

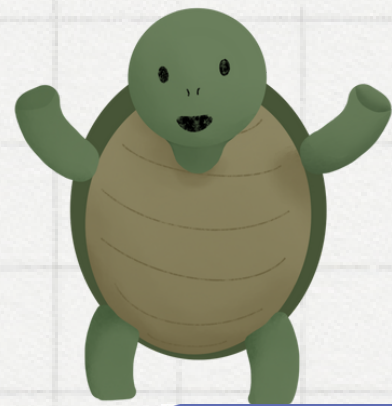


The Tortoise and the Hare

September 2022 - July 2023



End of year 3 report



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THEATRE COMPANY



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What is this project?

Between September 2022 and July 2023, we delivered the **final year** of our three year '**Once Upon a Time**' project funded by Ragdoll.

We have created an interactive storytelling framework that **introduces theatre** to families and children under 7. We work across children's centres and target primary schools, focusing on reaching children who wouldn't ordinarily have **access to the arts**, such as families in deprived areas, as well as **refugees** and children from **diverse backgrounds** .

Our third and final year of the project delivered **The Tortoise and the Hare** to over **400 children** across Ipswich, growing in participation numbers from last year by **more than 160**.



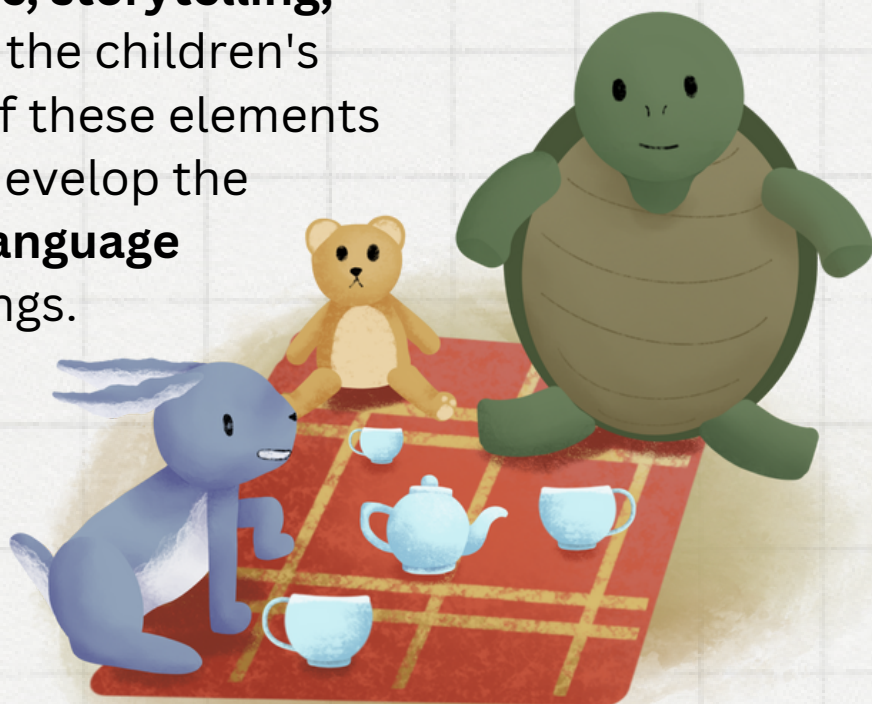
What did we do?



Our two actors successfully delivered The Tortoise and the Hare to **children's centres** across Ipswich, reaching disadvantaged families and children, **who otherwise wouldn't have access to creative learning opportunities**. Each week, a new part of the story unfolded episodically during hour long sessions, with songs and scenes from previous weeks being revisited and reinvented by the children, allowing **imaginative and thoughtful play**. We targeted centres in Ipswich with very **little early years provisions**; Wellington Family Hub, Hawthorn Family Hub, Highfield Family Hub, Hillside Family Hub and The Willows Family Hub. All 5 centres have returned to the project from the previous year, with many familiar families returning too, along with lots of new faces who were **eager to follow the story**. We took the project to St Matthew's Primary School, Ranelagh Primary School, The Willows Daycare and Sutton Hoo.

Each session combined **music, storytelling, and creative play** to capture the children's attention, building on each of these elements as the weeks progressed to develop the audience's **confidence and language skills** as they learned the songs.

The sessions all began with a recap of what had happened in the previous week, and children were encouraged to help Hatty and Terry remember what came next.



In 2021, **413,068 children in the UK** said that they didn't have any books at home. With the cost of living crisis, this figure will have likely grown, leaving many **disadvantaged children with little way of developing their imagination and basic language skills.**

So, at the end of the project, we gifted each child who participated in our sessions a **special illustrated book**, written to follow the story they had been watching, **encouraging further engagement** at home and development of **reading skills**. In total, we were able to give out **over 260 books.**



Once the children had seen all four episodes of the story, they were invited back to our home base at **The Avenue Theatre** to see a **full length performance** of the show one last time.

