

## Grants for the Arts Case Study

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# Frozen Light:

Engaging audiences with Profound and Multiple Learning Disabilities



Image by JMA Photography, courtesy of Frozen Light

Amber Onat Gregory and Lucy Garland  
Co-Artistic Directors, Frozen Light

# Case Study Introduction

## What will I learn and is it relevant to me?

### Themes...

- Diversity
- Disability
- Touring

### Learning...

- Developing relationships with venues
- Developing audiences with Profound and Multiple Learning Disabilities (PMLD)
- Developing touring networks and company profile

### Relevance...

This case study is relevant to:

- Touring companies wanting to work more closely with venues to develop audiences or raise their profile and build new networks
- Grants for the Arts applicants who want to find out more about funded projects
- Venue marketers working with touring companies to develop new audiences

Frozen Light was grown out of a desire to make theatre for audiences that don't usually access theatre in mainstream arts venues.

# Background

## Painting the backdrop to the project

### Introducing Frozen Light

Frozen Light is a touring company that creates exciting and original multi-sensory theatre for audiences with Profound and Multiple Learning Disabilities (PMLD).

We have a passion for stories and adventures, engaging interactive theatre and theatre that encompasses all senses.

Frozen Light was grown out of a desire to make theatre for audiences that don't usually access theatre in mainstream arts venues.

We are an associate company of the New Wolsey Ipswich who share our vision of accessible theatre for all.

### Our audiences

We focus on creating theatre for people with Profound and Multiple Learning Disabilities (PMLD).

Lucy and I had previously done a lot of work performing multi-sensory storytelling shows in

special schools after graduation in 2007. After six years of creating small-scale solo work we wanted to push ourselves artistically by working in professional theatre settings.

We wanted to increase the quality of our work and ensure that our audiences with PMLD could attend our shows with their families, outside of the school context as well as providing opportunity for school excursions. We also wanted to provide opportunities for adults with PMLD to access the theatre.

That provides the challenge of reaching lots of individuals rather than groups but it's important to us that families have that opportunity to attend a performance together.

### Our long-term ambitions...

- To increase the quality and availability of theatre for people with Profound and Multiple Learning Disabilities
- To achieve equal opportunity for people with Profound and Multiple Learning Disabilities

# The Forest

## A touring production for people with PMLD

### The project

The Forest was a multi-sensory production for teenagers and adults with Profound and Multiple Learning Disabilities. It was Frozen Light's second theatre production and the first that would tour entirely to theatre settings.

Our previous Grants for the Arts-funded tour of Tunnels had paved the way by transferring into a theatre setting. Tunnels was developed through a special school tour and followed by a theatre tour, also supported by house.

We received two separate grants for The Forest: one for the Research and Development Phase and then a smaller grant to support the tour.

### Research and development

The Research and Development phase of the project included research into immersive theatre, venue training, visiting shows and audience and PR development. Throughout the artistic process we were always thinking about who the audience is and how our work is relevant to their needs.

Transitioning from performing in special schools - where we were working almost entirely with groups - to attracting individuals, special schools and day centres to theatre settings required a strong focus on audience development. We dedicated time to relationship building, working with existing contacts and developing new ones.

We also spent a lot of time on profile raising and employed freelance Guardian journalist Saba Salman to advise us on things like press releases. We wrote blogs for The Guardian Culture Professionals Network and for Scope and Ewan's Guide.

That press development work was really important for sector awareness. Our previous tour had been booked by the house strategic touring initiative so this was our first tour we had booked entirely ourselves. We needed to develop industry relationships in order to access new regions and our target audiences within them.

### The tour

When it came to touring our work, the accessibility of venues was vital. We looked for settings that were suitable for our audience's needs with non-raked seating and accessible toilets that would be appropriate for our production and our target audience.

Once the tour was scheduled we then set about building relationships with those venues. We met with all the venues on the tour and talked to Marketing and Box Office staff about the show and about Frozen Light so they understood the company and what the show would be like. We also talked about our audiences with PMLD to help venues understand our target audience and how they could reach them. Throughout the tour we found that calling or emailing people directly and inviting them to attend was by far the most successful form of marketing.

We produced two separate resources for audiences and companions, which venues could send out before the performance. The guide for companions offered reassurance that it was fine for people to make noise or move around. It described the performance layout and gave very practical information about chillout zones elsewhere in the theatre if anyone became distressed. This was all part of building up trust and a relationship with our audience. The second resource was a visual story for our audience with PMLD.

### Cost

The Research and Development phase of the project cost approximately £60,000 and the tour cost £50,000. Arts Council England contributed £40,000 to the Research and Development phase and a further £11,000 for the tour.

The additional funds came from trusts and foundations including Stanley Thomas Johnson Foundation, Mercers Charitable Trust, Bruce Wake Foundation, Boshier Hinton Foundation, Eastern Counties Educational Trust, Hugh Fraser Charitable Trust, John Thaw Trust, D'Oyly Carte Charitable Trust and Odin Charitable Trust.

# Results and top tips

## Changing the world one piece at a time

### The results

- 1,199 people attended The Forest
- 82 performances, including the premiere, of The Forest at 27 venues
- 3 performers and a technician on tour
- 86% of performances reached full capacity for PMLD audiences (6 people with PMLD per show plus 6 carers and a further 12 friends and family places)

### How the organisation has benefited

The organisation has benefited from increased profile throughout the sector. We're already securing new venues for the next tour based on the strength of feedback from The Forest. This enables us to open up performances to an even wider audience by accessing new cities and regions that we haven't toured to before.

We're learning all the time about the best way of communicating with venues and with audiences to ensure that all our performances are full.

### How audiences have benefited

Our audiences have benefited from the equal opportunity to attend a performance in a theatre setting. They have engaged with the story and enjoyed being part of an

audience, enjoying an experience with family and friends.

Several venues are now actively seeking out other productions for PMLD audiences. Harlow Playhouse, for example, went on to programme Oily Cart. This will increase opportunities for PMLD audiences.

### Top tips

- Maintain strong communication with venues - we were able to step in and help some venues that were struggling to find audiences but that only worked when we knew there was a problem
- Pick up the phone and talk to people - that was by far the most effective marketing technique
- Share knowledge with venues - venues' local knowledge coupled with a touring company's research into a specific target audience and understanding of why their work is suitable for that audience is incredibly powerful
- Work hard to build your reputation with audiences and throughout the sector - you can only provide performances in accessible areas if you get venues in those areas interested in your work
- Push for reviewers and programmers from other venues to attend your shows to help you build that reputation and future interest

### Find out more

Watch a video and read about the show:

<http://frozenlighttheatre.com/pastproductions/forest/>

View The Forest resources for audiences and carers:

<http://frozenlighttheatre.com/resources/forest-resources/>