

# Engaging families

Contemporary art for family audiences



Image courtesy of Generation Tour. Generation AIR by Spacecadets © Donna Lisa Healy

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Generation Tour



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### Research findings

Generation Tour Evaluation



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# Generation Tour

## Contemporary art for families

The Generation Tour was a project funded by Arts Council England's Strategic Touring Fund. It combined family-focused programming and audience development work to attract family audiences to four contemporary art galleries in the north of England:

- The DLI Museum and Art Gallery, Durham
- Gymnasium Gallery, Berwick
- Central Art Gallery, Ashton-under-Lyne
- Towneley Hall, Burnley

The target audience was families with children under 11. These were identified as being an under-represented audience for the venues and contemporary visual art.

The Tour employed two communications specialists to work with curators to research and engage families. By taking a research-based approach, the tour engaged families who had never visited a contemporary art gallery before.

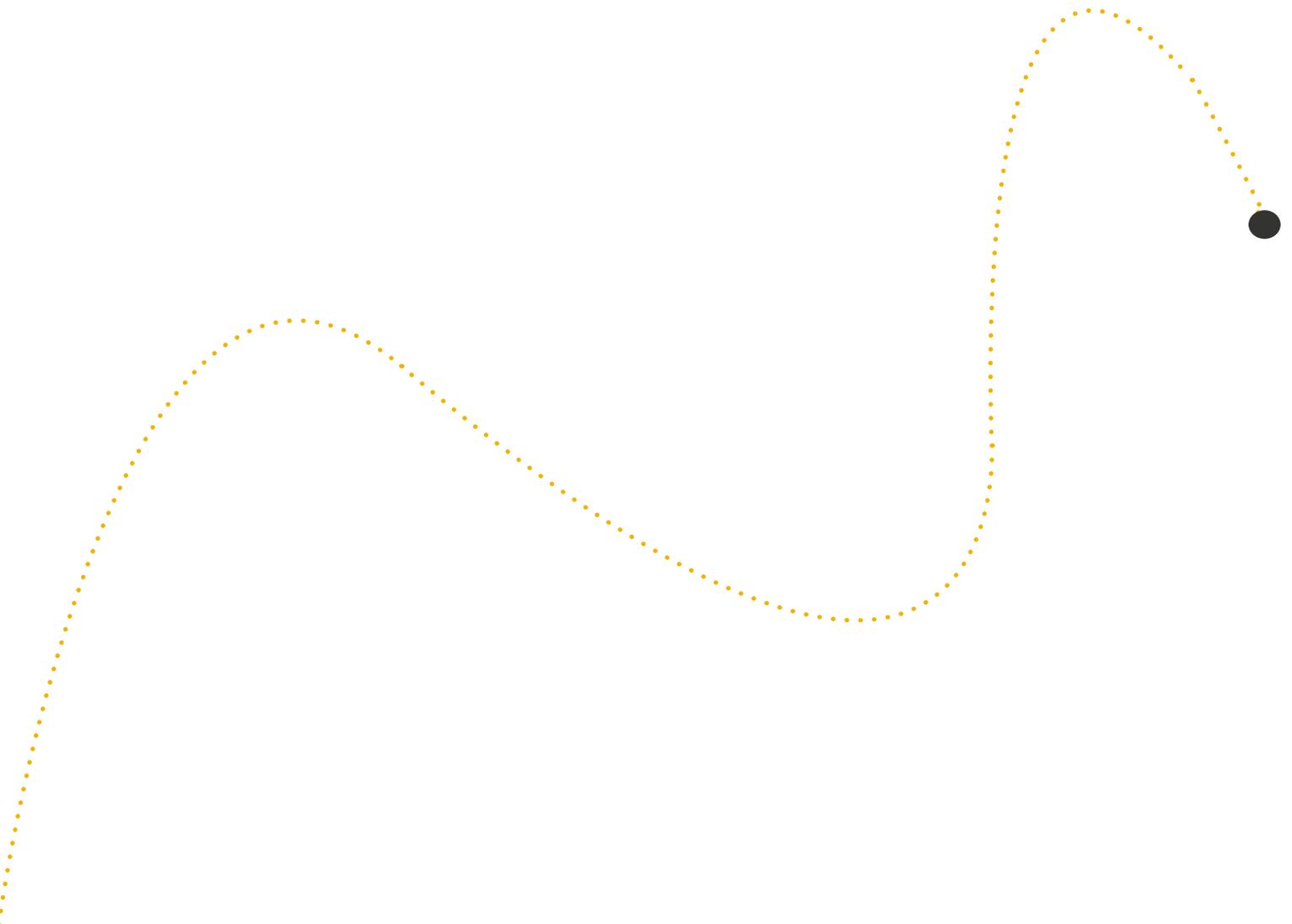


## Finding out what families want

The communications specialists worked with focus groups to find out what families in the area wanted and what they currently thought of visiting contemporary art galleries.

The focus groups and other research showed that families:

- wanted a hands on experience which was opposite to how they perceived contemporary art galleries to be
- could be turned off by the very words 'art' and 'artist'