In addition, we held public performances at **The Avenue Theatre and Sutton Hoo**, where members of the public could come and see the full story. We gave many **free tickets to deprived families from the Ipswich Family Bank**, and invited **young Asylum Seekers**, being housed in a local hotel, to come and see the show.



our toolkit for learning

The majority of children who come to our workshops are **non-verbal**, with children whose first language isn't English, with under 2s or children with disabilities like non-verbal autism. To **communicate in the most accessible way**, the actors used props like colourful umbrellas and handmade stars, to **link each part of the story to a physical object**.



You run fast fast fast
I walk slow slow slow
You run past past past
Watch me go go go

Ready Steady Get Set Go
We Run Fast
We walk slow

Though you're different you're
my friend
And we'll get there in the end!

Songs were repeated during the story, followed with **simple actions** that the children could easily pick up. 'The Fast and Slow Song' especially worked well in **regaining focus and confidence**, whilst encouraging the moral that **everyone is different** and you don't have to be the same to be friends.

At the end of each show, with Hatty and Terry's help, the children **recapped what happened in the story**. Encouraging them to think back to what they've just seen, and supporting their confidence when **retaining key parts of a story**.



We encouraged tidying up through play, making a fun game of collecting instruments and putting balls back in the ball pit (the river Hatty swims across).



At the beginning of the story, Terry the Tortoise was very shy, and asked for **high fives** from the audience. This got parents and children immediately **involved and engaged**, and encouraged a **safe environment** for shy children.

Hatty: What's the matter with you Terry?
Terry: I'm a bit shy! And all these people are making my knees knock and my shivers timber.
Hatty: But they all look very friendly to me! Are you very friendly everyone? (yes) You see. They're very friendly Terry. I know! How about you give everyone a high five! To make you feel better?



Hatty played catch with the children early on in the story, a game which **everyone could get involved** in as it **doesn't require lots of dialogue**.

Working with schools

This year, we have partnered with two primary schools, **St Matthews and Ranelagh**, targeting schools in extremely deprived wards, where **92.3% of pupils fall into the first 5 deciles in terms of deprivation** (IDACI data) compared to 45.3% across the local authority, and over **50% speak English as an additional language**.

With **no other drama provision or cultural engagement**, they were very excited to get involved in our 'Once Upon A Time' Project.

Our actors visited St Matthew's Reception and Year 1 classes, and Ranelagh's Year 1's and nursery children. The workshops were successful in engaging all children with **active participation throughout all the songs, dialogue and games**. Each child was also given their very own, specially designed storybook, which they were excited to take home and show to their families.

Many of the young students enjoyed watching the story so much that they came **a second time with their families** to see Hatty and Terry at The Avenue Theatre during our public shows!

"A fantastic workshop. Our children loved it! The teachers thought that it was amazing and engaging! Thank you for this opportunity!"
Ranelagh Headteacher




Access to the Arts

One of our key goals throughout this project has been to **inspire and uplift** children from disadvantaged households, supplying them with opportunities to **engage with performing arts** in a world that often excludes those from **low socioeconomic backgrounds**.

This year, we worked with **The Ipswich Family Bank** - a local food and baby bank - to give free tickets to families struggling during the **cost of living crisis**. A lot of the children that came through these tickets had never been to the theatre before, and because of this, **greatly benefitted** from the **relaxed and interactive** style of the show.

"The families that made it to your show said it was such an amazing experience and were so very grateful."
- Ipswich Family Bank

We also invited **18 children** from a local hotel **housing refugees** to our public performances, **providing them transport** to and from the theatre. Developing this connection with these children who are otherwise **isolated from social opportunities** is greatly important to us, and so following the performance, the actors spent time with the refugees, **showing them around** the theatre and continuing to **play music**.



This tailored experience gave them confidence to interact on their own terms, and soon they were offering to help the actors move props and get ready for the next show!

