CYPSC
CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE'S SERVICES COMMITTEES

# It's a magical journey

## I AM BABA – The Community Tour

## An Evaluation

TUSLA
An Ghníomhaireacht um Leanaí agus an Teaghlach
Child and Family Agency

# Foreword

## Children and Young People's Services Committees are pleased to have supported the I AM BABA Spring Tour 2020. Recognising that access to quality, cultural and artistic experiences can have very positive impacts for children, young people and families CYPSC is enthusiastic about creating opportunities for children and young people of all ages and abilities to experience the Arts.

Our collaboration with Anna Newell and her colleagues to bring such a special theatre production to the very youngest of audiences around Ireland was a pleasure and a privilege; it was also a challenge that was rewarded by the very positive experiences that babies and their caregivers experienced while participating in I AM BABA. This production promoted developmental opportunities for 0 to 12 month olds, provided opportunities for caregivers and babies to bond and supported caregivers' learning about creative play to stimulate babies' learning.

CYPSC places importance on reflecting on our work and learning from our collaboration-in-action. With this purpose in mind the positive findings and recommendations from evaluating our partnership in the I AM BABA Spring Tour 2020 will be utilised to demonstrate the value of participation in the Arts and to inform any future similar collaborations. I want to acknowledge especially the input of Lorna Kerin to survey design and to Aoife Dowling for her work to produce this report on behalf of CYPSC.

It is notable that in the planning stages of this baby theatre tour that over thirty community based services for children and young people worked with 12 local CYPSC to identify suitable venues and target audiences for the production. While the Spring Tour 2020 was interrupted and disrupted by the onset of Covid-19 public health restrictions the work of these many organisations in collaboration with CYPSC and the theatre company is much appreciated and is evidence of a commitment to inter-agency working to improve outcomes for children and young people.

CYPSC is a policy initiative of the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth to realise joint planning and co-ordination between children and young people's services in every county in Ireland. National and local leadership and implementation support for CYPSC is delivered by Tusla Child and Family Agency. Our national model of inter-agency working is strong and demonstrating a system-wide capacity for people and services to organise around responding to the needs of children and young people and to share responsibility and to realise shared results.

Working to support I AM BABA has been an invaluable experience for us and you will find, as you read through our report, that this is echoed by family members on behalf of themselves and their babies.

We anticipate further creative artistic collaborations for children, young people and families in our future!

Collaborate with us!

**Colma Nic Lughadha**
**National Co-ordinator for Children and Young People's Services Committees**
**Tusla Child and Family Agency**

**September 2021**

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# Executive Summary

## Introduction

This report was commissioned by the National CYPSC Office at Tusla Child and Family Agency. The aim of the evaluation report is to describe and detail the implementation of the CYPSC-supported elements of the I AM BABA theatre production for very young children Spring Tour 2020.

The learning from this national implementation approach is presented within and will inform future CYPSC efforts to promote positive outcomes for very young children and their families through the Arts.

### Description and background

Participation in the arts for the early years comes in many forms, one of those being baby theatre. I AM BABA, produced by Anna Newell in a co-production with The Civic, Tallaght, is a theatre adventure aimed at babies aged 0 to 12 months. Using a range of materials such as lights, mirrors and scarves in a specifically designed tent, babies (and their parents or guardians) are fully immersed in an intimate performance.

Exposing very young children to the Arts has a positive effect on their lives (Arts Council, 2019, Creative Ireland, 2019) as well as being beneficial to their development (Zeedyk 2015). In February 2020, a 10-week tour of I AM BABA commenced. It was expected that Children and Young People's Services Committees (CYPSC) across the country would support 20 dates, with 60 productions to an audience of up to 360 babies. The dates that CYPSC provided supportive elements to of the I AM BABA Spring Tour 2020 are referred to in this report as The Community Tour.

The purpose of the support provided by CYPSC, as a key interagency structure identified by the government to plan and coordinate services locally throughout Ireland, was to encourage access to the Arts for a very young audience and their parent/guardian and promote positive child development opportunities. In some CYPSC areas what was actually realised was a targeted provision to families less likely to access the Arts. A majority of the participating parents or guardians and their babies had an excellent experience of the supports provided by the CYPSC as well as the I AM BABA production itself. This evaluation examines how support provided by local CYPSC structures enabled a seldom-heard audience to attend arts productions.

### Exploration and learning

This evaluation sets out to:

- Explore the process of support and coordination provided by CYPSC to support access for very young children to the Arts; specifically, in this case the I AM BABA theatre production;
- Examine the collaboration between the CYPSC and artists to reach a very young audience including those under-served ordinarily; and
- Evaluate the effects and impact of the production.

In December 2018, 27 CYPSC were invited by the National Co-ordinator for CYPSC to express interest in hosting I AM BABA productions as part of the planned I AM BABA Spring Tour 2020.

## Methodology

External expert support was engaged by the National CYPSC Office to carry out this evaluation. The methodology included desk-based research (an analysis of available administrative data), five semi-structured interviews with key project stakeholders and an online survey, developed by the Dun Laoghaire Rathdown CYPSC Co-ordinator, circulated to parents or guardians that attended the performance.

## CYPSC and I AM BABA Timeline

I AM BABA was produced in **2017** in conjunction with Dublin local authorities (LAs) as part of the Arts Councils Exploring and Thinking bursary which was funded through the Arts Council of Ireland's Invitation to Collaboration Scheme.

In December **2018**, 27 CYPSC were invited by the National Co-ordinator for CYPSC to express interest in hosting I AM BABA productions as part of the planned I AM BABA Spring 2020 Tour.

In early **2019**, with support from the National Co-ordinator for CYPSC tour funding was secured by the theatre company from the Arts Council.

**12 CYPSC** expressed an interest in hosting **60 productions** of I AM BABA throughout Ireland over **20 dates**. In early December 2019 marketing packs were disseminated by the production company and local CYPSC identified local venues and necessary supports.

In late February **2020** the tour began. **12 dates** were toured before the Covid-19 pandemic. A total of **36 performances** were hosted by CYPSC in Louth, Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown, Longford Westmeath, Sligo, Kildare and Meath, to **161 babies** (and their parents or guardians).

# Outcomes and findings

## I AM BABA aims to create the optimum conditions for babies to be fully immersed in the theatre production. Each performance is 20 minutes long and up to 20 minutes free play, with the material objects used in the production, is available afterwards for the babies and parents or guardians.

The production took place in varied venues across Ireland. Existing networks of the local CYPSC structures were utilised to ensure that a new audience was reached.

A high-quality arts production was received by parents or guardians and their babies and parents or guardians were encouraged with new ways of playing with their babies.