- needed to know that it would be an easy experience practically speaking — good facilities for families, easy to find, easy to park, toilets etc
- liked colourful communications literature that was instantly recognisable as 'for families'



## The exhibitions

The Tour commissioned four brand new contemporary art exhibitions between September 2014 and September 2016:

- Generation AIR by Spacecadets
- Generation NOISE by Owl Project
- The Tree, The Caterpillar and The Butterfly by Aether & Hemera
- Musical Chairs by Hellicar&Lewis

All of the exhibitions were interactive in some way. Generation AIR had tunnels that could be crawled through. Generation NOISE featured wooden machines that made noises caused by human interaction. The Tree, The Caterpillar and The Butterfly created an interactive garden in each venue and Musical Chairs made different sounds when sat upon.



## Creating the Generation brand

All four exhibitions were presented under a single Generation brand, designed with families in mind.

It needed to:

- appeal to the family audience (who do not have strong engagement with arts/culture)
- be flexible enough to work across 4 venues, 4 artist commissions, print, digital and in venue interpretation
- be consistent enough to act as a visual identifier across time/venues/artists
- be fun/exciting/innovative and stand out from the crowd of communications that bombard our families on a daily basis



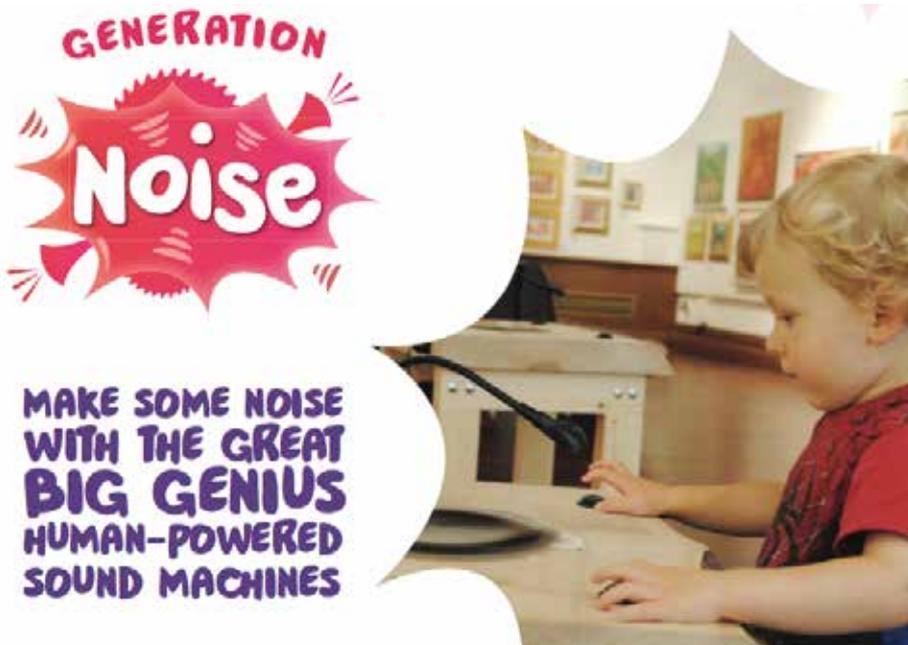
## Marketing and audience development

The marketing and audience development work for Generation Tour was informed by the focus group research with families.

