word spread about the nature of the experience.

Audience feedback was gathered in Fingal by way of an informal conversation and an audience survey at developmental sessions and performances of *I Am Baba*. The Youth & Education Officer of Fingal Arts Office met with parents before and after each session during the developmental week in Draíocht in Blanchardstown, and also before and after the performances at the Liam Rodgers Community Centre in Swords and Flemington Community Centre in Balbriggan. Opportunities to talk post-performance enabled parents to describe in more detail what they and their baby had experienced.

In South Dublin feedback was also gathered by way of an audience survey at performances of *I Am Baba*.

In dlr audience surveys were not given out, some oral feedback was gathered, and the Arts Office was given feedback on block bookings which were taken from services with basic information as to where the participants were from and other details. Support was given from local partners and services, for example a play therapist attended with one participant and key workers attended where possible.

Fingal

A total of 57 audience members completed feedback surveys at events in Fingal during October 2017.

- » Babies ranged from 1 to 12 months (some toddlers and older children also attended with siblings).
- » 56% of respondents said their baby had not attended an arts event before.
- » 50% of respondents live locally.
- » 100% would like to attend more early childhood arts events.

The most common ways that people found out about the event were through Draíocht (33%), friends or family (21%), a community centre or group (17%), and social media (Facebook, Whatsapp Mum's group). This underlines the importance of local partners and word of mouth in promoting events to the community at local level.

South Dublin

A total of 45 audience members completed feedback surveys at events in Dublin City.

- » The youngest child was 6 weeks old.
- » 60% of respondents live locally.
- » 100% would like to attend more early years arts events.

The most common ways that people found out about the event were through friends or family (35%), Facebook (15%), the Library (13%) and the public health nurse (9%). Again, this highlights the importance of local partners and word of mouth in promoting events to the community at local level.

When attendees in Fingal were asked how their babies reacted to the show the comments were overwhelmingly positive, with parents reporting babies engaging, paying attention and seeming mesmerised by various elements including the lights, fabric, mirror and tent.

- *Curious, happy, really enjoyed the props.*
- *In awe.*
- *Really enjoyed singing, beautiful, different elements, baby really enjoyed.*
- *Fascinated, hungry now and didn't cry.*
- *Loved it, smiling, interacting with lights and singing.*
- *Moving around inside tent loved the mirror, lovely space and tent structure.*
- *Very positive - really enjoyed elements with lights and fabric.*

Some comments also reflected the parents' own enjoyment and the relaxed atmosphere.

- *Didn't know what to expect, so both really enjoyed it -- sitting on my lap and then lying on the mirror.*
- *Mummy loved it, "My baby will dream about this".*
- *Relaxed environment, baby had mixed reaction to darkness -- needed to get used to it.*
- *First arts event -- will do more.*
- *Calm atmosphere for all.*
- *Great experience for parent and child.*

The social element of meeting and interacting with other babies was also regarded as a positive part of the experience.

- *Loved the whole experience, especially playing and meeting others.*
- *Highly recommend, loved being with other babies.*
- *Laughed throughout, clapped hands, connected with baby across from him.*
- *Loved everything, especially socialising with other children as she is an only child, bringing her to arts events to mix with others has helped her socially.*

Contact and interaction with the artists were also very welcome.

- *Loved the performers, loved the after play, enjoyed every aspect, had one on one contact with performers.*
- *It was beautiful to experience the show together and to see my daughter explore and involve herself in the show. It was a beautiful space and lovely energy. Lovely people and a beautiful piece put together.*

Additional open-ended comments were also very positive and reflected an interest in attending similar events.

- *Really good, light, music, communication, stunning, love to go to more events in future.*

The inclusive nature of the event and the importance of it being accessible locally was also raised. Several respondents commented on Saturdays or weekends being a good time for events.

- *Great with special needs 18 months - 2 years. Processing disorder.*
- *Interested in more art events for this age and local events would be great. Keeping it local is important for access.*
- *Great opportunity for a Saturday to go to this. Arts event in the community centre is very democratic.*

Feedback from South Dublin and Dublin City audiences was consistent with that from Fingal and reiterated enjoyment by both babies and parents.