### Support and coordination outcomes

The collaboration between CYPSC and the theatre production company actively enabled children's right to a high-quality arts production. The CYPSC provided:

- Engagement with an unreached audience through targeted promotion with local services.
- Knowledge of local supports and logistics required to effectively coordinate and host the event. This included identifying suitable venues and availing of services from local groups.
- Various supports were necessary for new audience members to attend the performances such as transport and childcare for older children.

### Babies' outcomes

A majority of the participating parents or guardians together with their babies had an excellent experience of the I AM BABA production. Babies were mesmerised by the production and were engaged throughout.

The performance itself was a unique and high-quality production that could be performed in many different environments. Audience members were made feel welcome and comfortable in the intimate productions.

### Value of exposure

Exposure to the Arts is extremely important for very young children as it has developmental benefits including speech and language development. Providing parents or guardians and their babies with an opportunity to explore new ways to play in a unique and comfortable environment, promotes not only their development but can also encourage further participation in other arts events.

### Learning

To ensure that a seldom-heard audience is reached additional resources are required by the CYPSC. In addition to the cost of the performance, additional finance and resources are required to ensure that a targeted audience is enabled to attend. The provision of support to audience members to encourage and support their attendance ensures a higher turnout.

An adequate timeline is required by local services from the CYPSC to deliver and promote the production as well as ensure a targeted audience is identified and that necessary resources are put in place to support optimal attendance.

A memorandum of understanding is needed between the artist and each CYPSC they are working with to ensure there is clear communication in regards to the requirements of both stakeholders.

# Conclusion and recommendations

## This evaluation of the implementation of the CYPSC-supported elements of the I AM BABA theatre production for very young children Spring Tour 2020 makes the following conclusions and recommendations:

I AM BABA provides young babies with an immersive arts experience. The environment that is created for babies provides them with an opportunity to be immersed in a magical journey through song and dance.

The support and coordination provided by CYPSC and the local services throughout the community tour (CYPSC-supported elements of the I AM BABA Spring Tour 2020) provided an opportunity to expose the arts production to a wider audience and provide an opportunity to enhance young children's lives by exposing them to the Arts.

CYPSC are in an ideal position to coordinate necessary supports to an audience that would not ordinarily attend an arts production.

In order for CYPSC to provide further support and coordination to increase very young children's exposure to the arts, this report recommends that:

- Resources that are required by the CYPSC to provide necessary administration and networking tasks should be supported; the availability of these supports can ensure that full capacity at each performance is reached.
- Adequate lead-in time to the performances is required by each CYPSC and by each of the local stakeholders hosting productions and providing support.
- A memorandum of agreement should be established between each local CYPSC and the performance artist.
- Finally, in order to support realisation of every child's right to the Arts at least once a year, each CYPSC should have an arts representative on each main county-level CYPSC committee.

# 1. Introduction

> 'Babies have a right to beauty and they're not always exposed to it."
>
> Véronique Coté,
> Theatre des Confettis, Quebec

Early childhood participation in the Arts can have many interpretations. It can be reading books to babies, singing songs or playing with material objects. Amongst these interpretations is baby theatre. This form of theatre is new and has many different understandings based on a number of factors including the artist, audience and venues. Goldfinger (2011) describes baby theatre as 'abstract productions' performed by professional artists. The productions have disjointed plotlines: artists perform with material objects and the audience members, although not always participating, are received on stage or within the production itself.

Developmental psychologists such as Zeedyk (2015, cited in The Guardian, 2015) emphasize how theatre experiences amongst young children promote a bonding experience between them and their parents or guardians. These experiences also support various aspects of a baby's development including their speech and language and communication skills.

In recent years there has been active discussion in both arts (Arts Council, 2019) and children's policy (Creative Ireland, 2019) about Arts participation amongst the early years and young child population. The national policy framework for children and young people, Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures states that children's lives can be enhanced through their participation in the Arts.

Children and Young People's Services Committees (CYPSC) is a key interagency structure identified by the government to plan and coordinate services locally throughout Ireland for children and young people with the aim to improve outcomes for all children and young people aged 0 up to 24 years. CYPSC provides an interagency structure and a collaborative environment for both statutory and community agencies to work together and is well-placed to promote high-quality arts productions within the community.

I AM BABA is a theatre production for babies. The production was first created by Anna Newell[1] in 2017 and in co-production with The Civic, Tallaght, as part of Exploring and Thinking bursary funding[2] in conjunction with the four Dublin local authorities. The production was well received in a range of venues throughout the Dublin area and with further tour funding from the Arts Council in 2020 and with support from CYPSC, a ten week[3] tour across a range of community venues was established.

The purpose of this collaborative relationship with the CYPSC was to ensure that I AM BABA reached babies right across Ireland and within communities where parents or guardians were less likely to attend arts productions.

In February 2020 a 10-week tour of I AM BABA commenced. It was expected that CYPSC would host 20 dates, with 60 productions to an audience of up to 360 babies. The dates that CYPSC provided supportive elements to of the I AM BABA Spring Tour 2020 are referred to as The Community Tour. Due to the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic many dates did not go ahead. Twelve dates were carried out, with 36 productions to 161 babies. This is an evaluation of the support and coordination provided by CYPSC and the outcomes for babies and their parents or guardians.

1. Anna Newell is an internationally renowned theatre director who has been shortlisted for the international Ellen Stewart Award for theatre makers whose work with/for young people has had a major social impact and in 2017, she was awarded one of the inaugural Tonic Theatre Awards for 'female theatre makers who are changing the face of theatre and the performing arts in the UK'.

2. Exploring and Thinking is a collaborative framework for early childhood arts in the Dublin region which was funded through the Arts Council of Ireland's Invitation to Collaboration Scheme.

3. A ten-week tour was envisaged to be carried out. Because of the Covid-19 pandemic, from March 2020 it was not possible to pursue the performances due to public health guidelines.

## 1.1 Early Years and the Arts

The Children's Rights Alliance in partnership with the Irish Times, states that universal investment in children's cultural activities as well as other actions including access to food, health, and housing can help to eliminate child poverty in Ireland (2020).

The most recent report to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child in Ireland, published in 2015, emphasises that providing children with a space to participate in the Arts within their communities encourages them to express their voice and opinions as young adults.

According to Rogers, 2013, in research published by the Arts Council on the perspectives of Early Childhood Arts, children absorb information through their senses and the most effective learnings for young children can be achieved from actual materials such as fabric and feathers. This research also noted the importance of the 'provision of relevant and meaningful early childhood arts experiences' for very young children.

A research paper published by the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) on Cultural Participation among children and young people, based on findings from the Growing up in Ireland longitudinal study, identified that young children from disadvantaged homes were more likely to spend long periods of time in front of screens. While young children from affluent homes, were more likely to be brought to cultural events and participate in arts related activities.