To promote the exhibitions, we:

- created a Generation Tour website
- printed leaflets and posters for each venue and exhibition, including specific family friendly information
- placed adverts in Primary Times magazine
- distributed and displayed leaflets and posters in family friendly places across the areas
- focused on PR to family media and online listings

In all communications, we focused on describing the artistic concept in a way that spoke to families and not the usual visual art audience.



The website, leaflets and word of mouth proved most successful in reaching families.

## Working with Children's Centres

Working with Children's Centres was a priority of the project. We wanted to develop a deeper relationship with partners who were already working with families.

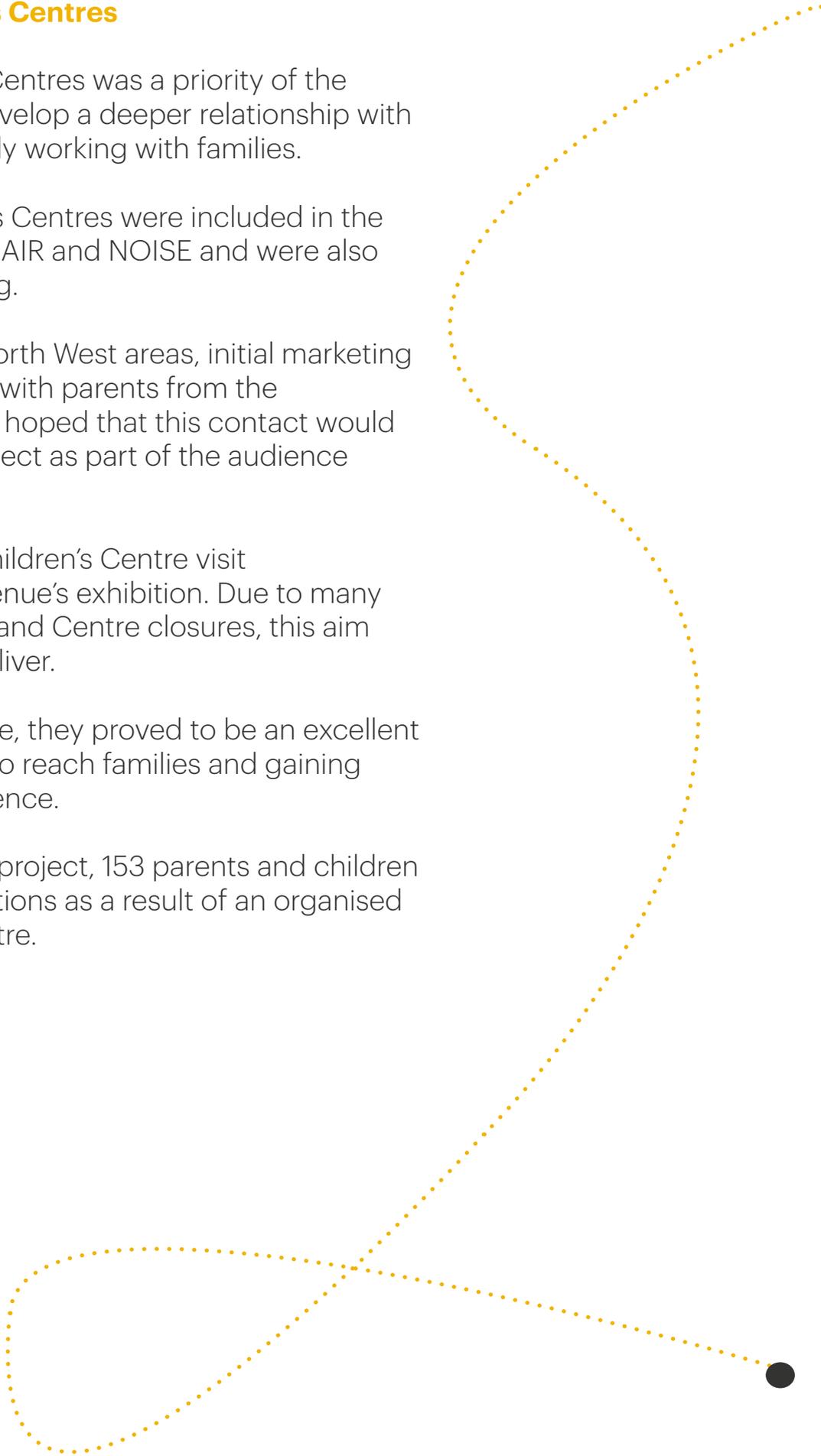
Staff from local Children's Centres were included in the commissioning panel for AIR and NOISE and were also involved in the shortlisting.