South Dublin

- *Intrigued, engaged, enjoyed, relaxed, calm, interested, enthralled, unsure but settled after a while, stimulating, mesmerised, amazed.*

Dublin City

- *It was all very calm which is unusual. They have usually had enough or get agitated a few minutes into anything. Really enjoyable.*
- *My baby seemed fascinated. Thank you very much for giving us a chance to experience baby theatre.*
- *Soothed and relaxed my baby.*
- *My 3-week-old baby reacted to the voices and I could see she was trying to focus her eyes on the face of the singer. She was very calm and settled with the singing.*
- *My baby was very engrossed in everything.*
- *Very special.*
- *Fabulous!*
- *Amazing work!*
- *The actors were wonderful.*
- *I was surprised by how much he reacted to everything.*
- *Excellent.*
- *Absolutely beautiful.*
- *The melodies were enchanting.*
- *She was mesmerised. It had everything she loved; singing, music, mirrors, friendly faces - without being over-stimulating. She was absolutely fascinated. One happy baby.*
- *This was honestly one of the most amazing experiences. I was nearly in tears; it was magic – five babies under one and you could hear a pin drop. I have never seen the likes of it before. It made me think about slowing down my voice and movements with her. Everything is so fast these days. Can you make one for adults?!*

Impact themes

The following section reviews stakeholder's reflections on the project in relation to progress towards stated objectives.

1. Support artistic ambition in the research and development of new work in early childhood which can be presented in different contexts – including festival, professional arts space, library and childcare settings.

The project partners found that the *Exploring and Thinking* collaboration resulted in not only a larger budget, but a pooling of resources that facilitated enhanced ambition and increased developmental opportunities for artists. The original brief reached a wider pool of creative practitioners with positive results. The commission also supported collaboration across artforms.

The commissioned artists responded to the original brief with project proposals for work that could successfully be presented in different contexts.

Feedback from the commissioned artists indicates that the development phase of *I Am Baba* with parents and babies and the testing of the *Sculptunes* prototype in a crèche setting facilitated the artists in interacting with babies, performers, parents and childcare professionals to refine and develop their commissions. Artist feedback reflects a positive experience and a feeling of being well supported on the ground by the partners.

2. Reach new early childhood audiences.

A range of stakeholders, including venues and local partner organisations operating in the early childhood sector, were engaged in the development and implementation of *I Am Baba* and the research and development of *Sculptunes*. These local partners have a pivotal role in reaching local communities and presenting early childhood arts in non-traditional arts settings. A more diverse audience was reached through the channels and venues available to the project stakeholders collectively.

Audience surveys at *I Am Baba* shows in Fingal show that over half of those surveyed were new to attending arts events with their babies, while in both Fingal and Dublin South over half of audiences lived locally. Many commented on the importance of having a local venue, and events being held at a convenient time.

3. Stimulate dialogue between the Dublin Local Authorities and with artists, early childhood educators and organisations.

The feedback from the four Arts Offices indicates that *Exploring and Thinking* provided space for them to engage in the process of working together, sharing collective knowledge, experience, contacts and practice in early childhood arts as well as approaches to local partnerships and engagement. Working collectively allowed partners to focus on the broader picture and has built a foundation for sustained collaboration by the Local Authorities. The commissioning process in itself resulted in valuable learning and the experience provides a foundation for future collaboration.

A larger budget and international call for applications cast the net wider and attracted the interest of a more diverse pool of artists, which in itself stimulated a dialogue. The commissioned artists engaged in dialogue with the Arts Offices throughout the development, implementation and evaluation, and monitoring phases of the project.

Relationships with local partners and venues such as the Area-Based Childhood (ABC) Programme, crèches, and community centres, which were central to delivery of the project in non-traditional arts settings, were enhanced and developed through the *Exploring and Thinking* collaboration.

The project partners have identified areas worthy of development, which focus on:

- Building and developing the partnership and networks formed to deliver arts to diverse audiences in non-traditional settings.