While research has shown how a baby's exposure to high-quality arts experiences is essential for the development of happy and healthy children, Zeedyk (2015, cited in The Guardian, 2015) also notes how a child's experiences within the first three years of their life have a strong influence on their brain formation.

# 2. The evaluation approach

## 2.1 Aims

This evaluation sets out to:

- Explore the process of support and coordination provided by CYPSC to support access for very young children to the Arts; specifically, in this case the I AM BABA theatre production;
- Examine the collaboration between the CYPSC and artists to reach a very young audience including those under-served ordinarily; and
- Evaluate the effects and impact of the production.

## 2.2 Design

This evaluation was conducted using a mixed-methods qualitative approach. Primary research included:

- Desk-based research: a review and analysis of available administrative data on the productions.
- A survey with members of the parents or guardians that attended the productions.
- Interviews with key stakeholders.

The semi-structured interviews were conducted via telephone. The interviews were guided by the following questions:

1. What was the interviewee's involvement in the project?
2. Were there any benefits of the collaboration with the CYPSC and the artist?
3. What did the collaboration set out to achieve?
4. Are there any recommendations for the production?

The interviews resulted in over three hours of recordings, which were transcribed and coded to identify recurring themes.

## 2.3 Data collection

Desk-based research was conducted to provide a brief review of the arts and early childhood in Ireland, examining the benefits of exposure of young children to the Arts.

The survey with parents or guardians that attended the productions was carried out via an online survey platform. The survey was provided by local CYPSC to all parents or guardians that attended the productions. The aim of surveying the parents or guardians of the babies that attended the productions was to capture their overall opinion of and the impact of the productions.

Five semi-structured interviews were carried out with project stakeholders. Table 1 shows the organisations of those interviewed.

| Organisation | Interviews |
|---|---|
| Anna Newell - Theatre Adventures | 1 |
| CYPSC National Office at Tusla Child and Family Agency | 1 |
| Community Mothers | 1 |
| Longford Westmeath CYPSC | 1 |
| Meath CYPSC | 1 |

**Table 1: Interview participants in an evaluation of the I AM BABA productions.**

# 3. CYPSC and I AM BABA

## 3.1 Overview

This chapter uses information gathered from interviews with stakeholders and aims to deliver a description of the theatre production as well as a detailed account of the process of the support provided by CYPSC for the I AM BABA Community Tour 2020. This chapter is structured under the following headings:

- The production
- The process of implementation
- Support and coordination provided by CYPSC
- Outcomes achieved

## 3.2 The production

I AM BABA incorporates songs, lights and textures to bring babies and their parents or guardians on a 'magical adventure', as described by the artist Anna Newell, exploring each individual baby's identity and personhood.

Using a range of materials such as lights, mirrors and scarves in a specifically designed tent, babies are fully immersed in this intimate performance. The harmony singing and material objects that help narrate the performance are carefully chosen for the show with the aim of creating a connection and forming a tactic dialogue with the babies.

Despite the overall structure of the production and the musical score being the same, each performance is unique as it responds to the individual babies in attendance.

The primary aim of the production is to create the optimum conditions for babies to take in the magical journey that the theatre production encourages them to go on. The purpose of the production is not to dictate to the baby (or the parent/guardian) how they should be involved with it but for each individual baby to engage with the experience in whatever way they feel comfortable.

Each performance is 20 minutes long and up to 20 minutes free play with the material objects is available afterwards for the babies and parents or guardians. The performance takes place in a fully portable tent ensuring that each performance, regardless of the venue, remains overall the same. After each performance the baby (and parent/guardian) is gifted with a scarf to bring home as a playful reminder of the performance.

Due to limited space within the tent, capacity for each performance is capped at six babies with one parent or guardian per baby. Up to three performances can be carried out per day in each venue, that's up to 36 family members reached per day.

## 3.3 The process of implementation

This section aims to describe the timeline of the development of the I AM BABA CYPSC tour dates, hosted by CYPSC throughout Ireland, and the roles of the stakeholders involved, and the productions.

I AM BABA was produced by Anna Newell in association with The Civic, Tallaght in 2017 in conjunction with the Dublin local authorities as part of the Arts Councils Exploring and Thinking bursary funding. In late 2018 and early 2019 the National CYPSC Office sought expressions of interest from CYPSC to support Anna Newell's Arts Council Application for a 2020 Spring Tour. Following the successful funding application with the Arts Council, those CYPSC that expressed interest were issued with marketing packs from the theatre production company in December 2019. From then on and in to early 2020 CYPSC identified local partner organisations and suitable venues to host the theatre production and identified suitable audiences throughout their localities. In late February 2020 the tour began (Figure 1).

### Figure 1: Timeline of the collaboration with I AM BABA and CYPSC.

**2017**
I AM BABA created in co-production with the Civic Tallaght as part of Exploring & Thinking Bursary Funding in conjunction with the 4 Dublin Local Authorities

**2018 DECEMBER**
Callout to local CYPSC for expressions of interest in I AM BABA in support of Anna Newell's Arts Council application for a 2020 Spring Tour

