

July 2016

contact a family
Cymru
i deuluoedd gyda phlant anabl
for families with disabled children



Cinema Provision in Wales for Families with Disabled Children

Ben Ewart-Dean

on behalf of
FILM HUB WALES & CONTACT A FAMILY

Contents

Introduction	Page 2
Background	Page 4
Methodology	Page 8
Interviews – Venues	Page 10
Contact A Family Screening Events	Page 16
Interviews – Audiences	Page 23
Research Conclusions	Page 27
References	Page 30
Recommendations	Page 31
Appendix A – Suggestions for Venues	Page 35
Appendix B – Useful Contacts	Page 36
Appendix C – List of Venues	Page 37

The researcher would like to acknowledge and thank everybody who took part in or contributed to this research: Angela Roberts; Angie Dickinson, Pontardawe Arts Centre; Allison Williams, Dragon Theatre; Annie Grundy, Magic Lantern Cinema; Chris Ryde, Monmouth Savoy; Chris & Finn; Claire Vaughan, Chapter Cardiff; The Crew-Davis family; The Davies family; Donna Calveley; Emily & Brenda; Emma Evans, Hynt; The Gooding family; Hana Lewis, Film Hub Wales; Jim Barrett, Bigger Picture Research; Katherine Wyke, Contact A Family; The Jarvis family; Liz Driscoll, Aberdare Coliseum; The Morgan family; Neal Hammond, Neil Simpson; Phoenix Centre; Paul Williams, Theatr Gwaun; Sarah Clarke, Dimensions; Shirley, Andrew, Emily & Daniel; Tomos, Eve & Heidi; Tracy Lawrence, Cross Hands Cinema.

All images taken by Noel Dacey at the Contact A Family 15th year anniversary event in Chapter, Cardiff



Introduction

This research was commissioned by Film Hub Wales and Contact a Family Cymru. The aim of the research was to identify the extent to which disabled children and their families were able to attend the cinema in Wales, and to highlight some of the barriers to them attending screenings at independent cinemas venues in Wales.

About Film Hub Wales (FHW)

FHW aims to bring more films, to more people, in more places around Wales. Along with its independent member venues, FHW regularly develops inventive ways for people in Wales to go to the cinema.

FHW is one of nine UK wide 'hubs' funded by the British Film Institute (BFI) to form the Film Audience Network (FAN), with Chapter appointed as the Film Hub Lead Organisation (FHLO) in Wales. We aim to develop the exhibition sector through dedicated research, training and audience development project support.

In partnership with cinemas, arts centres, community venues, societies, festivals and wider film practitioners, FHW aims to celebrate and support the vibrant cultural film sector here in Wales, working together to expand and increase choice for audiences, regardless of where they live.

About Contact a Family Cymru

Contact a Family is a UK-wide charity, providing support, advice and information for families with disabled children. Established in the 1970s, the charity works to bring families together to support each other, and campaigns to improve the circumstances and for their right to be included and equal in society. Starting in 2012, Contact a Family Cymru have been running a project entitled 'Disabled Children, Revitalised Families', part of which has been to run a series of screening events in venues around Wales, specifically for families of children with disabilities.



Background

In Wales, 22.5 percent of all pupils at local authority maintained schools and 16.0 per cent of all pupils at independent schools have some form of special educational need, a total of 104,957 (Statistics for Wales, 2015). The majority of these have either mild or moderate learning difficulties, which means that they need very little or no support to carry out everyday tasks (Hardy & Tilly, 2012).

The remaining pupils with special educational needs require a higher level of support, both in and out of school (Table 1.)

Description of need	Maintained	Independent	Total
Severe learning difficulties	2166	14	2180
Profound and Multiple learning difficulties	785	44	829
Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder	1243	9	1252
Autism Spectrum Disorder	4915	76	4991
Physical and medical difficulties	4549	0	4549
Behavioural, emotional and social difficulties	14,555	173	14,728
Hearing impairment	2182	0	2182
Visual impairment	867	0	867

TOTAL	31,262	316	31,578

Table 1: Total of pupils in schools in Wales who have special educational needs that require a high level of support, by need.

This makes a total of 31,578 children in Wales who potentially have specific access requirements and/or impairments that could form a barrier to visiting the cinema. If this is the case, then these children, plus their parents, carers and siblings, make up a large number of potential cinema audience members that may not be currently considered by cinemas.

Whilst many of the large chain cinemas are accessible for people (including children) with physical impairments, there are certain conditions whose symptoms are not readily apparent (for example autism spectrum conditions or ADHD), but which nevertheless affect the behaviour of children with those conditions in ways that is often deemed unacceptable in public.

Autism friendly screenings or relaxed screenings

Many of the major cinema chains (Cineworld, Odeon, Showcase, Vue) have made attempts to address the requirements of children on the autism spectrum by running regular 'autism friendly' screenings, in association with Dimensions UK. These are screenings of films that have had the screening environment adjusted to take into account the sensory needs of children and young people with autism. These screenings tend to happen at a time when the cinema is not so busy (usually on a Sunday morning), and the films that are shown are chosen for a family audience. In addition to this, the following adjustments are made:

- Lights left on low
- Sound turned down
- No trailers or advertisements (unless they are embedded in the film)
- Staff trained in autism awareness
- Disabled access
- Chill out zone, where available

- Freedom to move around and sit where you like
- Bring your own food and drink
- Free entry for carers with valid CEA Card.

(list adapted from Dimensions website)

For more information on Dimensions Autism Friendly screening scheme, visit:

<https://www.dimensions-uk.org/families/autism-friendly-screenings/>

Picturehouse also holds Autism Friendly screenings, in association with the National Autistic Society. There are, however, currently no Picturehouse cinemas in Wales.