In both North East and North West areas, initial marketing research was carried out with parents from the Children's Centres. It was hoped that this contact would grow throughout the project as part of the audience development plan.

The aim was to have a Children's Centre visit organised during each venue's exhibition. Due to many organisational pressures and Centre closures, this aim proved challenging to deliver.

Where visits were possible, they proved to be an excellent way of engaging harder to reach families and gaining insight into visitor experience.

Across the course of the project, 153 parents and children visited Generation exhibitions as a result of an organised trip with a Children's Centre.



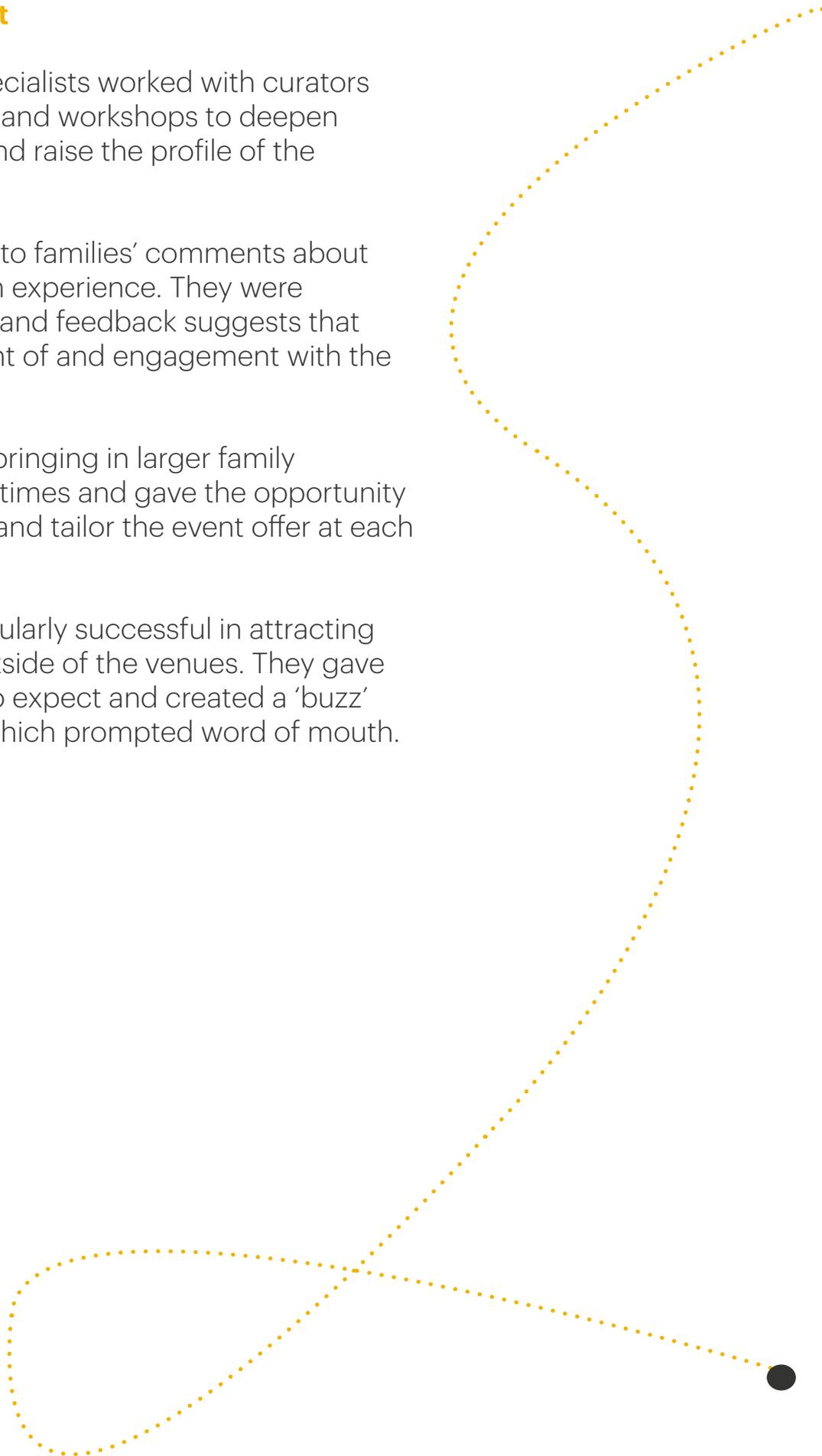
## Deepening engagement

The communications specialists worked with curators to plan animation events and workshops to deepen audience engagement and raise the profile of the exhibitions.

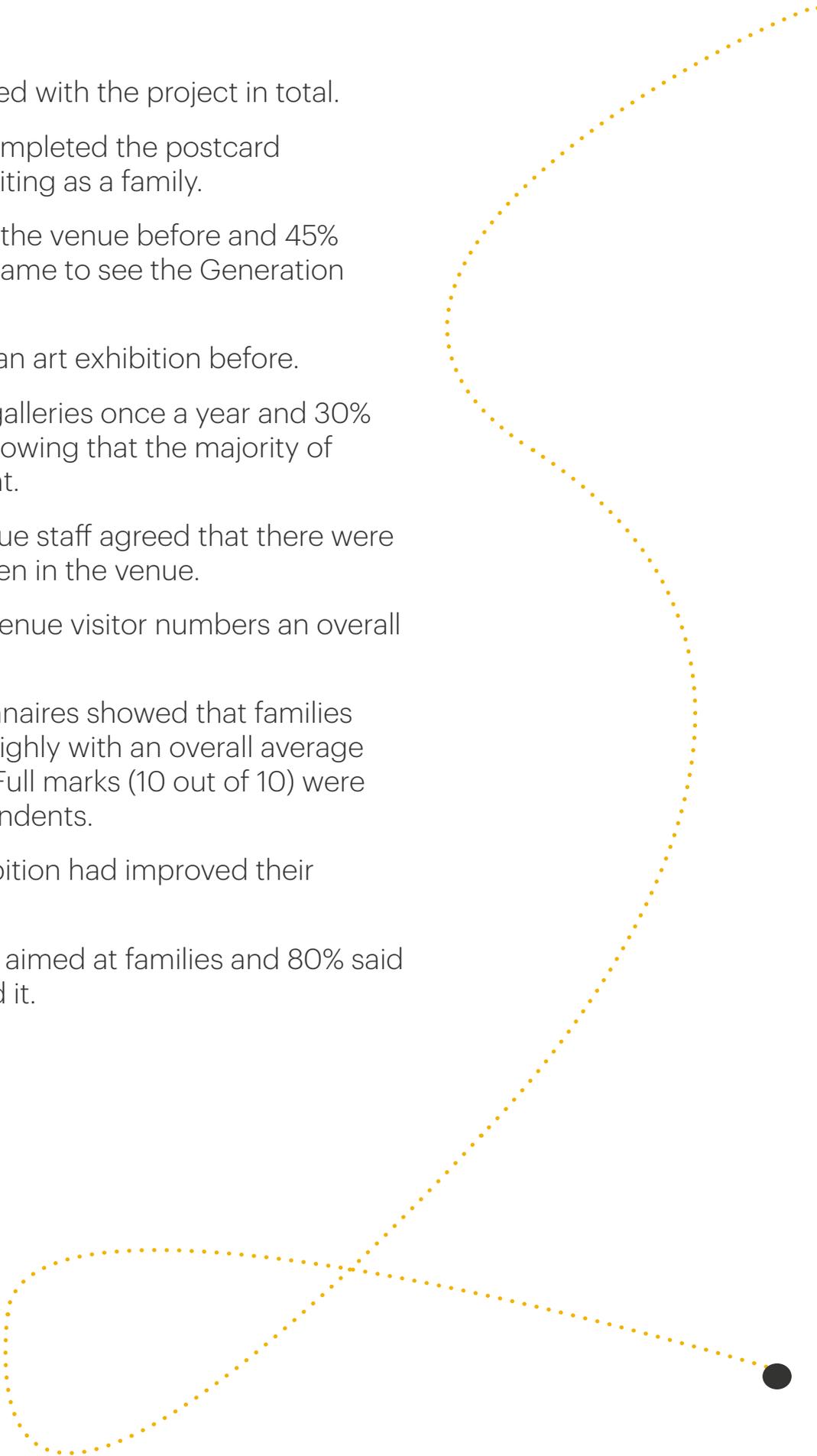
The activities responded to families' comments about wanting a more hands on experience. They were enthusiastically received and feedback suggests that they enhanced enjoyment of and engagement with the exhibitions.

