

Legal Name
Childsplay, Inc.
Project Title
To support "El Puente," a residency program in partnership with local artist Zarco Guerrero that seeks to make theatre for young audiences a vital part of Latino families' cultural experience
Project Progress and Successes
<p>During the past year, Childsplay continued implementing "El Puente," a program in partnership with artist Zarco Guerrero to engage Latino families in theatre participation. During this reporting period, Childsplay moved into Phase 3 (implementation) and held two El Puente festivals, both demonstrating meaningful success and growth in reaching our goals.</p> <p>Phase 3 continued throughout the year, focusing on expanding programming from the pilot festival and continuing to build an audience for El Puente events among Latino families. Zarco, as well as Childsplay staff, worked to continue building relationships with schools and community organizations to bring families to the theatre. Each festival tried new engagement points, and offered families new introductions to Childsplay and its programming. Over the course of the grant period, Childsplay saw significant growth in both attendance and engagement over the previous year.</p> <p>The first festival of the year was held on Sunday, September 14, 2014. It featured a free performance of Charlotte's Web at the Tempe Center for the Arts. Where the performance of The Cat in the Hat at the pilot festival had been held in the 200-seat studio theatre, both of the festivals in this grant period centered on performances in the 500-seat mainstage theatre. Like the previous event, the El Puente festival included other activities for families, including crafts like mask-making, face painting, and performances from other local groups. With the fall festival, we explored a "pay to play" option, in addition to the free tickets and activities, where families could pay for carnival games, a petting zoo, and other activities.</p> <p>The second festival was held on Sunday, April 26, 2015 in conjunction with a free performance of The Three Javelinas. Where the fall festival experimented with carnival-style games in a "pay to play" model, this festival explored an introduction to Childsplay's Academy (theatre classes for children of all ages). In addition to their theatre tickets, opportunities for family crafts, photo booths, and other performances, families had the opportunity to participate in drama classes for different age groups throughout the event.</p> <p>Both of these festivals "sold out," with Childsplay giving away all 500 tickets and keeping a wait list for other families who wanted to attend. We saw a significant increase in attendance at this year's festivals when compared to the previous year's festival in conjunction with The Cat in the Hat. We also continued to see a more diverse crowd in attendance at each festival, speaking to the potential for long-term shifts in the complexities of Childsplay's audiences.</p> <p>A continued success during this grant period was engaging culturally relevant performers in the festival experience. The festivals during this grant period included performances by Quetzalli Ballet Folklórico, Desert Sounds Mariachi, Keith Johnson and Sankofa Island Magic Music, Zarco Guerrero, DJ Sean Derek, Espiritu del Agua Dance, Ballet Folklórico Ollin Yoliztli, Axé Capoeira, La Frida & La Flaca Puppets, and Habla AZ. These performers, as</p>

well as the cast of the plays, led the final processions of artists and audience members out of the Tempe Center for the Arts across the pedestrian bridge that closed the festival.

One shift from the previous grant period was the community residencies that led into each El Puente festival. Each festival is preceded by residency workshops led by Zarco that help generate interest in Childsplay and El Puente. Over the course of this year we shifted these residencies out of schools and into community organizations, where we are more able to engage whole families. While the young people we worked with in schools shared a very positive experience in the residency, we found that it did not translate to family audience engagement. By connecting with families through residencies at the Paiute Neighborhood Center, Rising Youth Theatre, Quetzalli Ballet Folklorico, Desert Sounds, and the Young Athletes Relief Fund we were able to engage whole families, not just children, increasing participation at the events. We found that families who are already involved in arts activities have a higher likelihood of being interested in Childsplay's programming, and our attendance at both the Charlotte's Web and The Three Javelinas festivals reflected this success.

We also increased our success in introducing assessment metrics, by integrating intercept surveys at the events (as well as continuing with the follow up surveys) and seeking out creative ways to collect more email addresses such as contests, prize tables, and a photo booth. At both festivals, more than twice as many attendees replied to our follow up survey than the previous year. In looking at the demographics of families attending, we found that 54% of attendees identified as Hispanic, 28% identified as Caucasian, 5% identified as African American, 5% identified as Native American, 4% identified as Asian and 13% identified as multiracial (some respondents selected more than one identifier). 60% of attendees had never attended a Childsplay production before attending El Puente, and 54% had never been to the Tempe Center for the Arts.