**2019 EARLY**
Funding granted from the Arts Council for the 2020 Spring Tour of I AM BABA

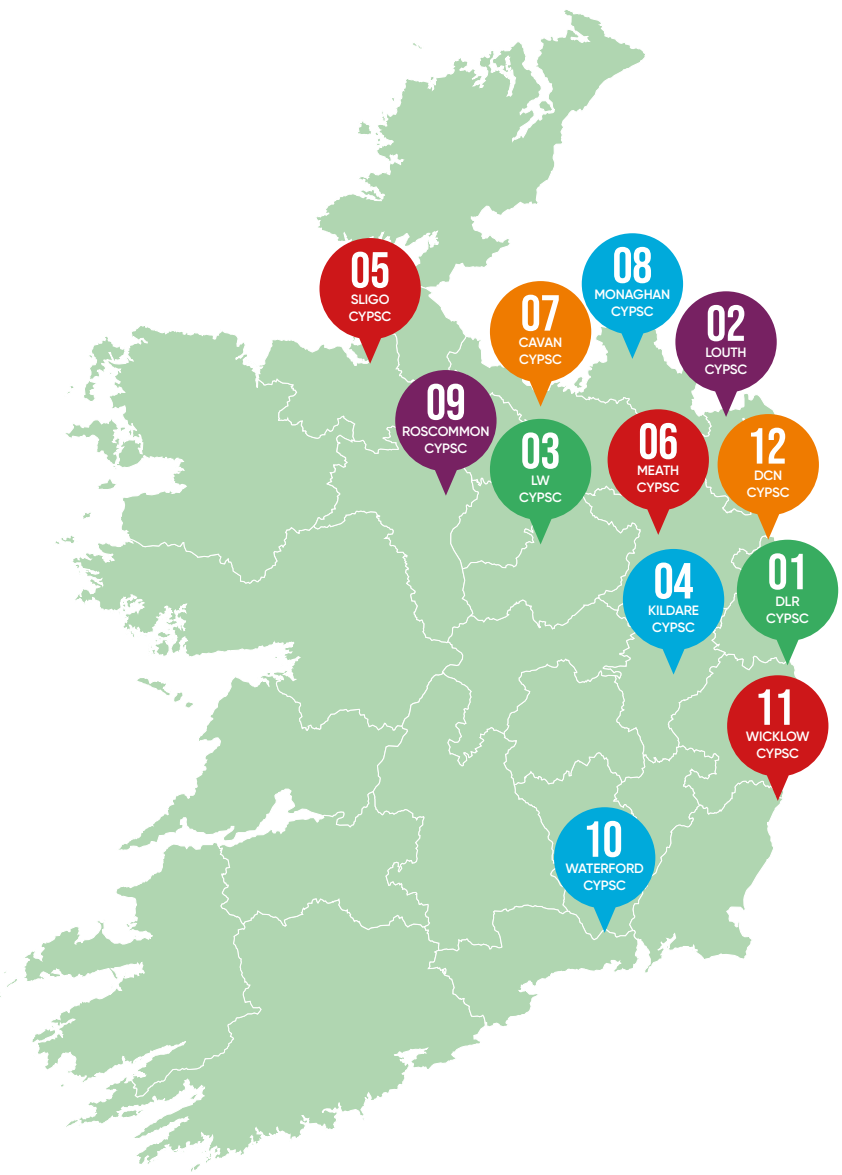
**2019 DECEMBER**
Marketing packs disseminated by theatre company and suitable venues identified by CYPSC

**2020 JANUARY - FEBRUARY**
Targeted audiences and supports required locally put in place

**2020 26th FEBRUARY - 9th May 2020**
I AM BABA tour

It was intended that 12 CYPSC would host 60 productions of I AM BABA throughout Ireland over 20 dates. Due to the onset of Covid-19 and pursuant public health restrictions, 12 of the 20 scheduled dates and 36 of the 60 planned productions were carried out (Map 3.3).

Of the 12 dates that were toured, before the Covid-19 pandemic and pursuant public health restrictions, the 36 performances that did go ahead were hosted by six CYPSC in Louth, Dún Laoghaire Rathdown, Longford Westmeath, Sligo, Kildare and Meath, to 161 babies (and their parents or guardians). Had the full tour gone ahead as planned, 60 productions would have been performed to an audience of up to 360 babies.




01 **DLR CYPSC:** 26th February
**Productions:** 3
**Audience Members:** 18

02 **Louth CYPSC:** 27th February
**Productions:** 3
**Audience Members:** 54

03 **LW CYPSC:** 2nd, 3rd, & 4th March
**Productions:** 9
**Audience Members:** 55

04 **Kildare CYPSC:** 5th & 6th March
**Productions:** 6
**Audience Members:** 36

05 **Sligo CYPSC:** 10th & 11th March
**Productions:** 6
**Audience Members:** 36

06 **Meath CYPSC:** 12th, 13th & 14th March
**Productions:** 9
**Potential Audience Members:** 54

07 **Cavan CYPSC:** 21st March
**Productions:** 3
**Potential Audience Members:** 18

08 **Monaghan CYPSC:** 3rd April
**Productions:** 3
**Potential Audience Members:** 18

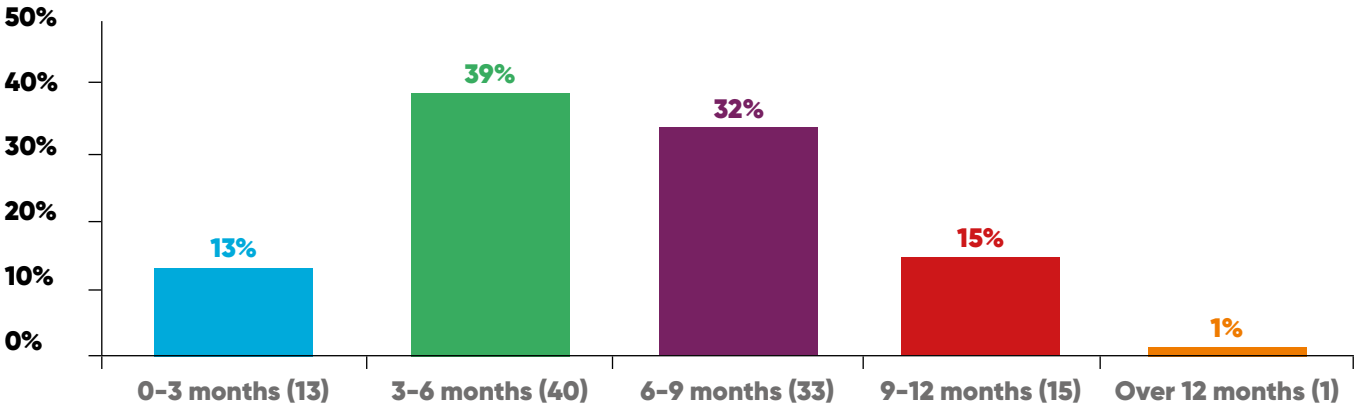
09 **Roscommon CYPSC:** 25th April
**Productions:** 3
**Potential Audience Members:** 18

10 **Waterford CYPSC:** 5th May
**Productions:** 3
**Potential Audience Members:** 18

11 **Wicklow CYPSC:** 6th, 7th & 8th May
**Productions:** 9
**Potential Audience Members:** 54

12 **DCN CYPSC:** 9th May
**Productions:** 3
**Potential Audience Members:** 18

**Map 1: CYPSC planned dates for I AM BABA tour 2020.**




**Graph 1: Ages of babies at the time of the performance.**

102 parents or guardians responded to the online survey used by the local CYPSC to gather feedback on parents'/guardians' and babies' experience of I AM BABA.

39% of babies that attended I AM BABA were aged between three and six months old, 32% were aged between six and nine months, 15% were aged from nine to 12 months, 13% were aged less than three months and only one baby attended that was over 12 months (Graph 1).