- Building capacity for early childhood arts by supporting artists to develop their practice or enter into early childhood arts.

4. Build on current research investigating practice across artforms and professional disciplines/contexts.

Sculptunes

Key learning and practical outcomes came from discussions with musicians that focused on engineering, maths and physics rather than artistic ideas or ambitions.

The commission provided a wonderful insight into how the child sees and experiences different artforms; and a wonderful opportunity to 'play' and 'experiment' with a range of different musicians and incorporate the possibilities of what we discovered and found stimulating into the work.

The initial research and development period should have focused on the artists sharing their practice and methodologies of working with early years children rather than beginning to make the piece.

An external mentor would support and build a collaborative framework to guide the artists in how best to work together. The role of the visual artist as an interactive part of the arts experience could be explored and documented further.

5. Consider how engagement with audiences may be influenced by the presentation of the commission in the different contexts.

I Am Baba

The *I Am Baba* commission included the creation of a portable set, which facilitated the presentation of the same show for different audiences regardless of the venue.

Partnership, connection and collaboration, both new and existing, with a range of diverse stakeholders in the early childhood sector were key to the successful implementation of the commission. Local partners are critical to engagement at a community level, particularly among under-served audiences, with whom they often have established relationships. Strong local partnerships lead to stronger attendance and buy-in by the community.

Creating the optimum conditions so people are relaxed and can engage is key to meeting the needs of early childhood audiences; making people feel welcome and at ease is very important when working in early childhood settings. Being sensitive to the needs of parents can be as important as how the performers engage and connect with the babies or children. This involves providing clarity about what to expect and using a range of simple strategies to accommodate audience needs.

Audience members heard about the event in a range of ways including the library, public health nurse, show venues and early childhood service providers. Word of mouth (family or friend) and social media appear to be particularly important in this context.

When attendees in Fingal and South Dublin were asked how their babies reacted to the *I Am Baba* show the comments were overwhelmingly positive, with parents reporting babies engaging, paying attention and seeming mesmerised. The opportunity for social interaction between babies and adults and interaction with performers was also seen as a positive part of the experience.

The inclusive nature of the event and the importance of it being accessible locally was raised, Saturdays or weekends seem to be a good time for events.

Sculptunes

Feedback from the research and development phase of *Sculptunes* reflects the importance of children having the opportunity to engage with the piece in their own time and on their own terms, which was facilitated by the crèche setting. Testing of the prototype in the crèche facilitated feedback from the staff in terms of design and development. Staff offered their views, based on observation, that children, particularly younger ones, engaged with the piece to a surprising extent and that children's opportunity to explore the piece impacted on their exploration of other musical instruments.

The commission also facilitated building capacity in local early childhood providers for supporting early childhood arts at community level, which in a wider context could lead to more opportunities for audiences to engage at local level in early childhood arts.

6. Generate advocacy in early childhood arts.

Collaboration across the four Dublin Local Authorities, artists, early childhood service providers and community based, non-traditional venues is a show of public support for early childhood arts. The project partners described ways in which the collaboration generated advocacy in early childhood arts.

Dublin City Council found working with partners such as the Area Based Childhood programmes, which offer co-ordinated services that respond to local needs that are a valuable model to consider when thinking about the position of arts practice in the community.

I Am Baba offered a further quality arts opportunity to the early childhood arts CPD programme, run by Dublin City Council's Children's Art in Libraries programme and Northside Partnership/ Preparing for Life programme while also highlighting arts practice for a targeted age group of 0-12 months. The programme had not yet explored arts experiences for this age group.

The Fingal Arts Office reached out to new family agencies during the promotion of *I Am Baba* in Blanchardstown, Swords and Balbriggan and the intention is to reconnect with groups who were not previously engaging but have expressed an interest in the arts ignited by *I Am Baba*. Commissioning new artwork for an early childhood audience was a new departure for Fingal's Youth & Education Programme and is believed to have enhanced the existing early childhood programmes.

Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown found that *Exploring and Thinking* provided the time and opportunity to work with the early years sector outside of the childcare committees and community childcare settings within the County and hope to build on this work in the future in tandem with the new contacts made as a result of the collaboration.

South Dublin County Council identified programmers, particularly the Civic Theatre and Library Services, as being key to the establishment and delivery of Early Childhood Arts in the area. They reached out to under-served areas through *I Am Baba* and have since initiated a programme of Early Years Dance for toddlers in the area.

The programme also increased the profile of early childhood arts in the region.

Appendix 1:

Early childhood arts services provision by Local Authorities in the Dublin region.

As described in the 2016 briefing document.

Image by Helen Barry



Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council

Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown delivers residency programmes in partnership with the County Childcare Committee, with whom they have collaborated since 2014 to meet identified need in the area. Prior to this the Arts Office delivered some programmes through childcare facilities under their Primary Arts Programme. Under a range of initiatives artists' practice is supported through longer-term residency and commissions in crèche settings. Sample programmes include:

- » Nov 2014 – April 2015: Artist at Work programme with Helen Barry. Based in local crèches and one local school (Jnr and Snr class). Helen developed work with the children centred around milk cartons. During the same period she was also based in the Project Room of dlr Lexlcon and developed family and early years workshops.
- » Feb – May 2015: Music Programme with Eamon Sweeney based in dlr Lexlcon, workshops for 2 to 3 and 3 to 4 year olds. Accompanied by CPD sessions for early childhood educators and special sessions for parents/guardians as to the benefits of music for early years children.
- » Jun – Jul 2015: Gallery Learning Programme for *Matisse: Drawing with Scissors*. This manifested as a creative hub that the general public could interact with (without staff) in the Project Room and also as a series of workshops for children from 4+ months as well as family sessions and special grandparent sessions. Workshops developed by artist Helen Barry included:
 - » *Sunlight* – 4 to 14 months: Exploring colour, shape and texture with your baby.
 - » *Under the Sea* – 2 to 3 year olds: This multi-sensory workshop used sound, movement and visual art to explore the world under the sea without getting wet.
 - » *Seilmide or Snail*: an animal that carries his home on his back – 3 to 5 year olds: This workshop used movement, drama, visual art and a transparent umbrella to explore the idea of home through the life of a snail.
- » Early Years Co-Commissions, 2015 – 2017. In 2015 dlr Arts Office with support from Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Childcare Committee sought individuals or organisations to research, develop and perform brand-new artistic and interactive experiences for pre-school children based in local community childcare facilities.
- » *Spine* is made up of a number of interactive art works that invite very small children to move, to get into and out of, to fit together in different ways and to play with on their own or with their parents. *Spine* was created by visual artist Helen Barry and the children from Casa Rosa Montessori in Dún Laoghaire. Every week, over 5 months, Helen led the children through a series of challenging and exciting workshops that explored movement, sound and construction through play and the visual arts.
- » *The Tail of Herman* - Herman the mouse lives and plays in a beautiful garden with all his friends. But one day the animals meet a little bird who's lonely and has travelled far from home and they decide to help her. This performance was written by Irma Grothuis and strongly influenced by the children attending the Early Years Service facilitated by Ballyogan's Family Resource Centre.

