



The
University
Of
Sheffield.

**The
School
Of
Education.**

Evaluation of **Booktrust Stories Tour** 2013-14 **Executive Summary**

Project Team:

Cathy Nutbrown, Peter Clough, Sabine Little

The School of Education
The University of Sheffield
388 Glossop Road
Sheffield, S10 2JA
c.e.nutbrown@sheffield.ac.uk
0114 222 8086

Executive Summary

The Booktrust Stories Tour forms part of the Arts Council's funding portfolio, specifically within the "Strategic Touring" strand. Booktrust was awarded funding for bringing

*multi-lingual (Punjabi, Urdu, Bengali, Somali) literature performances to libraries, community centres and prisons across England. These [were to] focus on deprived urban areas to reach families from black and minority ethnic groups.*¹

Central to the Stories Tour was a specially commissioned play performed by four actors (two men and two women) from different backgrounds and heritages. Using a minimalist, portable set, the play included music, puppetry and audience participation. At each performance the audience was invited to choose a story from three titles given; we understand that the story options were chosen from the cultural heritages of people from the Punjabi, Urdu, Bengali, Somali communities that the play was developed to attract. The play was always performed in English with some characters using words from other languages and one part in the plot where two characters played out a 'yes'/'no' scene using the words 'yes' and 'no' in the four community languages (Punjabi, Urdu, Bengali, Somali). The play was followed by a storyteller, sharing books, and the gifting of books to children (Appendix 1). Though the language of the play was English, the Stories tour website² included downloadable support materials and the audio version of the story in five languages (also given to children on a CD at the end of each performance). The Stories Tour events were run in community centres, libraries and prisons in ten local authorities across England and Wales.

This report has been commissioned by Booktrust in order to evaluate the impact the Stories Tour had throughout its life cycle, with the principal aim specifically focusing on "the venues hosting events and the families participating in the events".³

¹ Arts Council Website (<http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/>)

² <http://www.bookstart.org.uk/events/stories-tour/listen> the story could be listened to in English, Bengali, Punjabi, Urdu or Somali

³ (Specification of Requirements p.2). The evaluation began with a briefing meeting in July 2013 and ends with this report (August 2014).

Evaluation Design

Two key strands of enquiry have:

- in the venues, produced quantified and qualitative evidence of how the Booktrust Stories Tour sought to engage families in community centres, libraries and prisons.
- in relation to the families produced further qualitative evidence of their perceptions.

Research Questions

The evaluation design was developed in collaboration with Booktrust and was based on three key questions:

1. To what extent can a community-based literature/arts event 'reach' members of the community (in particular members of Black and Minority Ethnic groups) that are 'hard-to-reach'?
2. What are the barriers to this participation?
3. How might participation be maximised?

Data collection

Overall, the data comprised:

- Five Interviews with key staff at case study venues (in the case of prisons, a member of Pact⁴);
- Interviews with Booktrust's Stories Tour Project Manager at three stages of the tour;
- Twenty-two online questionnaires, conducted approximately two months post-performance;
- Twenty-six in-situ evaluations with families, featuring questions (show of hands, indication of preferences on posters), comments, and observations;
- Seven observations from evaluation team members at case study venues;
- Twenty-six observations completed by a member of venue staff/volunteer;
- Fifty-Two Stories Tour performance reports;
- Three phone interviews conducted with venues, specifically from LAs that were under-represented in the questionnaire
- Notes from a focus group conducted by Booktrust with the performers.

⁴ Booktrust worked in partnership with Pact on this project. Pact is a national charity which supports people affected by imprisonment, providing practical and emotional support to prisoners' children and families, and to prisoners themselves. <http://www.prisonadvice.org.uk/>

Data analysis

The analysis draws first on data from all evaluation activities, before presenting the seven case studies (two community centres, two libraries and three prisons). We have adopted a simple analytical framework based directly on the following key themes:

1. Views of the event from families and centre staff
2. Staffing
3. Booktrust support and marketing
4. Organisation of event
5. Auxiliary activity (e.g. workshops for prisoners)
6. Ethnicity of participants
7. Lasting impact, 'value' and future evaluation

Conclusions

Within these seven themes we conclude the following:

1. Views of the event from families and centre staff

- Overwhelmingly children enjoyed the performances.
- In the prisons there is plentiful evidence from families regarding their enjoyment of the event.

2. Staffing

- Levels of staffing, and commitment by staff to the project in the venues varied greatly as did the roles and use of volunteers in community centres and libraries;
- Four venues reported that the training offered to their community centre volunteers was very important whilst ten (eight libraries and two community centres) reported that it was unimportant or unused;
- Confidence of volunteers was said to have increased in six of the community centre venues;
- Booktrust's aim to empower local communities via volunteer training seems to have been at least partially successful;
- Lack of staffing was a challenge in prisons with one of the main challenges for Pact being the significant commitment of time required in liaison work within and outwith prisons to set up the tour events.

3. Booktrust support and marketing

- Flyers and marketing support from Booktrust were considered by 16 venues who responded (88%) to be important and 82% (14 responding

venues) found the Booktrust support good and helpful.