They were also useful in bringing in larger family audiences at key holiday times and gave the opportunity to work with local artists and tailor the event offer at each location.

These events were particularly successful in attracting audiences when held outside of the venues. They gave families a taste of what to expect and created a 'buzz' around the exhibitions, which prompted word of mouth.



## The results

- 123,235 people engaged with the project in total.
  - 83% of visitors who completed the postcard questionnaire were visiting as a family.
  - 43% had never visited the venue before and 45% said they specifically came to see the Generation exhibition.
  - 14% had never visited an art exhibition before.
  - 33% said they visited galleries once a year and 30% every three months showing that the majority of visitors were infrequent.
  - Anecdotally, most venue staff agreed that there were more families to be seen in the venue.
  - The exhibitions gave venue visitor numbers an overall boost.
  - The postcard questionnaires showed that families rated the exhibitions highly with an overall average score of 8.7 out of 10. Full marks (10 out of 10) were given by 43% of respondents.
  - 81% said that the exhibition had improved their opinion of the venue.
  - 86% said it was clearly aimed at families and 80% said that their children liked it.
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## Recommendations

**Build in robust interactive elements** — One of the main pieces of feedback received from families was that they wanted to be able to interact with the exhibition. Some staff commented on a need for those elements to be more robust to cope with the interaction.

**Develop wraparound events** — The animation events and workshops worked really well in deepening engagement and generating buzz around the exhibitions.

**Communicate differently** — It was clear that a lot of families were put off by words like 'art' or 'artist' so think about how you can communicate in a way that better suits your target audience.