For more information about Picturehouse autism-friendly screening scheme, please visit: <http://www.autism.org.uk/about/family-life/holidays-trips/picturehouse-cinemas.aspx>

Social stories

As part of the autism friendly screening scheme, some venues have social stories about them available for download. A social story is a short description of a particular situation or event, presented in a sequential order, and often accompanied by illustrations or photographs. The intention of a social story is to make the situation or event more comprehensible to children with learning disabilities.

An example of a social story, and a template to create your own social story can be found on the Dimensions Autism Friendly Screenings webpage:

<https://www.dimensions-uk.org/families/autism-friendly-screenings/>

CEA card

The CEA card is an initiative set up by the UK Cinema Association (formerly the Cinema Exhibitor's Association) in order to make it easier for disabled people to attend the cinema. Cinemas that are members of the CEA card scheme provide a complimentary ticket for the carer of anybody aged 8 years or older. Many of the major and independent cinemas in Wales are members of the CEA card scheme (to

search for participating cinemas, visit the CEA website:
<https://www.ceacard.co.uk/participatingcinemas.aspx>).

HYNT card

HYNT is a similar scheme to the CEA card, but instead of being specific to cinemas, it is designed for theatres and arts centres. HYNT also work in collaboration with venues and audiences to increase accessibility to theatres and arts venues around Wales, and facilitate a network to share best practice.

Because there are many multi-use venues in Wales, many of them have signed up to the HYNT scheme as well as the CEA card scheme. However, it should be noted that the criteria for eligibility differs between the two schemes. More information on the HYNT scheme can be found on the HYNT website: <http://www.hynt.co.uk/>

Disabled children have important rights under the UN Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which recognises that children with disabilities should have full enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms on an equal basis with other children (UNCRPD, 2006 Article 7). Despite the efforts of many independent cinema venues, both large and small, and schemes such as Hynt, CEA and the Autism Friendly screenings schemes to appeal to more diverse audiences, research suggests that parents of disabled children are often either unwilling or unable to visit the cinema with them (Ryan, 2005; Dowling & Dolan, 2001). This research is an attempt to highlight some of the reasons why this might be, and to make a series of recommendations of ways in which venues might be able to better accommodate disabled children and their families.



Methodology

The research was conducted between June and September 2015, using the following methods:

Questionnaire to venues

Researcher visits to Contact a Family screening events (3 in total)

Interviews with venues (10 in total, conducted either 1:1 or via telephone)

Interviews with families (12 in total, conducted either 1:1 or via telephone)

Interviews with other organisations (4 in total, conducted either 1:1 or via telephone)

Questionnaire

A questionnaire was sent out to all Film Hub Wales members as part of a parallel piece of FHW education research, and three questions were added to this questionnaire, regarding screening provision for disabled children and their families. The delivery of a more detailed questionnaire was discussed with Film Hub Wales and Contact A Family, but as Film Hub members were already being asked to

complete a lengthy questionnaire for the other piece of research, it was decided to add three questions to the existing one.

The three questions were:

Q1. Do you currently offer special film events catering to disabled children and their families?

Q2. Would you consider offering such screenings?

Q3. If yes, would you be interested in speaking about this matter to a researcher?

37 members responded to the questions, of which 15 identified as being either a mixed-use venue (eg. theatre, arts centre) or an independent cinema. The remaining respondents identified as being either a community cinema, a film festival or a film society. These were discounted because they did not provide screenings on a regular (at least once a week), year round basis.

This left a total of 28 venues that screened films on a regular basis. Of these, a further 10 were discounted because they did not offer regular (at least once a week) cinema screenings.

This left 18 venues from around Wales that ran regular screenings. The results of their responses were as follows:

1. Do you currently offer special screenings catering to disabled children and their families?

Yes - 7

No - 9

Don't know - 2

Of the 11 venues that replied No or Don't Know to Q1, all of them said that they would be prepared to offer such screenings (Q2).

The researcher contacted these 18 venues for follow-up interviews, of which ten replied and were interviewed. These venues represented a broad spectrum of small and large venues, from both rural and urban areas around Wales.



Interviews - venues

Interviews were conducted with the managers of ten venues (either dedicated cinemas or mixed-use venues) from around Wales, in order to gauge the general provision for screenings for families with disabled children and to highlight some of the issues that might be faced with the organisation of these screenings.

In each case, the participants were asked to describe the extent to which they provided such screenings and to suggest areas in which improvements might be made. All of them had some experience of running events for children with disabilities, and were willing to continue doing so, but there were some barriers to this.

Existing Screenings

Regular screenings

Screenings arranged via partnerships

The types of screenings that venues had arranged in the past varied between ones that the venue themselves had arranged, and ones that had been arranged by external partners (charities, services or local support groups). One dedicated cinema venue had regular (monthly) screenings run by the local branch of the National Autistic Society (NAS). Rather than charging for tickets, the venue charges the NAS for the cost of the screening fee, and the NAS arranges the audience. The venue is staffed by volunteers, so there are no staffing costs. The given reason for the NAS originally approaching the venue was they felt that, at the time, the local large chain cinema didn't have suitable provision (they have since signed up to the Autism

Friendly scheme run by Dimensions and described above) and they wanted to support a local cinema:

“I think they felt that a local cinema with friendly, approachable people that made you feel welcome was the way to go for them.”

For these screenings, the venue works closely with the local NAS co-ordinator to ensure the safety of the families. The staff at the venue don't have any specific autism training, but liase with the parents to support the needs of the individual children.