Dublin City Council

- » Dublin City Council's LAB Gallery supports emerging artists at the beginning of their careers and more established artists taking risks in their practice. Project 20/20, a visual literacy initiative for children in our neighbourhood, Dublin 1, focuses on developing the visual literacy of a specific cohort of children and young people by connecting them with contemporary Irish art and artists and unlocking their voices as citizens – what they have to say about their lives, connections with others (family, teachers, community), how they learn and develop. The LAB Gallery has been working with artist and educator Seodín O'Sullivan since 2012 developing an early years practice responding to the work exhibited within the gallery for the children in local early years crèches. Each exhibition in the LAB Gallery sees the artist using a different material, theme, response and media. For each session Seodín designs a response workshop to the contemporary artists and artwork, exploring multi-layered and multi sensory approaches to the making visible of their ideas and the use of a variety of materials, tools and tactics in the creation of their art works.
 - » DCC Children's Art in Libraries Programme (CAL) has, since 2010, commissioned a number of Early Years Programmes including music, drama, puppetry and storytelling that have taken place within the Library context. The programme simultaneously provides mentorship and support to artists who seek to develop their practice in relation to early years.
 - » Arts in Early Childhood Education in Community settings – Professional Development. In Winter 2016/2017 DCC Arts Office / Children's Art in Libraries began a partnership with Preparing for Life - an early childhood initiative of the Northside Partnership, under their Strengthening Foundations for Learning Programme. This resulted in the development of a responsive early year's arts development programme for Doras Buí Parents Alone resource service, Coolock and Darndale Belcamp Integrated Childcare Service (Jigsaw) within the local library and community childcare settings.
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South Dublin County Council

Children's programming, and early childhood in particular, has been identified as a priority area for service development in South Dublin County over the course of the period 2017- 2021. Its introduction to Early Childhood Arts has been through Ruaille Buaille, Lucan Children's Music Festival.

- » Ruaille Buaille, Lucan Children's Music Festival - 2015 South Dublin County Council introduced early years workshops for children (1-2yrs) and (3-4yrs) and their parents to Ruaille Buaille Lucan Children's Music Festival which were delivered by musicians Paula Phelan and Eamon Sweeney, in Lucan Library. The festival takes place in June each year. Early childhood programming was identified as an area for development in the 2017 festival programme.
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Fingal County Council

In 2012 Fingal Arts Office began work in early years arts. Since then the programme has grown to include Space Invaders, an international arts festival for children, families and educators, and Artful Dodgers, a music and visual arts programme in crèche services, which includes new research in partnership with the Arts Education Research Group (AERG), Trinity College Dublin.

- » Artful Dodgers is an early years music and visual arts programme, delivered in two community crèches in Fingal and engaging children aged three to five years. Fingal County Council's Arts Office, artists Jackie Maguire (music) and Naomi Draper (visual arts), Fingal County Childcare Committee and Trinity College Dublin are delivering Artful Dodgers in partnership with the children and staff of Ros Éo Community Childcare Centre, Rush and Little Learners Crèche, Mulhuddart. Artful Dodgers includes an artist-in-residence phase, a creative exchange phase and a parental involvement phase. The programme engaged Dr Lucie Corcoran and Prof Carmel O'Sullivan of AERG at TCD to explore whether music and visual arts enhance children's early literacy and numeracy skills, if the projected model sustains arts practices in early years settings and if it qualifies as a model of CPD for early years educators. The programme is currently in phase three – a parental involvement phase, which is also being researched by the AERG, Trinity College Dublin.
 - » Space Invaders, International Early Years Arts Festival and Seminar 2015 Space Invaders is an international arts festival for children, families and early years educators held at Farmleigh estate, which includes a series of international performances created for an early years audience, and a series of artist-led workshops for early years educators and early years artists. Each year the festival is oversubscribed with waiting lists to attend. The 2015 festival programme included artists and companies from Belgium, Lithuania, Croatia, Austria, Great Britain and Ireland. A unique seminar focusing on early years arts practice and research was included. It featured a local perspective with Artful Dodgers Research Collaborative presenting findings on an ongoing action research project in community crèche settings in Fingal, that aims to contribute to the development of early years arts education in Ireland. Starcatchers UK presented an international perspective, speaking about their multi-agency partnership programmes that aim to put arts and creativity at the heart of early years practice in Scotland. A panel discussion included members from the Arts Council, Better Start, Early Childhood Ireland, Artful Dodgers and Starcatchers.
 - » Now We Are Ready to Start! Workshop series (2012) was delivered by Fingal Arts Office in collaboration with three Irish artists – Orla Kelly, Helen Barry and Laura de Burca. Each artist specialises in working creatively with children. A series of stimulating and playful workshops were devised specifically for those in their early years and their parents. The programme was delivered over four weeks and advertised to the general public.
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Appendix 2:

Feedback from interviews and focus group for *Sculptunes*

Feedback from Interviews

Have the children previously shown an interest in music?