## 3.4 Support and coordination provided by CYPSC

The primary aim of the collaborative relationship between CYPSC and Anna Newell (theatre director) in a co-production with The Civic, Tallaght was to ensure that the performances reached the most diverse audience members as possible. According to Anna Newell, with standard social media promotion, it was difficult to target audience members that were not ordinarily likely to attend arts productions. The partnership with the CYPSC at both a national and local level provided a unique opportunity to encourage those not ordinarily likely to attend the production.

At the national level, the CYPSC National Coordinator provided valued support to the funding application with the Arts Council. The National Coordinator also provided coordination of and access to 27 local CYPSC that had the expertise to ensure that the intended audience would be reached.

Access to 27 local CYPSC provided extensive support to the production company in regards to the hosting of I AM BABA. This support ensured that the productions would reach a wide audience and that supports be provided to ensure attendance. Local CYPSC, as an interagency structure, have a diverse range of membership from statutory, community and voluntary sectors. CYPSC are in an ideal position to support innovation and promote the productions; they are also in a position to source suitable venues and partners at a local level. This type of local partnership and knowledge between CYPSC and the artist can promote the production to a new audience that would not ordinarily be likely to attend an arts production.

Local networks and groups such as Community Mothers[4] and local Family Resource Centres (FRCs)[5] were identified by the individual CYPSC to help engage families and promote the production. The production was brought to the attention of various inter-agency sub-groups within each CYPSC so that maximum awareness of and access to the event was achieved.

Members of the community that were not likely to attend arts events were targeted to attend the productions by a majority of the CYPSC. As part of the promotion for the event a number of supports were put in place by the local CYPSC and its members. For venues in rural areas transport was provided to parents or guardians and their babies. Venues such as Family Resource Centres provided childcare for older children (if needed) by parents or guardians to facilitate them

4. The Community Mothers Programme offers a volunteer led home visiting service to families with young children, particularly in communities of disadvantage. The Programme focuses on maternal health and wellbeing and infant health and development.

5. Funded by Tusla the Family Resource Centre programme is Ireland's largest family support programme delivering universal services to families in disadvantaged areas across the country based on a life-cycle approach.

attending the production with their smaller child. While for other groups, on-going contact was made with the parents or guardians to encourage full attendance. If a baby could no longer attend the place was promptly made available to another baby.

## 3.5 Stakeholders

**CYPSC National Office**

The National Co-ordinator for Children and Young People's Services Committees supported artists with the tour funding application to the Arts Council. The National Coordinator ensured that the production was hosted throughout Ireland by local CYPSC. The support encouraged babies' exposure to high-quality arts productions, particularly those that might not ordinarily experience "The Arts." This support was in line with early year's development priorities across CYPSC.

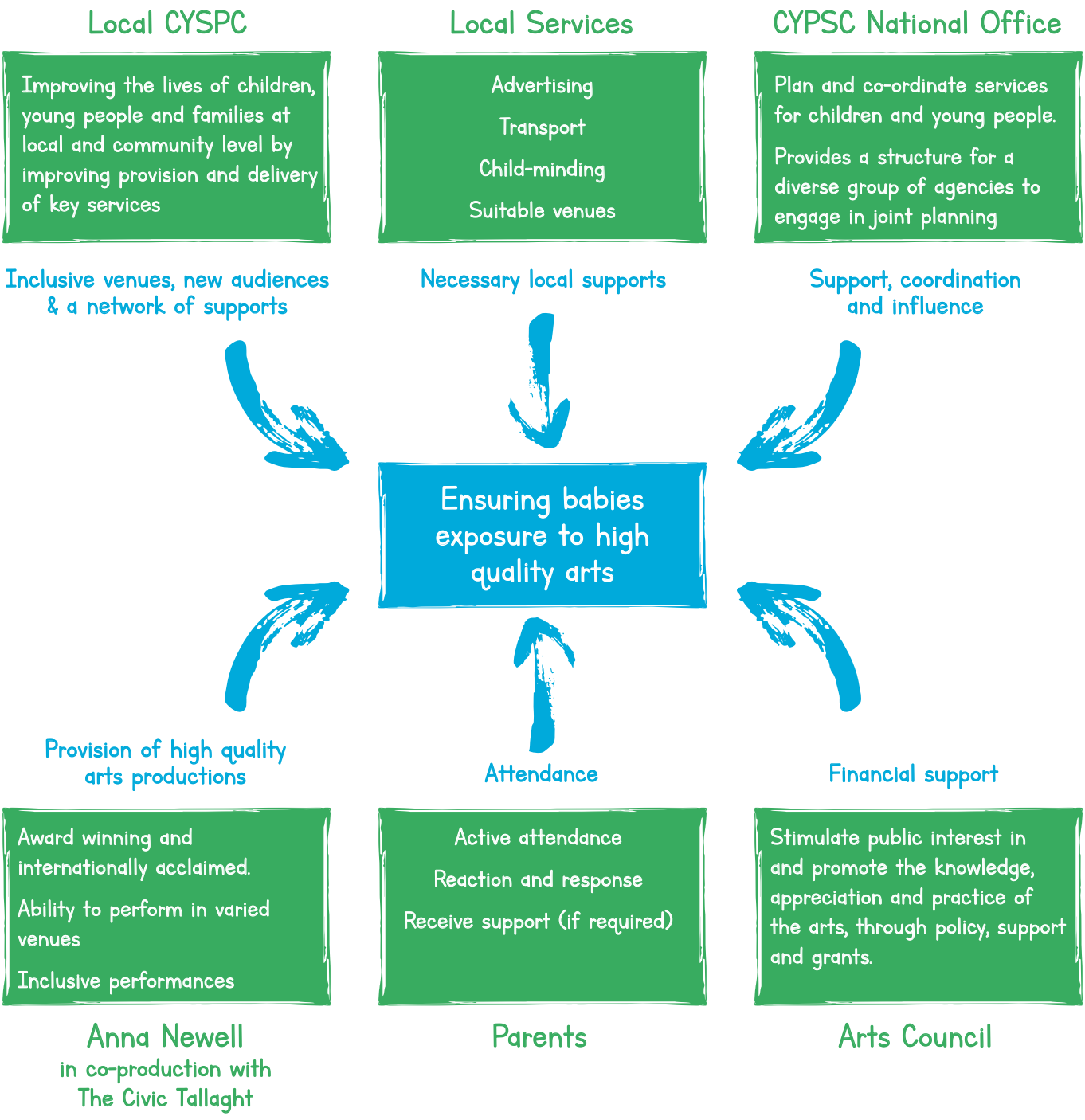



**Figure 2: Roles within the collaborative relationship.**

### Local CYPSC

CYPSC that expressed interest in hosting productions identified and liaised with local partner organisations [See Table 2], arranged suitable dates and worked directly with the artist's production company. Specifically, CYPSC in conjunction with the artist's production company:

- Strategically identified the intended audience.
- Sourced a suitable venue.
- Advertised the production locally.
- Identified and put in place necessary supports required by parents or guardians to attend the production.