“We tend to seek the advice from the parents. They're quite interactive with us...it's such a laidback and friendly environment. No-one has ever told us 'don't speak to him like that.' It's all taken as it comes”

Screenings arranged by venues

Other regular screenings are arranged by the venues themselves. One mixed-use venue runs regular 'relaxed screenings' every Wednesday morning at 11am:

“many cinemas call such a screening 'autism friendly', but we call it 'relaxed screening', because we feel it's more inclusive of lots of different kind of people.”

These relaxed screenings do not cater specifically for families but are, instead special screenings of films that are already part of the weekly programme, held using 'autism friendly' conditions.

One of the interviewed mixed-use venues has a regular Kids Club screening on a Saturday morning. One idea they are considering is to run an autism-friendly alternative on a Saturday afternoon as a cost-effective way of catering to a more specific audience. Booking a single title and arranging two screenings of it on one day is a cost-effective way of catering to two separate audiences.

Special screenings

Some venues that do not run screenings as part of the regular cinema programme may do so on an ad-hoc basis, such as screenings held by Contact A Family (discussed in more detail later in this report). In these cases (as with the regular screenings arranged in partnership with outside organisation discussed above), responsibility for marketing and audience attendance lies with the organisation or individual hiring the cinema for the one-off event, and all the venue has to do is provide the space and staff. Ticket prices for these events vary, but tend to work on the same basis of the regular screenings, with the outside organisation paying a fixed fee for the hire of the venue.

Issues (Venues)

Amongst the venues interviewed, it was clear that the issues they faced in providing screenings were common, despite differences in venue size and location, and whether they were a dedicated cinema or mixed-use venue.

Difficulty in marketing

The single greatest issue facing venues was the difficulties that they experienced when marketing events to families with disabled children and organisations that worked with disabled people. The reason for the venues experiencing these difficulties ultimately came down to not having enough employee-hours to effectively market to families.

“That’s the main thing, the time to make something work and to market it.”

One cinema, recounting a conversation that she had with a representative from a partner charity, with whom they worked to put on screenings recalled:

“According to him, they really have to push push push push push. People will sign up okay, but then they drop off if they’re not reminded and reminded and reminded. This is one of the things that we need to take on board...we

totally need to up out game with contacting people repeatedly. Don't just rely on one email. One email will not do it."

Lack of suitable titles

Several of the venues interviewed mentioned that they found it difficult to find suitable family-friendly titles. This was because there are very few available titles that can appeal to a wide range of ages and to both boys and girls.

"Some [audience members] are only three. Some are sixteen. You can't always find a suitable movie."

Small audiences

For most of the venues spoken to, many of the screenings that they put on for families with disabled children have very small audience numbers, which makes them hard for the venues to justify from a financial standpoint. This is because the cost of putting on a screening involves not just the price of the film, but also the overheads of heating, lighting and electricity, as well as (for those venues that aren't staffed by volunteers) staffing costs.

"To be frank, I can't really justify putting on a special screening for people, and paying extra staff, unless we can guarantee that people are going to come."

"The overheads for a single screening are about £50, just for lighting, heating, staffing."

Limited wheelchair access

Some older venues have limited numbers of spaces for wheelchairs. Even for the Contact A Family screenings, where parents are able to book in advance, this has been a problem, as there are rarely enough wheelchair spaces for young wheelchair users. This could potentially be even more of an issue with regular screenings, because families can just turn up on the day of the screening without booking in advance.

“The one restriction that we’ve got is that we’ve only got enough space for three wheelchairs, if anybody wanted to use them”

A related problem is the placing of wheelchair spaces, which tend to be at the front of the auditorium. For some young wheelchair users with mobility problems, this could mean not being able to see the screen properly, or at all.

“One of the things that we’ve got in the pipeline is to improve our wheelchair access, not into the building, but in the auditorium. We’ve got raked seating, and the front row comes fairly close to the screen. When wheelchair users come in, they’re right at the front, which is not great at all.”

Training

Some of the venues spoken to have had official disability or autism awareness training (although they didn’t specify who delivered this training), but many hadn’t, instead picking things up on the job. For those venues that run regular events for children with disabilities, they get to know the parents and speaking to them about their children on an individual basis. This contributes to the community-focussed atmosphere that is central to the appeal of local, independent venues:

“We tend to seek the advice from the mother or father, they’re quite interactive with us, the parents. It’s such a laid-back, friendly environment. None of them have ever said to us ‘don’t speak to them like that!’ It’s all taken as it comes.”

Venues were keen to have some training, but expressed concern about where or when that might be. Whilst Wales is not a large country, it can take many hours to travel from one end of it to the other. Venue staff are already overstretched, and simply cannot afford the time to travel long distances to attend training sessions:

“I might [attend training], depending on where it is. Time-wise, I find it difficult to attend things”

One respondent mentioned that a practical handbook would be helpful. This would be a relatively cost-effective way of providing useful information for venues that would like to provide more screenings for families with disabled children:

“A little handbook of do’s and don’ts. All of these little venues like ours, we’re all running backwards, so anything to make our lives easier.”

Building links with charities

As mentioned previously, many special screenings occur as a result of a partnership being formed between the venue and a local charity. One of the issues that venues have with developing (and keeping) audiences is getting the contact details for parents with disabled children, and letting them know about upcoming events. Many venues have mailing lists, but they do not have details about whether families have disabled children or carers. Neither can they access the details for families from local charities, because of data protection laws:

“It’s building the links with the organisations and agencies that have those links (with families). I know that if I arranged an event for families of children with autism, I might not have had 250 people coming, like I do (at a screening) this afternoon. But because I’ve partnered with a local carer’s service, they’ve got the relationship with the families.”