- » All age groups show a generalised wide enjoyment of music – singing along with radio/dancing etc.
- » All love playing instruments when available; shakers, triangles, scraper, guiros. Many don't have ready access to instruments.
- » Younger children generally show less overt interest in music.

Are there regular musical activities during the crèche day?

- » Children play with instruments regularly when possible
- » Learn songs as part of curriculum
- » Love listening to music
- » Music a part of every day
- » Daily exposure to different musical styles

Did any of the children show more interest in the activities than would be usual? Did it keep them focused for longer than would be usual?

- » Piece held the children's attention more than would be expected
- » Kept focus of children
- » Very interested in piece
- » Quietened the children to a remarkable extent
- » Novelty of materials held interest – importance of the piece not being 'shop bought'
- » Tended to draw children out of themselves

Any relevant traits exhibited by the children? E.g. sensitivity to sound? More adventurous? Cooperative? Inquiring?

- » Enjoyed 'playing house' inside the piece
- » Loved lying in it
- » Loved the pump
- » Playing with the piece will help develop pitch awareness and sensitivity

What would they suggest as the best method to gather data?

- » Interview
- » Observation

Any suggestions and advice?

Collars

- » Try different colours and textures on collars
- » Collars can be difficult to manage

Speaking / Listening Tubes

- » Have speaking/listening pipes pointing outwards
- » Listening tubes can strike heads; cushion them?
- » Some confusion with speaking/listening tubes – where to place listening part – children would place both ends to mouth

Pump

- » Pump hard to manage. Should pump be secured? Overall the thinking is no – better that the children develop their multi-tasking and balance
- » Older children seemed to get the connection between pump and sound

Frame

- » Have mirrors on the base – kids watch themselves
- » Tendency to pull on the frame – make it sturdy

General Points

- » Include a rhythm aspect; rainstick to twirl etc.
- » Importance of discovery of where the sound is coming from very important for the children
- » in general children were amazingly engaged and interested
- » Importance of having a variety of activities on the one frame
- » Include internal mat with different textures/colours
- » Include a piece that shows the power of pumped air, for example a feather floating in a transparent tube

Feedback from Focus Group

Which parts of the sculpture do you think the children liked/interacted with the most?

- » Pump
- » Speaking/listening tubes
- » Crawling inside the piece

How was the children's interaction when it was left with them?

- » Younger children more engaged than expected
- » Children really wanted to crawl inside
- » Couldn't wait to play with it
- » Some wanted especially to play with pump; some with speaking/listening tubes
- » Enjoyed playing with visual elements

Did it impact on the children musically? Any noticeable difference in their musical life - singing/humming?

- » Taking out musical instruments more
- » Children's opportunity to explore the piece on their own has impacted their exploration of other musical instruments
- » Tendency to sing more

Any observations on health and safety?

- » Keep the frame sturdy
- » Possible cushion behind the pump to protect from falls?

Overall takeaway points from interviews and focus groups

- » Engages children to a surprising extent.
- » Engages younger children more than expected.
- » Novelty of materials used very engaging e.g. piping plastic.
- » Maintains the interest of children for a significant period of time.
- » Important to utilise multi-sensory elements.
- » Interaction with piece can exemplify greater development in individual children than had hitherto been observed with them in other activities.
- » Importance of child-friendly scale e.g. allowing children to 'play house' inside frame.
- » Tended to engage children that would more often have been expected to be withdrawn/cautious.
- » Children's opportunity to engage with the piece in their own time and on their own terms very important.
- » Children's observation of cause and effect very relevant for their overall development.

Appendix 3:

I Am Baba promotional material



For further information please refer to:

South Dublin County Council Arts Office
www.sdcc.ie/en/services/sport-and-recreation/arts

Fingal County Council Arts Office
www.fingal.ie
www.fingalarts.ie

Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council Arts Office
www.dlrcoco.ie/arts

Dublin City Council Arts Office
www.dublincityartsoffice.ie