Challenges / Obstacles / Failures Encountered in the Project

We continue to have a challenge in developing this program in a space that we rent, rather than own. We were able to mitigate some of our early challenges by engaging the Tempe Center for the Arts as a meaningful partner in the program and scheduling our events early, before other programming was booked in the space. This year we had much more success in making the entire Tempe Center for the Arts feel active and engaged as part of the El Puente festival, and TCA staff responded enthusiastically to being more involved early on. The major ongoing challenge however, is food, and being able to provide a wide variety of inexpensive food options for festival attendees. We continue to hear feedback from our attendees that having food available for purchase is an important part of this type of event. However, we are limited to an in-house caterer at the Tempe Center for the Arts, which makes it harder for us to engage food vendors.

Another challenge continues to be capturing names and emails for follow up, due to the drop in nature of the festival. While we were able to make significant progress on this challenge throughout the year, including new opportunities for collecting email addresses and connecting with families, we have still seen a limited response for families who return to buy tickets to another Childsplay production. With this in mind, and as we look to continue this program, we are seeking ways of continuing this program after the grant period ends. Now that we are at capacity for attendance at these festivals, we are looking to see if there is a way to continue growing this audience. Or, now that we have reached this number of attendees, how can we now focus on deepening and enriching the

experience for the families who are already attending?

What was learned from these that might be of benefit to others?

As we look at the original goals of our program, and think about the ways in which we can cultivate an increasingly diverse, complex audience for Childsplay's public performances, we are enthusiastic about the new attendees who come to a Childsplay performance with their families. For example, we have started to see significant social media response to this festival. The promotional YouTube video we created for El Puente recorded some of the highest social media interaction we have ever had, in any social media context. Through this, we were able to reach new households and expand outside of our traditional audiences. While we still see only small amounts of El Puente attendees buying tickets to other performances, we are seeing continued growth in attendance at each festival. Childsplay and Zarco are looking to find ways in which we can continue to embed the El Puente festival into our programming after the end of the grant term, as well as find new entrance points to participation for festival attendees during our ongoing programming.

As we look towards our final festival and think about how we might continue this program, we also are thinking about the ways in which we can deepen Childsplay's relationship to our new community partners. We are working with an artist who has become a strong liaison between community groups and us. In the last year of implementation, we are looking to involve Childsplay staff more directly in the coordination with these groups, so that the relationship can continue when the artist is not as completely involved after the close of the grant period.

Links to relevant website(s) and/or project publications, reports, etc.

EL PUENTE PROMO VIDEO

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fINA1efOkRo>

PRESS LINKS - FALL 2014 FESTIVAL:

<http://www.azcentral.com/picture-gallery/entertainment/events/2014/09/22/el-puente-theatre-festival-and-mask-procession-in-tempe/16055985/>

<http://www.raisingarizonakids.com/2014/09/family-fun-mask-making/>

<http://bit.ly/1CDwSSB>

<http://www.abc15.com/news/smart-shopper/freebie-friday-catch-some-great-music-enjoy-family-activities-and-maybe-get-a-haircut>

PRESS LINKS -- SPRING 2015 FESTIVAL

<http://azc.cc/1zgcPeD>

<http://maryrabago.com/2015/04/22/con-mary-rabago-conferencia/>

<http://www.lavozarizona.com/picture-gallery/entertentimiento/tvymas/2015/04/28/fotos-festival-de-mscaras-el-puente-en-tempe/26540507/>

<http://mixedvoces.com/?s=Childsplay>

If someone wishes to speak with your organization further about your project, would there be a willing contact? Y/N

If yes, please provide contact name and information for preferred method of contact (email, phone, etc).

Y - Samantha Johnstone, sjohnstone@childsplayaz.org