

# Creating more adventurous family audiences

*How can venues encourage family audiences to 'play less safe' and try something new? **Carey Fluker Hunt** outlines how the 'Culture Window' project has created new family audiences.*

Newcastle Gateshead's Cultural Venues (NGCV) is a partnership of ten organisations operating a total of 22 venues across all artforms. It set up 'Culture Window' in 2011 to talk to and learn from families, as well as each other. During the project, families were asked to visit venues and provide feedback. They enjoyed all sorts of activities they would not otherwise have tried, with some even recommending venues to other families looking for a good day out.

The impetus for Culture Window lay in findings from earlier [NGCV research](#)<sup>1</sup>, showing that many families avoided risk in choosing a day out, but that encouragement such as personal recommendations could help people move across thresholds and become more culturally confident and engaged.

The thirteen families recruited were drawn from the middle ground between those targeted by participation programmes and the confident minority who will give most things a try. The families were willing and able to make independent visits and appreciated the value of taking children on cultural days out but were wary of doing anything they might not enjoy or understand. Baseline information was collected during a get-together at Seven Stories, and attitudes to risk explored through drama games. The families were issued with packs including materials needed to make scrapbooks, information about activities, books of vouchers and membership cards. They visited NGCV organisations over the summer and provided extensive, high-quality feedback, collated via scrapbooks, interviews and questionnaires.

The vouchers were an incentive but were little used by families, whose attitudes to paid-for venues shifted during the project. They disliked 'What's on' listings, describing them as 'too much', preferring word-of-mouth recommendations from trusted sources. The personal request made for families to visit lesser-known venues had a positive effect, with many enjoyable visits made despite families' negative expectations.

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<sup>1</sup> See <http://ngcv.tv/work/public-engagement/public-engagement> for a copy of the pilot project report and the original research by Morris Hargreaves McIntyre with NGCV.

Following the pilot's success, this year an additional seven organisations have joined 'Culture Window 13' in an action research project involving up to 20 schools and 500 families. We want to widen the conversation, developing confident and 'culturally mobile' family audiences right across the region. Seventeen cultural organisations from across the North-East began engaging primary schools in September. Facilitators will run after-school workshops in February 2013, recruiting up to 500 families who will make independent visits to cultural venues and post information on dedicated social media sites, as well as creating scrapbooks.

Culture Window 13 is longer than its pilot, with significantly more communications and organisational support, and will use segmentation to help us communicate more effectively with families, as well as a thorough evaluation to share learning with others.

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The Culture Window steering group includes the partner venues plus Arts Council England, Bridge North East, local authorities, an Audiences North East Board member and Juice Festival. It is chaired by Kate Edwards, Chief Executive of Seven Stories, the leading organisation on the project. The organisations involved are The Baltic Centre for Contemporary Art, Centre for Life, Dance City, Live Theatre, Northern Stage, Seven Stories, The Sage Gateshead, Theatre Royal, Tyne & Wear Museums & Archives, Tyneside Cinema, plus Beamish Museum, Bowes Museum, The Customs House, The Forge, Preston Park Museum, Queens Hall Arts Centre and Woodhorn Museum.