One respondent suggested that families come to some of their screenings because of a familiarity with the partner charity, rather than with the venue.

“Most people come to Contact A Family screenings because of the familiarity with Contact A Family, rather than the venue”



Contact A Family Screening Events

From February 2013 until November 2015 Contact A Family organised a series of cinema events specifically for disabled children and their families. The programme resulted in 51 screenings in 37 venues around Wales (a full list of the participating venues can be found in Appendix C) and was responsible for 999 individual family trips to the cinema. It was made possible with funding by BBC Children in Need and the Big Lottery Fund. Funding from Film Hub Wales provided for a special Contact a Family Cymru 15 year anniversary event at Chapter Arts Centre in Cardiff and 23 more supportive environment screenings in local authorities in Wales.

The CaF screening events were held at a range of independent venues around Wales, a mixture of dedicated cinemas and mixed-use venues (combining regular film screenings with live performances). Contact A Family worked in collaboration with each venue to deliver the events.

Venues were selected through a variety of means, some on the basis of pre-existing relationships with Contact A Family or their partner organisations and schools, and others because they were located in particularly underserved areas.

Screenings were free for families to attend, and a free lunch was provided wherever possible. The events were initially advertised via email or through flyers distributed by CaF or their partner organisations and schools. Bookings were taken through Facebook, email or telephone.

Films chosen for the screening events were popular, family-oriented titles (examples of titles shown in 2015 were *Inside Out*, *Minions* and *Paddington*) and that had a fairly universal appeal (i.e. not too gender-focussed). Film bookings were mostly arranged by the venues, but on those occasions that the chosen venue didn't screen regular films, titles were booked via Filmbank, a UK-based distributor of DVDs and BluRays for public screenings. (www.filmbank.co.uk)

The booking process

“We focus on the needs of the family, rather than the diagnosis” (CaF staff member)

A central part of the CaF approach is to adopt a personalised approach to speaking with families. This approach has resulted in an enhanced booking process, which made an important contribution to the success of the CaF film screenings programme. Rather than the booking process happening over the phone in a single brief call, as would be the case in a regular venue, families are taken through a more in-depth process, designed to find out about their individual needs. Over the course of the process, parents are reassured that their needs are being catered for.

Bookings are taken through Facebook, text or over the phone and over the course of the booking process, CaF and the family may have several conversations about the event. The booking form will contain as much information as possible, including amount of children, their ages and dietary needs and any concerns that they might have, and that they want to share. This ensures that CaF has all the information that they need to accommodate/cater for the family, and assures the family that their needs have been acknowledged. Having this information on file also means that the

family do not go through the lengthy process again if they want to attend future screenings.

A few days before the screening, CaF will contact the family via text, partly as a reminder about the screening, but also to give them the opportunity to ask any questions. The initial text will be a blanket text (a single message, sent to many people), but if somebody replies with a question, the answer will be more individual. Having a family's details recorded at the point of booking makes this process more personal.

Issues (Contact A Family screenings)

Interviews conducted with CaF staff highlighted a range of issues described by parents when making bookings for screening events. These are outlined in the following section, accompanied by descriptions of the processes and techniques that were used to address the issues.

Definition of 'disabled'

Issue - Some parents experience anxiety about having to prove that their child has an additional need, and CaF staff report being asked whether they require proof of a child's disability.

Solution – CaF don't ask for any proof of a child's disability.

Financial anxiety

Issue - A CaF survey conducted in 2014 found that 83% of parents of disabled children go without basic amenities such as food and heating in order to cover the additional cost of caring for them (CaF, 2014). This leads to concerns that attending a screening event will cost them money that they can't afford.

Answer – CaF screenings are free to attend.

Judgement of other parents

Issue - Some parents were concerned that their disabled child's or children's behaviour would attract unwanted attention from other families.

Answer – Parents were assured during the booking process that any kind of behaviour was acceptable during the screening events.

Location of venue

Issue - Some of the venues at which screenings are held are in remote locations, and may not be well signposted.

Answer – Parents were given full directions to the venue well in advance of the events.

Parking

Issue - Some venues may not have readily accessible parking facilities, and parents may have to park far from the venue.

Answer – Parents were given information about the venue well in advance of each event, including where to park.

Remembering an event

Issue - With the additional pressures that come with caring for a disabled child, parents may forget that they have booked onto an event.

Answer – Contact a Family kept in touch with families after the initial booking conversation, sending them a reminder a few days before the screening via text or email, and responding to any questions.

Sitting through a film

Issue - One of the characteristic features of autism or Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder is a short attention span, and parents of children are often concerned that their child not being able to sit through an entire film will be disruptive to other children.

Answer – A ‘break-out room’ was provided at each venue, so that children would have the opportunity to go somewhere other than the cinema for a while.

Sensory issues

Issue – Another characteristic feature of autism is an over-sensitivity to loud noises or extreme lighting conditions, both of which are typically found in a cinema auditorium.

Answer – Parents are informed in the initial literature advertising the event that the screenings are conducted under ‘autism friendly’ conditions, which includes lowered volume and reduced lighting conditions.

Cancellations

Issue - Sometimes, due to circumstances beyond their control, families are not able to attend a screening that they have booked for. The process of arranging a trip to the cinema can be a time-consuming one for any family, and this is even more the case for families with disabled children.

Answer – Parents are assured that they will not be penalised in any way, should they not attend a screening that they have book onto.

Lack of disabled toilet facilities

Issue - Many venues do not have disabled toilet facilities.

Answer – Parents are given full details about the venue, including toileting facilities. If none are available, they are given information regarding alternatives.

The screenings

Before the screening

Before the day of the CaF screening, many venues will be available for pre-visits from families, so that children have the opportunity to see what the venue looks like.

