



# Audience Development in Derbyshire – Agenda

Caroline Griffin, September 2010





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Derbyshire Arts Development Group (DADG) is made up of arts organisations in Derbyshire who want to work together to improve access to the arts for Derbyshire residents. Attendance and participation in the arts in Derbyshire are slightly below the national average, DADG wanted to find out why this was, and what might be done to encourage more people to get involved.

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### What we know

A unique piece of research was commissioned that looked hard at the barriers to attendance in Derbyshire.<sup>i</sup> The research identified six main barriers to engagement, which, when considered from an audience development viewpoint, can be clustered in two groups, as **practical barriers** and **attitudinal barriers**.<sup>ii</sup>

#### Practical Barriers

Just under 2/3 of the sampled fall into these groups

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'Time conscious' People who find it difficult to find the time.

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'Uninformed' People who don't know what's going on or who find out about it too late.

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'Isolated' People who have limited transport and can't get to events. This group also involves people who don't have anyone to go with.

#### Attitudinal Barriers

Just over 1/3 of the sampled fall into these groups

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'Non-motivated' People who aren't really interested in the arts.

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'Non-barriers' People who can't identify anything that stops them from attending, but who still don't go.

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'Resistant' People who believe that the arts are not for them and are actively antagonistic to "the arts".

At about the same time as this research was published, Arts Council England produced Arts: Audiences Insight, which divides the English population into 13 segments, according to their arts attendance patterns.<sup>iii</sup> Of these segments, two are highly engaged attenders of the arts, seven are moderately engaged and three are not engaged at all.

Both of these pieces of work can provide evidence to support the creation and management of effective audience development projects. They also raise questions about the potential impact of audience development initiatives, and considering these can help organisations to be realistic about the resource implications of engaging different audiences. For example, what is the realistic amount of resource that might be required if organisations want to try to engage individuals who are completely not engaged in the arts, including those who are actively 'resistant' to the arts?

An underlying issue when developing new audience relationships is to consider the fundamentals of the relationship between audience member, arts organisations and the artistic experience on offer. This is particularly relevant when trying to counter attitudinal barriers to arts attendance. A report published by the DCMS in 2007, *Culture on Demand*, looked into what drives people to the arts (as opposed to what keeps them from attending).<sup>iv</sup> The report shows that for a lot of people arts attendance is driven not primarily by a desire for an artistic experience, but by personal lifestyle choices. This means that a lot of arts attendance decisions are to fulfil personal development, social or family needs. This suggests that arts organisations can be more successful in engaging people if they take their lifestyle into account when planning activity, including programming and marketing, and doing so would make these organisations more relevant without compromising on artistic quality or integrity. Using all this information it is possible to see potential audience development activity as falling into one of three types:

Changing what you do or how you do it	This involves doing what you've always done but changing some elements to make it easier for audiences to engage
Developing an audience led approach	This involves including potential audiences when you develop programmes, projects and events
Changing yourselves	This involves taking a wholesale review of who you are and making your audiences an integral part of your whole organisation

To explore how audience development works practically in Derbyshire, DADG commissioned three action research projects. These projects were designed to test some of these ideas in practice in the county, taking into account the specifics of the Derbyshire context.<sup>v</sup> The 'Audience Development Agenda' that follows, uses the results from these projects, plus experiences from audience development activity in comparable areas to identify local strengths and weaknesses, and to open a debate on artists and organisations in Derbyshire that could use this activity as inspiration for future audience development work.



Chesterfield Flashmob event. Photograph Jon Bradbury

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## Audience Development Agenda

### Changing what you do or how you do it

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Audience development is closely related to marketing, and therefore traditional marketing approaches, such as reviewing the Marketing Mix, can be used to develop links with new audiences or develop relationships with existing audiences. For example, changes to pricing, the timing of events, the marketing materials used or the ancillary features of your activities (such as post show talks) can all be useful tools.

In the short term:

**Lack of awareness** of the arts available in the county was shown to be a significant barrier for attendance in Derbyshire. Increasing targeted marketing activity, as well as making arts information more widely available and easier to access more generally, could increase attendance, particularly amongst the elderly and younger people. The existing artsderbyshire website is a key resource for the county, and ensuring that it is comprehensive, easy to use and well publicised, could help even the most isolated communities to be more in touch with the range of arts activity available to them.

For many non or infrequent attenders, **price sensitivity** is an important factor when engaging (or not engaging) with the arts. Targeted price incentives and free events are often effective at engaging new and infrequent attenders. The experience of the action research projects was that making activities free was essential when trying to engage the completely non-engaged in arts activity.