### Local Service Providers

Utilising existing relationships with groups of parents' local service providers, coordinated by CYPSC, conducted targeted advertising and provided suitable venues. The local services could also provide supports that would encourage and enable parents to attend the performances as well as manage active cancellation lists to ensure full attendance.

**Service providers that provided supports included**

| CYPSC | Local Service Providers / CYPSC Partner[6] |
|---|---|
| **Louth** | Louth Library service |
| **Longford Westmeath** | Longford County Childcare Committee<br>Westmeath County Childcare Committee<br>Lús na Gréine Family Resource Centre<br>Longford Community Mothers<br>Westmeath Community Mothers<br>Longford Community Resources Clg<br>Westmeath Community Development |
| **Sligo** | Sligo Family Resource Centre<br>Lifestart Leitrim, Sligo, West Cavan<br>West Sligo Family Resource Centre |
| **Kildare** | Kildare Youth Services - Naas Child & Family Project<br>Athy Community & Family Resource Centre |
| **Dún Laoghaire Rathdown** | Lexicon Library and Cultural Centre |
| **Meath** | Trim Family Resource Centre<br>Kells People's Resource Centre*<br>East Coast Family Resource Centre* |
| **Monaghan** | Enable Ireland Early Intervention Service* |
| **Roscommon** | Ballaghadereen Family Resource Centre*<br>Tusla Family Support Service, Ballaghadereen*<br>Emergency Reception and Orientation Centre, Ballaghadereen* |
| **Waterford** | Waterford Libraries*<br>Sacred Heart Family Resource Centre*<br>St Brigid's Family Resource Centre*<br>HSE Public Health Nurses* |
| **Wicklow** | Family Support Services*<br>Wicklow Travellers Group*<br>HSE Public Health Nurses*<br>Tusla Child and Family Support Networks*<br>Wicklow County Childcare Committee* |
| **Dublin City North** | Preparing for Life, Northside Partnership* |
| **Cavan** | Cavan County Childcare Committee*<br>Parenting Cavan*<br>Teach Oscail Family Resource Centre*<br>Focus Family Resource Centre*<br>Tusla Prevention Partnership and Family Support and Child and Family Support Networks* |

**Table 2. CYPSC partner organisations collaborating to support I AM BABA Community Tour 2020**

6. Services were engaged by local CYPSC to collaborate and put in the groundwork in preparation for the Spring Tour 2020. Not all performances went ahead. Services where the performance did not go ahead due to Covid-19 public health restrictions at the time are marked with *

**The artist – Anna Newell in co-production with The Civic, Tallaght**

Created by theatre director Anna Newell and composer David Goodall in co-production with The Civic, Tallaght, I AM BABA is a theatre adventure, as described by the artist, aimed at babies aged 0 to 12 months. Working in conjunction with agencies such as the Arts Council and CYPSC, ensures that the production can reach an audience that would not be likely to attend an arts production.

**Parents**

Parents played a crucial role attending the performances and availing of the offered supports if they were required. Parents welcomed the opportunity to attend the unique performances with their babies and provided valuable feedback.

**Arts Council**

Funding from the Arts Council was granted to the theatre production company to subsidise the cost of the total artistic fees, production materials, travel and accommodation with the understanding that part of the budget would be income generated from fees. Each performance day attracted a fee of €450.00 and this was met by each local CYPSC.

## 3.6 Outcomes Achieved

The aim of the collaboration between CYPSC and the I AM BABA Community Tour (CYPSC supported element of the Spring Tour 2020) was to reach as wide an audience as possible and to promote babies' participation in the Arts. This section outlines the key components of the outcomes achieved.

**Local services and networks utilised**

By utilising local networks and services as identified in this research such as Family Resource Centres and Community Mothers groups, CYPSC enabled the production reach a broader audience than it would have reached had only traditional social media advertising been employed. The infrastructure of the venues as well as supports provided by local CYPSC and partner organisations enabled babies (and their parents or guardians) to experience the high-quality arts production being performed.

**Local Venues**

The adaptable nature of the production utilising a tent and material objects ensured that the babies (and their parents or guardians) were provided with the same quality of performance in each venue no matter the geographical location. On the limited run that this evaluation is based on, the venues in which the productions took place included theatre venues, community centres and family resource centres in local community settings.

**Exposing babies to the Arts**

I AM BABA has been produced to an extremely high standard and at its core is the aim to deliver a high-quality production to babies. Each performance is inclusive to each audience member regardless of their needs at the time. Babies are provided with the adequate conditions to be involved with the magical space, as described by the artist and the stakeholders that attended the production.

Exposing babies and their parents or guardians to high-quality arts production supports parents or guardians with new methods of play and interaction aiding a baby's development. The exposure to the arts also encourages babies with their parents or guardians to attend future arts events.

# 4. Findings

## 4.1 Overview

In this chapter, the data collected from surveys with the parents or guardians that attended the productions and from stakeholder interviews is used to examine and evaluate the following key areas of the community tour of I AM BABA:

- Support and coordination outcomes
- Babies' outcomes
- Value of exposure
- Learnings

Each of these areas will be discussed and will be based on the findings from the online survey carried out with the parents or guardians of babies that attended the performance as well as interviews with stakeholders, including:

- Anna Newell, the artist
- National Coordinator for Children and Young People's Services Committees
- Local CYPSC coordinators from Longford Westmeath, and from Meath
- A Community Mothers group in Westmeath.

## 4.2 Provision of support and coordination

Findings from the online survey carried out with parents or guardians that attended the production found that:

- 30% heard about the production from a local service e.g. a Family Resource Centre or a Community Mothers group.
- Feedback from parents that were supported to attend the event included:
  - "Good to have this free session available for people who can't access things money-wise. I really appreciate it. Well done to everyone who organised it"
  - "Thank you so much for making a memory for me and my baby"
  - "It was fantastic and being free it was a fabulous opportunity to get to attend."

According to one stakeholder, CYPSC, as an interagency structure are in between policy development and policy implementation. As stated by the Children's Rights Alliance, every child has a right to be exposed to at least one quality arts production a year. As an interagency structure tasked with bringing together many different agencies to cater for the needs of children and young people, the interviewee felt that the local CYPSC has a role in not only promoting these productions but realising children's rights to the arts by ensuring that seldom heard audiences are exposed to arts productions.

All of the interviewees noted how when advertising is conducted through the standard methods of social media and posters, that events are more likely to attract audience members who are likely to frequent these types of productions already. Working with the local CYPSC infrastructure of varied member agencies and local resources provides an opportunity to attract and engage a wider audience; particularly members of the community that are not ordinarily likely to take part in arts productions.