On the day of the screening, the venue is opened at least 30 minutes before the screening. When families arrive, a member of CaF staff greets them at the door, answers any questions that they have, and directs them towards a central waiting area, where there is seating, refreshments and activities for children.

The greeting is done without using a table, which can create a barrier between the member of staff and the family. The person greeting the families speaks to the children as well as the adults, thus making every member of the family feel part of the experience.

During this waiting period, if families want to see the screening space, they are able to. If a child wants to sit in a particular seat, they can go in before the rest of the audience.

During the screening

Once all of the audience has arrived, they are encouraged to make their way into the screening space, and when everybody is seated, a member of CaF staff gives a short introduction. During this introduction (which is directed towards all members of families, not just the parents), it is explained that the house lights will be left on, the volume of the film will be decreased and that moving about or making noise during the film is acceptable (during one of the screenings attended by the researcher, the audience was told “don’t worry about any kind of behaviour at all, just do what you want”).

Once the film starts, if young audience members need a break, there is a break-out room close to the auditorium, with activities for them to do. The doors of the auditorium are often left open so that people can come and go as they please.

After the screening

Once the film has ended, families are encouraged to stay in the venue for lunch, which is provided free of charge. Lunchtime gives families the opportunity to socialise, and to speak to CaF staff about the film and services that they offer. Other partner organisations are also invited to attend. There is a table with literature about

CaF and the partner organisations. While they are eating, parents fill in feedback forms about the screening.



Interviews - Audiences

Interviews were conducted with ten families at three Contact A Family screenings around Wales. An additional two interviews were conducted over the phone. The main focus of these interviews was about what they particularly liked about the Contact A Family Screenings, and about the issues that they face when going to the cinema.

Other people don't mind

The most common recurring comment was the fact that parents felt relaxed at the CaF screenings, because they knew that they were among other families who were having the same experiences. This gave them the feeling that everybody was equal, and their family wasn't being judged by anybody.

"In the cinema, you've got so many people behind you, you just don't want to make a noise, but in the CaF ones, everybody's on the same level and they can come in and out whenever they want to, make a little noise if they have to and really get into the film...If the parents are a bit more relaxed, they (the children) are more relaxed as well"

"we know that if she wants to have a chat, if she wants to get up and move around, no-one's going to judge."

"We're all in the same boat. Nobody's going to judge, just in case their kid goes off on one"

“From mum’s point of view, we’re not worrying. Because we know that she (daughter) wants to have a chat, if she wants to get up and move around, no-one’s going to judge.”

“Every child in here, I bet they’ve been to the cinema and caused havoc, when they’re expected to sit and be quiet.”

Several of them commented that their children had stayed longer at the screening they attended than they had done at any other screenings in the past.

Having helpful staff

This feeling of not being judged was helped by the welcome that they received when they arrived at the venue, and the ongoing accommodating and supportive environment. This was in part due to the participatory approach employed by CaF, but also by having visible, and visibly helpful venue staff.

“The staff are very helpful, always on hand if you need anything”

“I thought it was really nice when Richard (CaF staff member) was explaining that the children could talk if they wanted to, or run around, because they were having trouble keeping still.”

This friendly and approachable manner demonstrated by the staff, distinguishes the CaF events held in small independent venues from the Autism Friendly screenings held in the larger chain cinemas, where such an approach is sometimes not found:

“That makes a difference as well. I’ve left (a local chain cinema) with (my son) kicking and screaming, and they don’t even go “is everything okay?” or “do you need a hand?” Even just asking, it does make a massive difference.”

The screening environment

According to the parents, the ‘autism friendly’ element of the screenings was a contributing factor to their children’s enjoyment of the event. Although parents mentioned different elements of the sensory environment (which is consistent with that fact that different individuals with autism are affected in different ways) it was

clear that altering the screening environment had an effect on their children, which in turn made the parents more relaxed.

“When we go to the cinema, it’s the noise, it’s a bit too loud”

“The light is the main thing, because she will not go in if it’s dark”

“It’s not as crowded in there, there’s more room generally.”

“I think if it was completely packed, it would be hard. He (son) doesn’t like crowded spaces”

“It was lighter than normal, not as loud as normal, so I thought it was really nice”

Going as a family

One of the main principles of the work that CaF does is to encourage families to attend events as a group. This was something that the families attending the screening events appreciated.

One particular family had a non-disabled daughter, as well as a son with physical impairments, and they found that they were not able to go to the cinema as often as they would like, partly because their local cinema was difficult to get to, with unsuitable parking, but also because they were unable to sit together:

“The problem is that the only times when we can go is when the kids are off, and it’s extremely busy”

They were able to come to the CaF screenings because there were fewer people there, and they were all able to sit together.

Another family had one son on the autism spectrum and two daughters without a disability, and they have had difficulty in the past going to the cinema as a family. The high cost of having to buy five cinema tickets, and the logistics involved in organizing the trip makes it frustrating when their son’s behaviour spoils the enjoyment of the film for the rest of the family, as well as other audience members:

“We’ve gone to (local chain cinema) before, five of us. It’s cost £40 for us to get in there, and I’ve ended up having to leave because of the disruption. He was stuck to the chair one day, we couldn’t move him, and screamed for 40 minutes of the film. Short of refunding everybody’s money I was, like ‘what do I do about this?’”

Often, a solution has been to split the family for cinema visits:

“the girls would go with their dad and I’d go with him (the son). We’d go in separate cars; we’d sit in separate parts of the cinema. We completely became separated because of [his] condition. And it shouldn’t be that way.”