#### ***Agenda for Derbyshire***

- Increase use of artsderbyshire by arts organisations throughout the county
- Increase promotion of artsderbyshire by working in partnership with all arts and cultural organisations in the county
- Explore the possibilities for using online ticketing, either by individual organisations or offering a service for the county as a whole. Many models for online ticketing for the arts are available for comparison and development
- Invest in new audiences by removing price barriers when trying to engage non-engaged audiences

In the long term:

The research shows that many active arts attenders often travel to venues outside Derbyshire for **professional arts events**. If these audiences are to be encouraged to experience more of the arts activity available in the county, new programmes of professional art will need to be developed, alongside an appropriate infrastructure of venues and events.

We know that people who attend the arts as children are much more likely to attend as adults<sup>vi</sup> – in fact, exposure to the arts as a child is second only to education in being a determinant of ongoing arts attendance. In the long-term, developing childhood engagement would seem to be key to building audiences for the future.

*Case study:* There are many interesting case studies of projects that are designed to engage children and young people. For example, Birmingham Rep run a project called Rep's Children and has offered free theatre experiences every year for 10 years for children born in a certain month.<sup>vii</sup> Welsh National Opera work with young people in their own environments, to help create an interest in opera – an art form often seen as not for them, for example for their project Surf Tailz they worked with young people in Newquay.<sup>viii</sup>

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### ***Agenda for Derbyshire***

- Consider the development of appropriate professional arts provision in the county, or develop new relationships with providers outside the county to help form relationships with those arts attenders and encourage them to enjoy local provision as well.
- Invest in young people for the future, focus on ensuring they have regular and high-quality arts experiences as this is most likely to develop an arts attendance habit for the future.



Mask Mayhem in Bamford. Photograph Katie Scott

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### **Developing an audience-led approach**

If we take the perspective of an infrequent or non-attender, it can help us to see why the arts aren't top of their list. They have to make a conscious decision to attend our events or participate in our activities –with all that that entails. Finding out about what's on, booking it, making arrangements for child care, making travel arrangements, are all big commitments, and if you are not 100% sure you are going to enjoy yourself – or if you don't know if the family and friends you are going to attend with are going to enjoy themselves – why would you take the risk? People are much more likely to take a risk when the activity fits in with their lives, for example, somewhere to celebrate a family birthday, an opportunity to spend time with friends, a chance to support a child's learning, or an opportunity to have a laugh.

**Making art part of the day-to-day** can give non-attenders an opportunity to experience the arts – sometimes a completely non day-to-day experience – in a way that suits their lifestyles. For example, shoppers in Chesterfield enjoyed watching the Flashmob dance event that took place as one of the DADG action research projects.

<sup>ix</sup> Thinking about the day-to-day lives of target audiences, and developing arts activities that fit in with them, could significantly increase the number or individuals experiencing the arts. This can be the case when creating new participatory experience as well as opportunities to attend.

*Case study:* One of the action research projects, *Little Treasures*, aimed to encourage women to get involved in digital photography. This project was most successful when the artist visited the women in their own homes, working individually with women when they could fit it into their family lives. The women's work was exhibited in a variety of spaces across the village, drawing together the whole community, as well as having a significant impact on the lives of the women directly involved.



Project photos in empty shop Killamarsh.  
Photograph Katie Scott



WI Meeting in Killamarsh. Photograph Pam Gill

Derbyshire is a rural county with significant numbers of people saying they don't access the arts because they can't get to them. Geographic isolation can result in travel difficulties and many audience development projects have been tried that try to ease travel constrictions for attenders, for example running special coaches.<sup>x</sup> Such projects can be very successful, but often face difficulties in being sustained in the long term. **Taking arts activities to these communities** is a different approach to the same problem, and experimenting with new ways of engagement, could have a significant impact for such barriers.

*Case study:* One of the recent action research projects looked to do just this. Artizani were commissioned to take their show, *The Cabaret of Dr Caligari* to Bamford and Hayfield with the specific aim of getting those not normally involved in the arts to undertake a series of workshops that would build to a celebratory community event. This project showed that there is an appetite for such events, but that to be successful, artists need to work deep in the community and be responsive to the local environment.



Dr Caligari performance in Bamford. Photograph Katie Scott

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### **Agenda for Derbyshire**

- Understand your target segments by using the available research, but ensure that you also get to know the audience you are working with as a group, as well as forming links with key individuals. Be prepared to develop your projects in response to individuals and small communities, especially when working with those who are not currently engaged with the arts.
- Be prepared to attract relatively small numbers of new attenders, especially when working with people who have been completely not engaged with the arts.
- Go to your target audiences, don't expect them to come to you.
- Give credit to individuals, community leaders and community groups for their role and encourage further partnerships to help maintain momentum.
- Use artists who are experienced at working in small groups or individually. Dealing with people so intimately needs special skills, both artistically and personally.