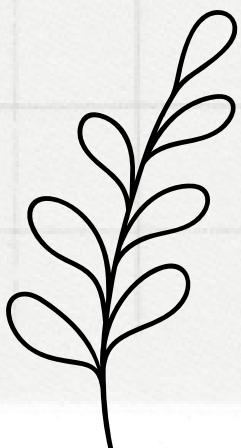
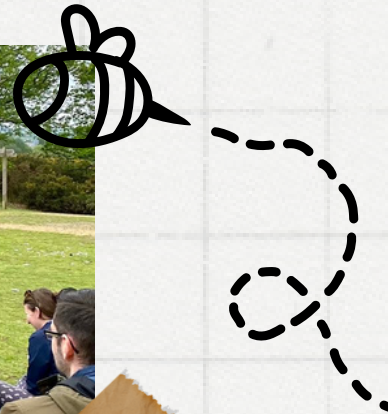


The Great Outdoors

Year 2 saw us **performing outdoors** at one of the children's centres, and this proved to be **incredibly successful**. This year, we **pushed this further**, staging one of our public performances outdoors to give the children the space to play and **enjoy the nature** in our theatre's garden. This choice **elevated the story**, enhancing the script as the characters mentioned what a **very sunny day** it was, or that it was the perfect spot for a picnic.



In order to **further explore the outdoors** with our young audience and get them in touch with the natural world, we teamed up with **The National Trust** to bring a **free performance** of The Tortoise and the Hare to **Sutton Hoo**. This performance was **held outdoors** in the centre of the heritage site, and the children greatly enjoyed **piling cushions on top of Hatty** while she napped in the sunshine!



Challenges

Following the challenges after **the pandemic**, we have seen an **increase in audience numbers** at both the children's centres and at our public theatre performances. However we faced the challenge of retaining participants week on week, rather than 'drop in' style sessions, meaning many children missed parts of the story.

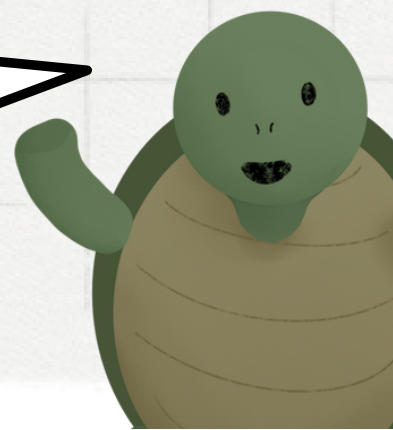
Having delivered two years of this project prior to **The Tortoise and the Hare**, we've developed a method that effectively engages with children in a manner that puts their **educational needs** and comfort first. This has allowed us to focus our attention on targeting the families that **need this work the most**. We connected with refugees in year two and identified this as an **important area to expand on**.

One of the challenges we faced was getting the refugees to the theatre, as most of them don't have access to transport of their own and can't afford to pay for public transport. We arranged a free bus transport from their housing to the theatre, and this was very successful, allowing us to bring parents and their children to our venue free of charge.

We knew that all of these refugees had either just begun learning English, or that English was a second language, and so created the show with colourful, visual storytelling which we have found to be very helpful in breaking through this language barrier. The result of this was that even children who knew very little English could participate in the games and songs and follow the story



We gave the refugees books at the start of the show, giving them a visual guide to follow along with the performance.



Outcomes

Each week we saw the **children's excitement** for the next instalment of the story grow, and their confidence to **interact with the actors** grow with it. This process was **accelerated** by the actors' presence in the **performance space** as the young audience arrived, **easing them into the show** before it had even started.

Parents have also been interacting with the story **at home**, through reading the book, **singing the songs**, and acting out scenes with their children. Inviting them to The Avenue Theatre to see the show **one last time** also proved to be **successful**, and many of the audience expressed how they'd have loved to see it **even more times**

88%

of parents said they're now more likely to take their child to the theatre again

"I've decided that for the rest of my life I'm going to keep it slow and steady."

A young member of the audience

75%

of children had never been to a theatre before

"We could take both kids to the show. Eldest has ASD & GDD so we struggle to do things as a family."

A parent

72%

of parents said their child's confidence has grown during the sessions

"My son loved it and keeps talking about it after school"

A parent

During the sessions, the children were **encouraged** to collaborate in **creating scenes**, allowing them to **express their creativity** and interact in a way that felt **natural to them**. By weeks three and four, their confidence had grown with help from the **repetition in the story**, and they were singing along with the songs and **telling the actors** what came next.

"My son has loved interacting with Hatty & Terry each week & joined in. I was sad it has come to an end but cannot wait for the next one."

A parent





"Me and my daughter come to one of their workshops and loved every minute. They are brilliant and work so well with kids. Can't wait until next year for the next one."

A parent

"My niece absolutely loved this performance at the weekend - the actors did amazing and are so accommodating of the little ones "

A parent



Through the connection with the hotel housing refugees, as well as our work with Ipswich Family Bank, we hope to help disadvantaged families explore the arts further. Many of them have expressed an interest in joining our free youth theatre and coming to see more shows, and we are actively working to make that happen, as we plan to invite them to see our outdoor Shakespeare show in the summer.

Opportunities to engage with them like The Tortoise and the Hare are vital to opening these doorways.