Food

The addition of food was a big draw, with many families staying after the screenings to eat. This time gives the families the opportunity to socialise with other families, and makes the screening more of a social event:

“We didn’t expect food until we got the text a couple of days ago. It was a nice extra.”



Research Conclusions

Reaching out to families

All of the venue representatives spoken to as part of this research had some experience of arranging screening events for families with disabled children, with varying degrees of success. Several of the venues set up relaxed or autism friendly screenings because of a pre-existing interest in and awareness of disability, either through a family member or a friend. In some cases these types of events have come about when approached by an outside organisation. Many of them had a genuine desire to continue to put on these screenings, and furthermore, were willing to do this without the need to make a profit, merely to break even. The issue from their point of view was that it was often not financially viable to do so, because the lack of marketing resources or staff hours that they had at their disposal meant that they felt unable to adequately market events to specific audiences.

A common issue faced by venues is how to contact families. Many venues have addressed this problem by forming partnerships with local community groups or charities. That way, the charity, who already know the individual families and their individual needs can contact the families and feedback relevant information to the venues. A key part of establishing and maintaining this partnership is to adopt an efficient system of communication. Families with disabled children have a range of individual needs, some of which are hard to predict. With a good communication system these needs can be addressed quickly and competently.

One of the notable successes of the Contact A Family screening event scheme has been the development of a booking system designed to elicit information that can make a visit to the cinema as enjoyable as possible for families with disabled children. This takes considerably more time than the regular process of booking a

ticket over the phone or online, but ensures that their individual needs are acknowledged and, where possible, met. This not only makes it more likely that every family will enjoy their visit to the cinema but also that they will feel valued and listened to.

An important point to note is that the communication process extends beyond booking onto the event. With the additional financial and practical pressures that face families with disabled children, coupled with the unease that usually accompanies a trip to the cinema, families may need to be reminded that they have been booked onto an event, so the lines of communication need to remain open, in the form of a reminder a few days before, and the willingness to continue to address any issues that may arise.

Choice of film

Another concern that venues have is that they don't have much choice in the film that they are able to screen at special events. This is partly due to the wide age range that they are appealing to, and partly because it is often prohibitively expensive to book a film for a single showing, so they usually have to rely on putting on a special show of an already screening film, of which truly family-friendly titles are relatively rare.

Interestingly, whereas venues are concerned that there is little choice in titles, the families seem less concerned about what film they are watching. Instead, they respond to the communal aspect of the screenings, which is helped by putting on food, giving them the opportunity to socialise with other families. The choice of title is a secondary concern to them.

Families feeling judged

All of the families that were interviewed as part of this research were unanimous in their praise for the Contact A Family screenings. What they particularly responded to was the friendly and non-judgemental atmosphere during the screenings, the notion that the other adults in the audience were 'in the same boat' as them, and the feeling that their child's behaviour (and by extension their parenting skills) was not

being judged. This atmosphere was partly a result of the individualised approach that Contact A Family values, which involves listening to families, engaging with the whole family, and acknowledging each family's individual needs, and this approach also extended to the staff at the venues.

Audience size

One of the tensions that this research has revealed lies between the need for venues to have large enough audiences be able to justify putting on screenings, and the need for families to have small enough audiences so as to avoid overcrowding during screenings, which could be distressing for their children.

The strength of independence

Whilst independent venues may not have access to the large budgets of the major cinema chains, what they do have is a sense of community, and small local cinemas often quite rightly pride themselves on serving the needs of their immediate community. The friendly and non-judgemental atmosphere experienced by families at the Contact A Family screenings is something that local venues tend to do automatically, by virtue of them being community-based enterprises. It is by developing and sustaining this welcoming atmosphere that venues can build and keep family audiences.

References

Contact A Family (2014) Counting The Costs. Retrieved September 2015 from:
http://www.cafamily.org.uk/media/805120/counting_the_costs_2014_uk_report.pdf

Dowling, M. & Dolan, L. (2001). Families with Children with Disabilities - Inequalities and the Social Model, *Disability & Society*, 16(1), 21-35.

Hardy, E. & Tilly, L. (2012). An Introduction to Supporting People With A Learning Disability. British Institute of Learning Disabilities.

Ryan, S. (2005) 'Busy Behaviour' in the 'Land of the Golden M': Going Out with Learning Disabled Children in Public Places, *Journal of Applied Research in Intellectual Disabilities*, 18(1), 65–74.

Statistics For Wales (2015) 'School Census results, 2015. Retrieved September 2015 from: <http://gov.wales/docs/statistics/2015/150723-school-census-results-2015-en.pdf>

United Nations (1989) Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Retrieved January 2016 from
http://www.un.org/disabilities/documents/convention/convention_accessible_pdf.pdf



Recommendations for Film Hub Wales members

Five main areas of improvement were highlighted, and what follows is a series of suggestions of how these areas might be addressed.

1. Build partnerships
2. Change attitudes
3. Provide information
4. Develop training
5. Seek funding

Build partnerships

It was clear that the pressures involved in running small venues meant that venue managers felt that they were not able to afford the time or the expense required to run specialised marketing drives targeted specifically towards families with disabled children.

One potential way of addressing this issue would be for venues to form partnerships with local support groups for families with disabled children, be they independent organisations or local branches of larger national charities. Other potentially fruitful partnerships may be developed with local SEN schools, or SEN co-ordinators in mainstream schools, who will already have links with local families with disabled children.

This is something that some venues are already doing, and these were the venues that seemed to be the most successful in putting on events for disabled children and their families.