Arty Party. Photograph James Macpherson



Arty Party. Photograph James Macpherson

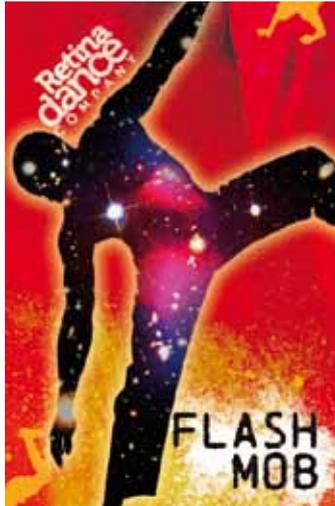
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### **Changing yourselves**

Audience development often assumes that we can change audience behaviour, for example, that by changing the time of our events we make it easier for people to attend. Underlying this is a sense that audiences want to attend and want what we have to offer, we just have to make it easier for them to take advantage of our work. For people with some engagement in the arts this may be the case, but equally it may not be. Motivation, interest, relevance and enjoyment of the arts may be more influential. And it is unlikely that people who are not engaged at all will suddenly become attenders because we have tweaked aspects of what we have to offer.

How about we turn the issue on its head and consider not how to change the audience, but how to change ourselves to make us more relevant to our audiences? Maybe we need a complete rethink about our own attitudes, it's worth reconsidering what is an 'attendance', what are the 'arts', what is an 'artist' and where does creativity lie?

As we saw above, encouraging engagement with the arts by young people is crucial to the long term health of arts audiences. To do this though, we must be prepared to **understand the point of view of young people**, with regards to creativity and the arts, and allow them to guide us in building programmes that are responsive and relevant.



Chesterfield Flashmob flier.  
Retina Dance Company.

*Case study:* As part of the action research a project called *Flashmob* was held in Chesterfield. This project was designed to engage young people in the arts by responding to their understanding of creativity. This was designed because the research showed that young people's understanding of art forms was much more fluid than those in the traditional arts sector. Digital technology has been especially influential in blurring the boundaries between creator and viewer, and the role of the artist. It was also found that young people involved in artistic activity do not necessarily see their interests fitting into conventional categories, for example they may be interested in street dance but that would not necessarily mean they would be interested in attending a contemporary dance event.

**Developing culturally diverse audiences** may also require arts organisations to rethink the way they approach audience development. The research shows that there is a low interest in audiences from Derbyshire for cultural festivals, e.g. Melas. However, the focus group work showed that where there are strong cultural social groups, there is an interest in attending such events. Supporting such groups to develop events may require investment in the short term, but could in the long term increase interest in such events, and generate new attendances, new audiences for the arts, and a wider range of arts activity taking place in the county.

*Case study:* A well-known example of a mela that was driven by the local community is the Nottingham Mela, now in its 22<sup>nd</sup> year. This event is respected nationally for the impact it has had on local communities. It has given increased visibility to Nottingham's Asian communities as well as attracting other members of the community, in 2010 30%-40% of attenders are expected to be non-Asian.<sup>xi</sup>

### **Agenda for Derbyshire**

- Be aware that even non-attenders may have their own creative life, or a different perspective of what the arts are. Try to work with this.
- Digital technologies are blurring the boundaries between creator and observer, and between traditional art-forms. Think about this when developing projects or when thinking about how to move your organisation forward.
- Exploring creativity in the use of digital technologies could be a powerful engagement tool for arts organisations when engaging with new audiences, as even young people are not always able to maximise the potential of new technologies without creative support.
- Passions and enthusiasms of small groups can be difficult to unlock. It can be rewarding to support them in developing their own ideas, but be prepared to start small and provide sufficient support for those new to developing events and activities to become proficient.

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## Agenda for Derbyshire

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In addition to considering these specific audience development areas, the research reports combined with the findings of the action research projects, have brought to light a number of other ideas and issues to help when undertaking audience development in Derbyshire.

