



The Family Arts Campaign and the Family & Childcare Trust have developed the Family Arts Standards to address a need for guidance on how best to welcome families to arts organisations. This case study is part of a series that supports the Family Arts Standards and accompanying guidance for arts organisations. To find out more about the Family Arts Standards and how to implement them visit familyarts.co.uk/family-arts-standards.

Liverpool Philharmonic Kids Club

Liverpool Philharmonic Kids Club was set up in 2012 in order to help children and their families to gain a better understanding of the world of Classical music. It is primarily aimed at children from 18-months to 12 years old. Through running events specially designed for younger children and their families we hoped to break down the barriers to understanding for families as a whole. We try to design activities and events that families can enjoy on different levels, i.e. activities that adults will also enjoy, such as pre-concert talks with conductors, backstage tours and rehearsal visits. Membership is free and upon joining children receive a pack which contains a copy of the book, *The Incredible Story of Classical Music for Children* and a Kids Club pencil.

Members also are entitled to come along to free events such as:

- Post-concert party after Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra family concerts - capacity approx 100.
- Royal Liverpool Philharmonic rehearsal visit - capacity 50.
- Specially designed backstage tour of Philharmonic Hall - capacity 25.
- Priority booking for our under 2's workshops - capacity 15 children plus associated adults.
- A Masterclass - this is our one event designed for slightly older children (up to 16 yrs) who play an instrument, giving an opportunity to play in public and gain feedback and teaching from professional musicians. Adults and family are able to come and watch and also participate in the Masterclass by asking questions and interacting with the musicians.

Throughout the year they also receive:

- A surprise on their birthday (usually a complementary ticket to one of our family concerts)
- Emails from our Chief Conductor, Vasily Petrenko about upcoming concerts and competitions

The events are advertised on a rolling basis and depending upon capacity families can book from approximately 2 months in advance right up until the week before if there are still spaces available. From the beginning we deliberately kept the numbers quite low so that we had control over the experience for the families. By ensuring that staff members had the chance to speak to those attending it also allowed us to get feedback straight away at events and to deliver high quality sessions.



Based on the feedback, we extended the club to include a signposting feature for our main Orchestral season concerts. We discovered that families sometimes found it difficult to know how to progress to the main Orchestral season once their children were too old for family concerts which are recommended for 4-10 year olds. From this we devised a Kids Club recommended logo to highlight less challenging programmes or Sunday afternoons (avoiding late finish performances on school nights). We signposted more clearly to our under 25's £7 tickets, and suggested the idea that actually it was okay to leave in the interval if the total concert length was too long.



Learning Points

- Don't underestimate the resources required in order to carry this out in both time and finance. It is not a small undertaking. For example, when we only had a couple of hundred children it was easy to keep the events small as demand was relatively low. However, as the Kids Club has become more successful the growth rate has been exponential and it is becoming much more than just a side-line activity.
- Build the research into family views in from the start and make sure that a member of staff is always clearly visible at the end of events to talk to families. Often this is where you get the best feedback, both good and bad. As families are short on time, many don't want to be faced with a lengthy survey once they're home and the suggestions they make often seem small but can make all the difference to a families' experience moving forward. It also means that if a problem arises during the event that staff are available and it can be dealt with immediately.
- One set of more formal research that worked well for us was to keep things very simple, such as a piece of paper and some felt tip pens provided with "Tell us what you think" written in a bubble. This allowed parents to comment, but also space for children to draw or write too resulting in some really lovely feedback which we were able to share via social media. Don't be too prescriptive with the questions you ask your audience to respond to – by being flexible you can get more than you asked for and greater insight into many aspects.
- Think about the timing of your event. We held some of ours early in the morning, i.e. from 9am on a Saturday morning. We offered small refreshments (fruit, flapjacks), the families then met the conductor and went to watch the rehearsal for approximately an hour. The whole event was finished by around 11am, leaving families free to enjoy the rest of their day. Comments when





they left included “what a really lovely way to start the weekend”. This had also been an event which families could enjoy together – sitting in on an Orchestral rehearsal is a treat for all ages and as those working in the arts we often forget the ‘behind the scenes’ elements which we sometimes take so much for granted.

- Allow exit points within the events. Don’t make people feel like they have to stay for the whole event, allow them to leave early if they need to. One hour may be just enough for some children and they need to be free to leave without worrying about how it impacts on other attenders.
- Liverpool Philharmonic Kids Club events are free which has sometimes been a problem – families have many demands on their time and things crop up last minute. We are starting to introduce a waiting list so that on full events we can offer spaces for cancellations.
- Finally, don’t be afraid to experiment, keep it small and then just try things. If you explain that this is the first time you’ve tried something, families will often suggest ways to make it better or ideas of things they want – be prepared to listen and respond.