> 'I do think it opens the door for families that wouldn't say have that tradition of accessing arts opportunity. That was some of the value that was brought from CYPSC to this.'

The artist agreed with this sentiment. She felt that engaging with the local CYPSC provided her with not only new audiences but also audiences that were not likely to attend the productions otherwise. The engagement provided the artist with the necessary infrastructure to realise a child's right to an arts experience.

'This is a step up in terms of the network or venue usually provided to emerging artists. The network of agencies around each of the I AM BABA community tour venues connected by the CYPSC structure built a local infrastructure to support every child's right to high quality arts experiences as part of their lives.'

One stakeholder discussed the importance of reaching out to parents or guardians and babies that are not likely to have an arts experience. This outreach supported empowerment of and enabling knowledge for parents or guardians on the developmental importance of play in babies and young children's lives.

'This is a way for us to reach out to babies and their parents that may not have the opportunity.'

Both local knowledge and valuable resources are required, as noted by one stakeholder, to support families that do not have a tradition of participation in the Arts.

'That is the problem with a lot of arts productions, people don't recognise themselves in them. 'The arts are sometimes not the most inclusive thing in the world.'

Four out of five of the stakeholders discussed at length the benefits of working with the local family resource centres. Benefits included engaging with an audience that would be otherwise difficult to reach and providing accessible venues. Stakeholders explained how FRCs were happy to circulate advertising materials, link in with families already engaging with their services and source suitable venues for the performances.

'Working with the FRC does work. It is all in the nature of the social inclusion programme.'

'The organisation is already linked in with families and it wasn't just a scheduled event attracting the same people that we know will attend anyway.'

Two stakeholders discussed how there were challenges to resource the coordination required to host the productions and ensure that information regarding the productions was reaching the intended audiences. One stakeholder went on to discuss that despite the logistics and coordination required, they felt that CYPSC, as an interagency structure with the aim of supporting the full development of children, is in an ideal position to support and deliver the resources as required.

The two local CYPSC, Longford Westmeath CYPSC and Meath CYPSC that were interviewed for this evaluation reached out to existing networks to support the coordination of the production. They used these networks to target the production at audience members that would traditionally not be likely to attend, as well as identifying supports that families required. Supports included providing transport to parents or guardians and their babies to the event and providing childcare for older children in the family that would not be attending the production.

'We worked closely with our partners to ensure that first we were reaching parents that the production would benefit most.'

'Any mothers that couldn't attend because they needed childcare for other children or did not have transport were collected and brought to the event. While in the room next to the production there were little toddlers being minded.'

In order to avoid low turnout to the production, wait lists via messaging groups were established where parents or guardians could give enough notice of non-attendance and the place could be given to another parent or guardian.

The artist noted the benefits of coordinating with the CYPSC. Benefits included being provided with an established network of relevant agencies available to support a baby's right to an arts experience as part of their lives. The artist felt that collaborating with CYPSC provided them with an opportunity to connect with a demographic that was not likely to attend their performances. Newell went on to discuss how CYPSC provided her with a more varied audience; this new audience was accessing her production through an agency that they already had a trusting relationship with.

'It's about building relationships – the first time you go somewhere it is a new thing – one reason about working with the CYPSC is that it's about connecting with an audience through agencies that they trust.'

The collaboration between the CYPSC and the artist provided a connection to an audience that were unlikely to attend arts performances and provided the necessary support for that audience to attend.

## 4.3 Babies' experience

Findings from the online survey carried out with parents or guardians that attended the production found that:

- 84.2% stated that their baby's experience of the production was excellent. This included:
  - "He laughed and smiled and really seemed to enjoy the show"
  - "Fully engaged, beautiful atmosphere and sound, fabulous facilitators"
  - "My baby was fascinated by the lights, music and the girls. He took it all in"
  - "Very interactive and the show changed to keep their attention"
  - "I thought that it was engaging her without over-stimulation"
  - "She was intrigued with everything"
  - "Calming, magical experience"
- 93.2% felt that their own experience of the production was excellent. Feedback included:
  - "Exciting, very unusual"
  - "I enjoyed watching all the babies react to the experience and felt very relaxed myself"
  - "A really nice bonding time for me and him"
  - "It was so peaceful and interactive, something different that you wouldn't have done at home before"
  - "I loved watching my baby's face and all of the babies' faces, it was lovely and calm and relaxing"
  - "You feel like you're in another world"
- Three parents or guardians emphasised how they were made feel comfortable and welcome by the performers.

- Most of the parents or guardians described how their babies were relaxed and happy throughout the production and that their babies interacted with the lights, sounds and textures.
- The babies were engaged throughout the production and parents or guardians found it a calming and beautiful experience for the babies.
- 100% of parents would recommend the production to other parents or guardians.

In interviews with the artist, she described how the aim of the production was to create an ideal environment in which the babies could interact with the production. The production was baby-centred allowing the baby to be vocal and move towards the lights, sounds and objects or else watch from their parents or guardian's arms.

'The experience is for them (the audience) - whether it's something that impacts on how they play with their baby, whether it's a much-needed social moment for those who might be isolated or whether it's simply a chance to sit back and breathe and watch their baby interact with someone else.'

The environment that the production creates allows parents or guardians and their babies to be as comfortable as possible. Parents or guardians were provided with information and details on the performance beforehand and were not required to interact with the performers, performance or other audience members.

Two stakeholders interviewed discussed the benefit of the production being performed in the tent. They described how it creates optimum conditions for the parents or guardians and the babies to experience the production. The tent also ensured the quality of the performance was the same regardless of the venue.

'It's very flexible in terms of its model at that. We didn't need to have a theatre and all of the expensive costs that come with that. It's a mobile performance in a pop-up tent.'

'What was key for me was that it could play wherever – it would still have the same production values. It would also be accessible. The same show that might be played in Broadway is the exact same one that played in a church hall to the most disadvantaged families.'

Despite the number of parents or guardians and babies being able to take part in each performance being capped (six parents or guardians and six babies), the response of the artist to conduct three productions on each tour date was welcomed by the stakeholders. They felt that this allowed them to provide the arts experience to as many babies as possible (up to 18 babies per day.)

The aim of the production was to provide babies with a creative space to explore their own being. The stakeholders interviewed who had a chance themselves to experience the performances all observed that the artist had created a relaxed atmosphere for both babies and the parents or guardians. The atmosphere created by the artist immersed and mesmerised the babies as well as creating an individual experience for each baby and parent or guardian.

'It's a magical journey.'

'There is nothing overly extravagant about the production - it is about what the performers are actually doing – it's beautiful.'