Making connections such as these can provide venues with a ready-made audience to whom they can market events. The charities, organisations and schools have pre-existing relationships with families, as well as some knowledge of the families' individual needs. This is of benefit to overstretched venue staff who don't have access to dedicated mailing lists, and therefore may not have the means to contact the families in the first instance. Having an arrangement with an outside organisation who do have regular contact with families means that the venues can concentrate less on marketing and more on arranging the screenings, and reacting to the feedback given to them by the partner group or the families, making sure that the families' needs are met.

A few examples of national charities that have local groups can be found in the contacts section at the end of this report.

Change attitudes

It is one thing to get families through the front doors of the venues, and another thing still to get them to return. Building relationships with family audiences is an important element of ensuring that their cinema visit is enjoyable, and making it more likely that they will come back in the future.

Following on from Contact A Family's individualistic approach, accepting that individual families have individual needs, and working together with each family to meet these needs is paramount.

What was striking when interviewing families attending the Contact A Family screening events is how well they responded to the warm and friendly environment at the events. This was initially the result of the general family-centred approach adopted by Contact A Family, but also by the welcoming and non-judgmental response that the families experienced from the venue staff on the day of the screening. This took many simple forms, from a staff member dressing up as a

Minion at one of the events attended by the researcher, to having refreshments and activities available for the whole family before and after the screening. Most crucially, and perhaps most simply, it took the form of staff members speaking to families, and many venues who ran more regular events reported this as one of the keys to their success. This is an approach that is unlikely to be adopted at the larger chains, but one that is well-suited to independent local venues, where the focus is often on the local community.

Clearly this is an ongoing process, but venue managers should actively encourage staff to engage with families who visit the cinema, and to offer help and support, even if it may not be asked for.

Provide information

One of the central focuses of Contact A Family's booking process is to provide as much relevant information as possible for families that are attending their screenings. This includes such information as parking, disabled toilet facilities and access. This is all information that should be easily accessible on a venue's website, and that customer-facing staff should be aware of when families get in touch with them. Making this information freely available might require some initial work, but it gives the impression that a venue has considered the needs of families with disabled children, and could therefore make all the difference to a family considering a visit.

Develop training

In part, a change in attitude and the building of awareness among venues of some of the issues affecting families with disabled children can be addressed in part by providing a range of training options. Such training does exist (Hynt and The UK Cinema Association, for instance provide disability awareness training, and Contact A Family Cymru provide relaxed performance workshops, in addition to the Opening Doors workshop support and resources provided by Film Hub Wales), and this training would provide an excellent starting point for venues wishing to explore some of the issues affecting families with disabled children. This is training that is not necessarily targeted to independent cinema venues, though. It is recommended that

Film Hub Wales continues to work on dedicated training resources to make it easier for independent cinema and mixed-use venues to learn about some of the issues that might face the families of disabled children. In the short-term this would make it more likely that venues would meet the needs of the families, but in the longer term could perhaps give them some idea of some of suitable marketing tools that might be well suited when arranging events specifically for them. Such a resource could also possibly include information about suitable titles, which would address the concern that some venues had about the lack of film choice.

Given the size of Wales, and the fact that some participants mentioned that that it was often difficult for them to attend training sessions, this training could take the form of an online or digital resource, rather than an event that had to be attended in-person.

To augment this in-person (or virtual) training, it is further recommended that a good practice guide be commissioned, based upon the booking model developed by Contact A Family. This would go some way toward ensuring the legacy of the valuable work that CaF have done during the three years that the Disabled Children, Revitalised Families project has been running. The guide would be made freely available online, and would include guidance on the best ways to speak to families in order to elicit information that venues can use to make their visit more enjoyable.

Seek funding

The tension between having audiences large enough to justify the cost of putting on screenings and small enough to be comfortable to children is a difficult one to resolve.

A potential solution could be to subsidise a large-scale programme of screenings at independent venues across Wales. This programme would be similar to the Contact A Family screening events, but instead of the screenings being arranged by an outside organisation like CaF, they would be primarily arranged by the venues, in partnership with their local organisations. The subsidisation would ensure that venues could keep ticket prices low, which would encourage families to get into the

habit of visiting the cinema together. This approach would create a longer time period during which venues could gradually build family audiences.

Having an ongoing programme of screenings would have the additional benefit of addressing the point discussed earlier, of changing attitudes to families with disabled children, as it would normalise the cinema-going experience.

It is therefore recommended that Film Hub Wales members, possibly in partnership with Contact A Family, submit a group bid to a funding body to request funds to subsidise a large-scale programme of screenings at independent venues around Wales. Potential funders for such a programme might be The Wellcome Trust and the BFI Diversity Fund.

Appendix A – Suggestions for Venues

- Develop a partnership with a local charity or community group that has connection with the families of children with disabilities.

(A list of some Wales-based children's charities can be found in the Contacts section.)

- Make contact with local SEN schools, or the SEN co-ordinator or local mainstream schools. Information about schools can be found on local authority websites.

- Consider adjusting the screening environment to meet the differing sensory needs of disabled children.

(A list of potential adjustments can be found on the Dimensions website:
<https://www.dimensions-uk.org/families/autism-friendly-screenings/>)

- Encourage customer-facing staff to take the time to speak to families with disabled children that come in to screenings, and if appropriate ask them if there are any additional steps that you can take to make their visit more enjoyable.

- Bear in mind that parents with disabled children might need assistance, but might be unwilling to ask for it. Even if they don't need assistance, they often appreciate being asked if they do.

- Ensure that any information about disabled access is clearly available on your website (including information about where to park).

- Consider putting together a social story about your venue. This is a simple way of introducing your venue to children on the autism spectrum, which might make their visit easier.

