

# Northern Ireland, Belfast / Hitchhikers Case study

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## Summary of project intent

Hitchhikers Guide to the Arts is a new pilot initiative to enhance engagement by a small number of 'Test Drivers' with the arts by offering the chance to Test drive more than one art form. This included theatre, cultural cinema, visual arts, opera and classical music and each event included a talk or guide for context and greater understanding and familiarity of the art form and venue.

### DIFFICULTIES MET

- ▶ Recruiting participants while finalising the programme meant we were unable to confirm dates and art forms. This led to some participants being unable to attend events due to prior commitments
- ▶ Some venues challenged the request to give away so many free tickets to participants (20-25 tickets)
- ▶ A condition of participation was the willingness to be videoed and take part in video diaries, in reality some participants strongly resisted appearing on video
- ▶ Originally participants were asked to submit application forms via post or email however lack of internet access, email account, computers and literacy issues led the team to fill in the form with applicants over the phone

*"The older women have really embraced Hitchhikers and the staff, we now meet a day or two after the event for a coffee to discuss what we liked and didn't like. It's made such a difference on a cognitive level too."*

*(Fiona, Community Worker)*

### RESULTS

- ▶ Hitchhikers provided gateways to making venues more accessible to non-traditional audiences
- ▶ Of the 26 core participants (came to 4 out of the 5 events) the majority have expressed an increased confidence in re-attending the arts
- ▶ Attitudinal change identified around participants feeling "art can be for me"



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*"I hated that, but you can't say it wasn't an experience."*

*(Participant)*

## LEARNINGS

- ▶ Online applications can disadvantage social inclusion for some groups
- ▶ Doing preparation work with venue to make it more accessible to non-traditional audiences.  
Learnings from this project particularly around accessibility and participation are being fed back to participating venues along with some recommendations from Audiences NI staff and participants

## FUTURE / TIPS

- ▶ Secure and confirm all events before recruiting participants to ensure they are all free to attend those times and dates
- ▶ A video was a good idea but it's important to recognise participants' lack of confidence or knowledge of the arts might result in them feeling intimidated about putting their views on video
- ▶ Audiences NI would work closer with venues around making participants feel welcomed and accommodating any special needs