- **Encourage infrequent attenders to engage more often:** Derbyshire has notably high infrequent attender rates. As it is easier, and less resource intensive, to get infrequent attenders to attend more often than to convince a non-attender to engage in the arts, tackling infrequent attendance should be a priority for arts organisations in Derbyshire
- **Local partnerships are important:** when working in small communities local links are vital, a visiting arts organisation can find it really hard to get sufficient local support to make a project really fly.
- **Look for excellent artists and organisations in the county:** the action research revealed several organisations that present work internationally but rarely in Derbyshire itself. Building new local partnerships may help deliver a more diverse and high-quality arts offer across the county.
- **Support volunteering:** where there are higher levels of arts volunteers there are correspondingly higher levels of arts engagement. Volunteering can be a very meaningful and expansive experience for individuals and can support arts development at the same time.
- **Be realistic about resource needs:** attracting new attenders to the arts can be very resource intensive, especially when activity includes plans for maintaining engagement with new attenders. Projects which aim to attract new attenders should be well-resourced, take a long-term view and have clear indicators for success.
- **Momentum:** Before commencing projects in remote communities consider how momentum can be maintained, partnerships working outside the arts sector can be the answer in some instances.

### Call to arms

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As well as bringing to light the potential for new approaches to audience development in Derbyshire, the research and action research has also highlighted many ways in which artists and arts organisations are well positioned for engaging more people in the arts, or engaging them more often. Not least amongst these is the existence of Derbyshire Arts Development Group, and the shared intent that this group has of working together now and in the future.

Collaboration and partnership working, whether on a county level or on a very local level, is strong within Derbyshire, and there are a wide range of organisations with extensive experience at working deep within communities. As these approaches are likely to be very effective when increasing engagement with attenders and non-attenders, arts organisations should feel encouraged to continue to develop collaborative projects. However, now is a good time to re-evaluate some of this activity, to ensure that it is as fresh as possible, and absolutely tailored to the audiences being engaged. New partnerships, within and without the arts sector, may revitalise existing practice, and a fresh look at the audience data can help arts organisations be sure that they are working on facts and not assumptions.

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The available data on audiences in the county means that arts organisations that want to engage new audiences are ideally placed to make significant changes to their own practice, to form new alliances and partnerships and to work together to make a difference to the strategic direction for audience development in the region. Working together does make a difference, and organisations in Derbyshire are good at it! New initiatives now could help ensure that there are strong audiences for the arts both now, and in the long-term.



Chesterfield Flashmob event. Photograph Jon Bradbury

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- i Arts Audiences and Participants Research (2009) [www.artsderbyshire.org.uk/export/sites/dap/find\\_artist/minisites/dadgminisite/documents/Arts\\_Audiences\\_and\\_Participation\\_research.pdf](http://www.artsderbyshire.org.uk/export/sites/dap/find_artist/minisites/dadgminisite/documents/Arts_Audiences_and_Participation_research.pdf)
  - ii Available from [www.artsderbyshire.org.uk/find\\_artist/minisites/dadgminisite/dadg\\_resources.html](http://www.artsderbyshire.org.uk/find_artist/minisites/dadgminisite/dadg_resources.html)
  - iii Arts Audiences: Insight can be found online at [www.artscouncil.org.uk/about-us/research/arts-based-segmentation-research/](http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/about-us/research/arts-based-segmentation-research/)
  - iv This work on drivers is particularly strong on what drives individuals to the arts. For an overview on drivers as understood by arts and cultural policy makers, the new CASE resource, Understanding the drivers to engagement, is a useful resource, [www.culture.gov.uk/what\\_we\\_do/research\\_and\\_statistics/7275.aspx#drivers](http://www.culture.gov.uk/what_we_do/research_and_statistics/7275.aspx#drivers).
  - v The full evaluation of these projects is available from [www.artsderbyshire.org.uk/find\\_artist/minisites/dadgminisite/dadg\\_resources.html](http://www.artsderbyshire.org.uk/find_artist/minisites/dadgminisite/dadg_resources.html)
  - vi Creative Research (2007). The arts debate: findings of research among the general public. London: Arts Council England.
  - vii [www.birmingham-rep.co.uk/about/audience-ambitions/rep-s-children/](http://www.birmingham-rep.co.uk/about/audience-ambitions/rep-s-children/)
  - viii [www.wno.org.uk/get-involved/projects-archive?cid=2488](http://www.wno.org.uk/get-involved/projects-archive?cid=2488)
  - ix [www.youtube.com/watch?v=tjJT6\\_i2HGE](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tjJT6_i2HGE)
  - x For example, see projects in the Arts Ride strand on the New Audiences website, [www.takingpartinthearts.com](http://www.takingpartinthearts.com)
  - xi [news.bbc.co.uk/local/nottingham/hi/people\\_and\\_places/arts\\_and\\_culture/newsid\\_8597000/8597112.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/local/nottingham/hi/people_and_places/arts_and_culture/newsid_8597000/8597112.stm)

