**Forget me not Case Study**

A year ago, Edinburgh’s Festival and King’s Theatres teamed up with Forget Me Not which is a ground-breaking programme designed to create dementia-friendly communities at the heart of cultural venues. Funded by the Life Changes Trust, Forget Me Not aims to make the Festival and King’s Theatres accessible and inviting venues for people living with dementia and their families.

Forget Me Not also creates events and performances which are suitable for people living with dementia and their carers.

As it came to the end of the first year of its three-year project, Festival and Kings Theatres Edinburgh approached Culture Republic to help them to evaluate the project so far.

**The brief**

Festival and Kings Theatres asked Culture Republic to conduct research that would help the theatre to measure its success to date in achieving its project objectives. The main aim was to hear the views of attenders who had dementia, as well as hearing from theatre staff and dementia carers.

The Life Challenges Trust had set out key measures at the start of the project, and so these were considered when conducting the research.

The key measures for the project were as follows: -

* I have a significant say in how my dementia friendly community is run
* I know I have a community of support around me
* I am included
* I am empowered to do the things that matter to me
* I feel less stigma and less isolated

**Methodologies**

Several methodologies were explored and adapted due to the specific dementia -related conditions of the audience. The final approach consisted of observational methods, a written survey for attenders, a wider survey for the theatre audience, a written survey for theatre staff, and a mystery shopper exercise.

The Chitty Chitty Bang Bang production was chosen to form part of the research as it was Scotland’s first dementia friendly performance of a major touring musical.

**Attenders observation and short written survey**

As part of the observation, it was noted that audience members were very responsive to the musical part of the show and responded well with the children in the show.

41 written surveys were completed with all respondents saying that they enjoyed the show and with 39 stating that they felt part of a supportive community at the Festival theatre.

**Audience survey**

The audience survey was designed for all attenders and not just those living with dementia. The survey was sent to 120,000 people and Culture Republic received 1429 responses. 79% of respondents thought that it was important that people living with dementia (PLWD) are supported and able to live active lives.

One respondent said “The Forget Me Not programme is an excellent idea and I strongly welcome it. It’s too easy for sufferers and their carers to become socially isolated.”

**Staff Survey**

A slightly amended survey was conducted with the staff at the theatres. 34 out of 39 members of staff rated the service provided by the Theatres as excellent or good. However, the survey identified that there was some room for improvement in terms of awareness of the need to tailor the service for the PLWD community.

**Mystery shopper**

The mystery shopping aspect of the research was a highly effective way of seeing whether the Forget Me Not project was on track in achieving its goals in terms of ensuring that the theatres are welcoming places for attenders living with dementia. This was predominantly due to the research looking at the theatre going experience in its entirety from booking a ticket to attending the venue.

It was agreed that the mystery shopping should be rolled out more widely and on an ongoing basis with a continuous feedback loop from the Theatre staff back to the Forget Me Knot project staff.

In terms of assessing research methodology, undertaking an evaluation of the project at the end of the first year was useful as it has allowed for the research methods to be tested and this will ensure further research will be effective going forward.

**Findings and recommendations**

The research found that PLWD attending the events showed high levels of satisfaction. The programme is clearly providing a supportive environment and making the PLWD community feel valued and listened to. It was evident from the research that the Forget Me Not project is delivering on its objectives, but is still some way off in achieving its target of 50% awareness of the project by 2018. The research has also shown that people with dementia attend the theatre far less regularly than those without dementia, but this community would attend more frequently if barriers were lifted. One barrier that was highlighted for example, was that signage and wayfinding facilities in the venues are confusing and need improving.

Culture Republic has put together a range of proposals for Forget Me Not to consider, and its research has been vital in illustrating the important work of Forget Me Not and the need for more projects of this kind to help even more people living with dementia to gain access to cultural events.