4. Organisation of events

- The organisation of the project overall broke new ground for Booktrust
- For a small number of community centre venues and one library, the organisation was over-complicated and could have been simpler;
- All but five of the 22 responses to our questionnaire survey reported that they would engage in such events in the future if given the opportunity, and indicated strong commitment to help Booktrust achieve its aim of drawing the audience from “hard-to-reach” target populations;
- The actors would have found it helpful to know more detail about their audiences beforehand so as to adapt the play if appropriate;
- Booktrust’s collaboration with Pact, a charity experienced in working with prisons, lay at the heart of the success of the Stories Tour in prisons, so that the complex challenges to organising an event were negated or overcome;
- All venues acknowledged the support available, and for most there was a sense that difficulties and challenges would not inhibit venues from further similar engagement in the future.

5. Auxiliary activity

- Personalised book bags and books were a huge success with prisoners’ children and clearly something that made the day a success for prison families.

6. Ethnicity of participants

- The Stories Tour was successful to a large degree in attracting members of all the targeted BAME groups to the events located in community centres and libraries;
- In the prison venues, the criteria used to select prisoners for participation were not related to the BAME-related targets;
- Turnout for the stories tour event was higher than usual for 78% of the venues responding, In general, low participation rates at cultural events were attributed to: a history of lack of events, lack of funding, lack of interest, childcare difficulties, and language issues;
- About a half of libraries and community centres were successful in bringing children from local schools, nurseries and preschools, and in just under a third of the venues those who attended were not previously known to that venue;
- For some *venues* the £100 participation fee was likely to be a barrier in the future. For some *families* a requirement to pay in future might present difficulties in the future; some were not willing to pay at all whilst others said they might be willing to pay up to £5;

- It seems that some venues were successful in attracting new users and in breaking down some barriers to participation, attracting people considered to be 'hard-to-reach';
- Whilst not everyone agreed on the importance of offering refreshments, some venues reported more specifically that this was much appreciated by families and that it added to the special nature of the event;
- Of responding venues 78% report higher attendance than other events, and a similar proportion reported that new links were being created within the community.

7. Lasting impact, 'value' and future evaluation

We have identified the following indicators of and factors to support, continued activity which vary according to venue type:

- Since all **community centres** involved in the Stories Tour were new contacts, Booktrust staff felt that these new relationships would impact positively on Booktrust's future work at such venues, with several community centres having expressed interest in further involvement with Booktrust;
- The impact of the Stories Tour in **prisons** has been highlighted. Pact plans to continue collaborative work with Booktrust. Two prisons have maintained contact with the local storyteller who participated in their events and envisage further collaboration;
- For **libraries**, impact was largely measured via increased membership numbers, as well as links with the community.
- We are not able to comment on value for money because that is outside of the scope of the commissioned evaluation and we do not have the necessary information to form a view on this aspect.
- Despite immediate success in the venues, few have run follow-up activities. The planned 'Legacy Toolkit' [see below] and further volunteer training opportunities may result in more development;
- To date there have been no resulting links between prisons and local community centres or libraries, although there is hope that the 'Legacy Toolkit' will help develop this.

We have identified the following barriers to continued activity (which of course vary according to venue and venue type):

- Funding cuts have led to reduced staffing in some **community centres**, which limits capacity for additional events. In several community centres, there seemed to be an expectation that it would be Booktrust's responsibility to provide ideas or opportunities for future engagement;
- Within **prisons**, maintaining links and liaison with individual officers can be

- difficult due to re-deployment, and the prisoners themselves may also be moved between prisons;
- Staff difficulties due to funding cuts appear to have impacted on *libraries'* ability to generate further activities.

This project was ambitious; it attracted considerable funding and attempted considerable 'reach' into communities traditionally underserved in the arts. It is important to understand something of lasting effects of the Stories Tour as well as its immediate impact.

Recommendations

We recommend that:

- clear information is given, in future, about the suitability of Booktrust events for particular age groups;
- future events should include time for consulting with families about what future stories-oriented events they would like;
- Booktrust gives careful attention to staffing the event and that venues receive the necessary funding to support future events to avoid staffing difficulties being a barrier to participation;
- guidance is given to venues on what can be funded from the marketing budget in future;
- participation would be maximized if any information specific to venues and audiences were given to actors before the event where it was known or deemed appropriate;
- a budget for refreshments at similar events is maintained in the future;
- auxiliary activities, especially personalizing the book gift bags, are included in any future events for prisons;
- venues are supported in developing community specific approaches to engaging new audiences;
- the Legacy Toolkit is available in several languages so as to maximise the likelihood of further similar activities, and includes: ways of working that might reach out to working with school groups, in terms of professional development for teachers and teaching assistants to develop ideas for work which extend beyond the day itself; information

on ways to follow up the performance; information on how the play links with Early Years Foundation Stage; support material how to consult with families about what future stories-oriented events they would like.

- careful thought should be given to the budget for evaluation of a project of this size and scope, we recommend a minimum of 10% of project funding should be allocated to evaluation.
- there should be some future evaluation of the follow-up in venues so that Booktrust can learn something of the 'legacy' of the Stories Tour.