## 4.4 Value of exposure

Findings from the online survey carried out with 102 parents or guardians that attended the production found that:

- 87.3% stated that they came to the production as they thought it would be an enjoyable experience for their baby.
- 27.5% stated that they came to the production as they felt it would be educational about play.
- 90.9% felt they learned new ways to engage in play with their babies after attending the production. This included:
  - "Using the mirrors and the importance of the sensory tools"
  - "Fun ways to play with my baby. Lights hands and fabrics"
  - "The importance of music in play"
  - "The scarf that we received I will use with him and is really nice"
  - "Different ways to connect with baby and use of different textures"
  - "The use of textures, lights the colours and the use of songs and she loves being talked to and was constantly smiling during the show"
  - "Using lights in play"
  - "Every parent should engage in a calming and relaxing play with babies"

Three of the five stakeholders interviewed discussed that not only should exposure to the Arts, at least once a year, be a fundamental right of a child, but that there are also widely known neurological and developmental benefits to Arts participation.

'It's about the arts and it's about supporting the development of children and babies and all of our families and parents.'

Two of the five stakeholders felt that not all parents or guardians had the skills or the knowledge on how to interact and engage with their babies through new forms of play. One stakeholder went on to explain that with standard baby and parent programmes such as baby sensory classes, there was not enough emphasis on replicating the learning experiences in their own homes, whilst I AM BABA placed significance and meaning on recreating the experiences at home and is central to the production itself.

As part of the I AM BABA production, parents or guardians were given an opportunity for 20 minutes after the production (the same length of time as the actual production) to play with the material props that are used in the show. These props include light, mirrors and scarves; objects that can be found in most homes. Parents or guardians were gifted with a scarf to bring home. All of the stakeholders agreed that this was encouraging to parents or guardians to replicate at home the new forms of play that their baby had been immersed in throughout the production.

> 'They are going home with an element of it that they can replicate in their home, even if it is only for one minute or two.'

The five stakeholders interviewed agreed that the production offered parents or guardians a valued insight into new ways to interact and play with their babies.

> 'For some parents that haven't thought how the different senses need to be stimulated it gave them food for thought.'

## 4.5 Learning

As identified from the interviews with stakeholders, learning from the support and coordination provided by CYPSC included:

- Resources are required to ensure that the intended audience of the community tour is reached. This includes identifying accessible venues, reaching new audiences through existing local groups and services as well as identifying the supports required by some parents or guardians to attend the performances e.g. transport and/or childcare for older siblings.
- As with most events arranged for parents or guardians and babies, non-attendance can happen for a variety of reasons. For a small number of performances, attendance was as low as one parent or guardian and their baby due to last minute non-attendance. Despite this the performances still went ahead. However, it is important that if there are cancellations this is communicated effectively and in a timely manner to ensure that the place can be given to someone else.
- CYPSC coordinators felt that there was not adequate lead-in time for the dates provided for the community tour. More notice would allow them to appropriately plan with their committee members regarding appropriate venues, groups that they wished to target and supports required for parents or guardians and their babies to attend.
- There is a strong relationship between the artist and CYPSC with clear communication and a memorandum of agreement. In order for the local CYPSC and its committee members to respond appropriately to the needs of the artist and to ensure that the production reaches a new and varied audience a memorandum of agreement is required at a local level between the CYPSC and the artist.

# 5. Recommendations and conclusion

## 5.1 Overview

This section outlines recommendations arising from the evaluation with concluding remarks.

## 5.2 Recommendations

**Resources required**

- Exposure to arts productions has developmental benefits for children. In order for the arts to reach all members of the community, local groups and networks should encourage and support these audience members to attend arts events.
- In order to achieve this, resources that are required by the CYPSC to provide necessary administration and networking tasks should be supported.

**Supports needed**

- High attendance/participation rates were realised for most of the I AM BABA performances. This was due to the range of additional supports offered such as transport and childcare for older children (babies' siblings).
- If the community tour is to be conducted again these supports should be made available universally. Equally a wait list system for last minute cancellations, which would ensure full capacity at each performance is reached, should be applied for each performance.

**Lead in time to the productions**

- Adequate lead-in time to the performances is required by the local services that local CYPSC aim to utilise to support attendance at the productions. This would create a timely opportunity, in conjunction with the main CYPSC committee and relevant subgroups, to identify the audiences they wish to encourage to attend the performance. It should also provide an adequate timeframe to identify a suitable venue and to identify any additional supports or resources needed.

**Memorandum of agreement**

- A memorandum of agreement should be established between local CYPSC and the artist. This would provide clear guidance on the supports required by both entities to ensure that the production reaches as wide an audience as possible.

**Arts representation on CYPSC**

- Finally, in order to realise every child's right to high-quality arts productions at least once a year, each CYPSC should have an Arts representative on each main committee. This would support a relationship with local arts expertise, venues or local networks of artists as well as support the beneficial agenda to ensure that children are exposed to high-quality arts experiences.

## 5.3 Conclusion

This evaluation set out to explore the process of support and coordination provided by CYPSC to I AM BABA, to examine the collaboration between the CYPSC and the artist as well as evaluate the effects of the production.

The support and coordination provided by CYPSC gave the artist an opportunity to reach members of the community that are not ordinarily likely to attend an arts production. The collaborative partnership between CYPSC and the artist provided accessible venues, local networks of services and necessary supports such as transport and childcare, enabling exposure of new audiences to an arts production. This in turn is supporting the aspirations of organisations concerned with promoting children's rights to realise every child's right to cultural activities.

I AM BABA provides babies with an immersive arts experience. The environment that is created for babies provides them with an opportunity to be engrossed in the production through song and dance. Using inanimate objects such as lights and mirrors encourages parents or guardians to look at new ways to play with their babies at home, stimulating them

and encouraging their development. The environment created by the artist relaxes both the parents or guardians and the babies, providing them with the ultimate space to explore their imagination.

Parents or guardians that attended the productions with their babies mostly reported that both they and their babies had an excellent experience. Parents or guardians reported feeling comfortable and welcome during the performance and that their babies were fascinated by the production. Exposure to arts productions is important for a baby's development.

The collaborative relationship between the CYPSC and the artist throughout the community tour provided an opportunity to share the arts production with a wider audience, specifically those that would not ordinarily attend an arts production. Working with local CYPSC the artist was able to utilise a local network of agencies to avail of accessible venues, new audiences and to have in place supports required to enable these new audiences to attend the production.

Findings from this evaluation can inform any future collaborative initiatives by CYPSC to harness the Arts as a valuable experience in its own right and as a means to support positive developmental outcomes for very young children in Ireland.

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