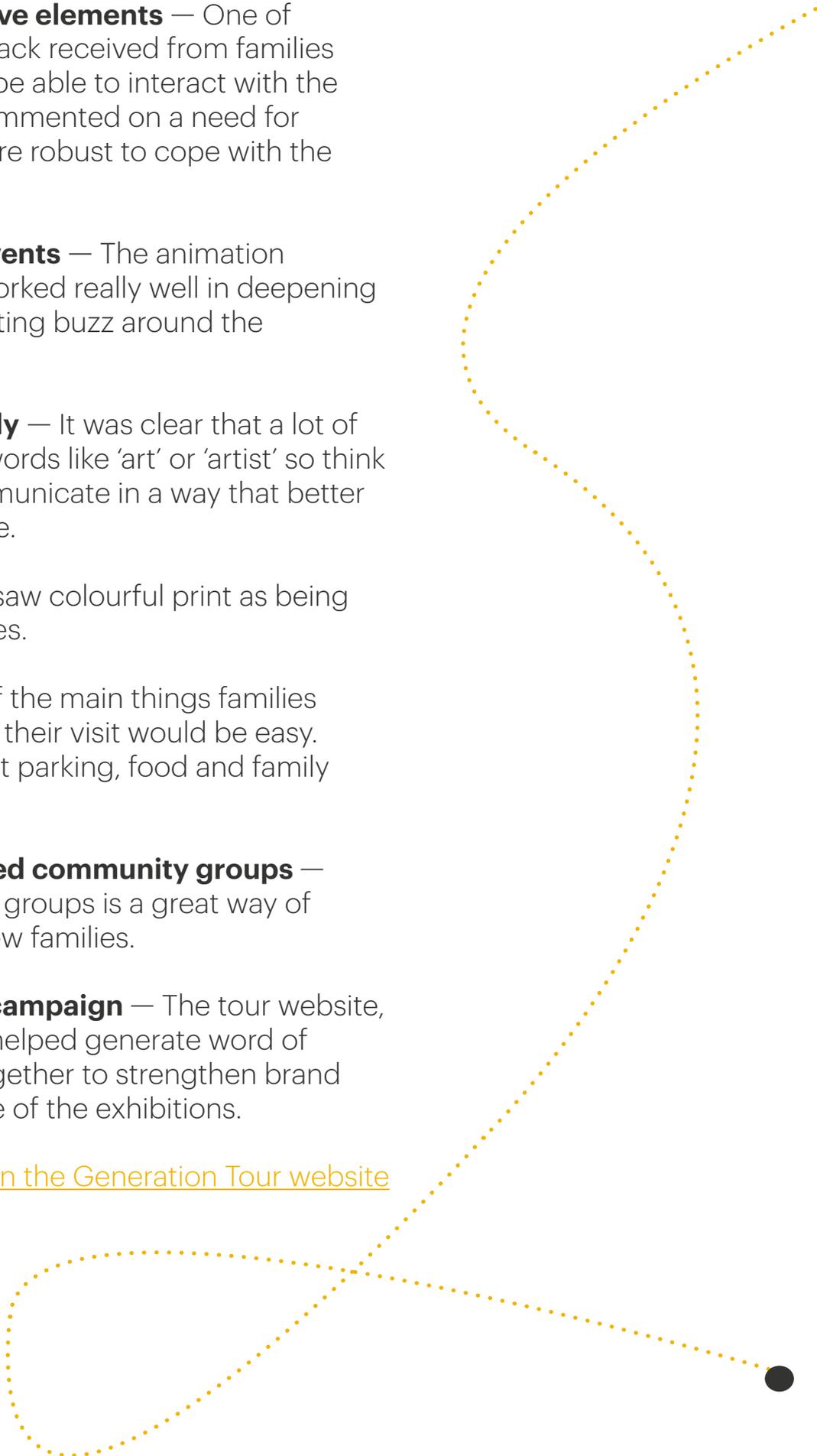
**Be colourful** — Families saw colourful print as being more obviously for families.

**Be informative** — One of the main things families wanted to know was that their visit would be easy. Include information about parking, food and family friendly facilities.

**Work with family-focused community groups** — Connecting with existing groups is a great way of meeting and involving new families.

**Develop an integrated campaign** — The tour website, leaflets and activity that helped generate word of mouth all worked well together to strengthen brand awareness and the profile of the exhibitions.

[Read the full evaluation on the Generation Tour website](#)





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