(An example of a social story, and a template to create your own social story can be found on the Dimensions Autism Friendly Screenings webpage:
<https://www.dimensions-uk.org/families/autism-friendly-screenings/>)

- Consider making your venue available for visits from families or classes outside of normal opening hours, so that they can get to know your venue when it is quiet.
- Be aware that the needs of an individual family with a disabled child/children may be very different from those of any other family, and that the best way that you will find out what those needs are is by being open to communicating with them.
- Consider having a larger disabled toilet with bed and hoist. Contact Changing Places <http://www.changing-places.org/> for information about this and possible costs/grants. You will increase the number of visits from families with disabled children / adults and organisations who care for people with complex needs.

Appendix B – Useful Contacts

Hynt - <http://www.hynt.co.uk/en/>

CEA Card - <https://www.ceacard.co.uk/>

National Autistic Society - <http://www.autism.org.uk/>

National Autistic Society local branches -
<http://www.autism.org.uk/services/local/wales.aspx>

Mencap - <https://www.mencap.org.uk/wales>

Mencap local branches - <https://www.mencap.org.uk/local-groups>

Barnado's - <http://www.barnardos.org.uk/>

Afasic Cymru - <http://www.afasiccymru.org.uk/>

Afasic Cymru local groups - <http://www.afasiccymru.org.uk/parents/local-parent-support-groups/>

Dimensions - <https://www.dimensions-uk.org/>

Picturehouse - <https://www.picturehouses.com/>

Film Hub Wales - <http://www.filmhubwales.org/>

Contact a Family Cymru - <http://www.cafamily.org.uk/wales>

Action for Children - <https://www.actionforchildren.org.uk/>

SNAP Cymru - <http://www.snapcymru.org/>

Whizzkidz - <http://www.whizz-kidz.org.uk/>

NSPCC - <https://www.nspcc.org.uk/>

Youngminds - <http://www.youngminds.org.uk/>

RNIB - <http://www.rnib.org.uk/wales>

NDCS National Deaf Children's Society - www.ndcs.org.uk/wales

BFI Diversity Fund - <http://www.bfi.org.uk/supporting-uk-film/bfi-film-fund/funding-production-development/diversity-fund>

Wellcome Trust - <http://www.wellcome.ac.uk/Funding/index.htm>

Changing Places - <http://www.changing-places.org/>

Appendix C – List of venues used for Contact a Family screening event scheme, February 2013 – November 2015

Aberystwyth Arts Centre, Aberystwyth (<https://www.aberystwythartscentre.co.uk/>)

Blackwood Miner's Institute, Blackwood
(<https://your.caerphilly.gov.uk/bmi/content/welcome>)

Chapter, Cardiff (<http://www.chapter.org/>)

Coliseum, Aberdare (<http://coliseum.rct-arts.org/>)

Coliseum, Brecon (<http://www.coliseumbrecon.co.uk/>)

Dragon Theatre, Barmouth (<http://www.dragontheatre.co.uk/>)

Ffwrnes, Llanelli (<http://www.theatrausirgar.co.uk/en/>)

Glyndwr University, Wrexham (<http://www.glyndwr.ac.uk/en/events/>)

Grand Pavilion, Porthcawl (<http://www.grandpavilion.co.uk/>)

Memo Arts Centre, Barry (<http://www.memoartscentre.co.uk/>)

Memo, Newbridge (<http://www.newbridgememo.co.uk>)

Metropole, Abertillery (<http://www.the-met.co.uk/>)

Neuadd Dwyfor, Pwllheli (<https://www.gwynedd.llyw.cymru/en/Residents/Leisure-parks-and-events/Cinemas-and-theatres/Neuadd-Dwyfor,-Pwllheli.aspx>)

Odeon, Bridgend (<http://www.odeon.co.uk/cinemas/bridgend/70/>)

Parc and Dare, Treorchy (<http://parkdare.rct-arts.org/en/whats-on/>)

Pavilion, Llangollen (<http://llangollenpavilion.co.uk/>)

Pontardawe Arts Centre, Pontardawe (<http://www.pontardaweartscentre.com/>)

Redhouse, Merthyr Tydfil (<http://www.redhousecymru.com/>)

Riverfront, Newport (<https://tickets.newportlive.co.uk/>)

Savoy, Monmouth (<http://www.monmouth-savoy.co.uk/>)

Scala Theatre, Prestatyn (<http://prestatyn.scalacinemas.co.uk/>)

TAPE, Colwyn Bay (<http://tapemusicandfilm.co.uk/>)

Theatr Clwyd, Mold (<https://www.theatrclwyd.com/en/>)

Theatr Colwyn, Colwyn Bay (<http://www.theatrcolwyn.co.uk/>)

Theatr Gwaun, Fishguard (<http://theatrgwaun.com/>)

Theatr Hafren, Newtown (<http://www.thehafren.co.uk/>)

Theatr Mwldan, Cardigan (<http://www.mwldan.co.uk/>)

Theatre Severn, Shrewsbury (<http://www.theatresevern.co.uk/>)

Torch Theatre, Milford Haven (<http://torchtheatre.co.uk/>)

Ucheldre, Holyhead (<http://www.ucheldre.org/allevnt.htm>)

Venue Cymru, Llandudno (<https://www.venuecymru.co.uk/>)

Vue, Carmarthen (<http://www.myvue.com/latest-movies/cinema/carmarthen>)

Vue, Cwmbran (<http://www.myvue.com/latest-movies/cinema/cwmbran>)

Waterfront Museum, Swansea (<http://www.museumwales.ac.uk/swansea/>)

Y Galeri, Caernarfon (<http://www.galericaernarfon.com/>)

YourSpace, Chirk (<http://yourspacemarches.co.uk/>)