

Not For People Like Us

How to reach new audiences
and why this matters



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- Very young
- Missing Millennials
- Forgotten generation
- Ethnic minorities
- Deprived communities



The very young





The missing millennials





The forgotten generation – Baby Boomers





New families from ethnic minorities





68 yrs



Trainspotting

Areas of multiple deprivation



Average life expectancy



82 yrs



Big Picnic



SURVIVING THE STORM



SOME TRAUMA IN LIFE MIGHT BE INEVITABLE
BUT NOT MANY PEOPLE WOULD VIEW IT AS
ESSENTIAL. IAN EDWARDS (ROYAL BOTANIC
GARDEN EDINBURGH) EXPLAINS WHAT WE CAN
LEARN FROM NATURE ABOUT REGENERATION,
RESILIENCE AND SURVIVAL.

AUG 20, 1.50-2.50PM, £8/£6



NEW TOWN
THEATRE

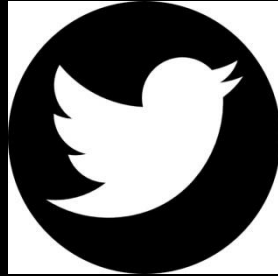
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Diversity = resilience

Some of our collaborators

Edinburgh University; West Pilton
Community Health; BigPicnic;
Cyrenians; Garvald; Teen Plus;
Edinburgh Welcoming; Creative
Scotland; Calouste Gulbenkian
Foundation; Dementia Scotland;
Scottish Association for Mental
Health; Art in Healthcare



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Royal
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Not for People Like Us: How to reach new audiences and why it matters.

Abstract

Botanic gardens are often very popular places and therefore it is easy for us to get complacent about audiences. But are we reaching the right people with the right messages, or simply 'preaching to the choir'? With support from initiatives, including the BigPicnic, the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh has reached beyond our traditional affluent and well-educated audience and engaged with a range of hard-to-reach communities, embracing diversity in all its forms, and helping to build a better informed and more resilient society. Sharing our failures and the lessons we have learnt, as well as our successes, I will show how food, art, play and popular culture have been used at Edinburgh to engage with individuals and communities who had never set foot in our gardens before, and how this has changed their lives for the better. The key to effective engagement with limited resources, has always been strong partnerships and I will explain how collaboration and mutualism is at the heart of everything we do.

Introduction

Why are we developing audiences and making our programmes more inclusive? It should not be a 'box ticking' exercise to help obtain grants or achieve good relationship with sponsors or government departments. If you are serious about breaking down barriers and attracting new, diverse audiences, then this has to be an ethical and moral decision on the part of your organisation and you need to be sincere that you are doing it for the right reasons. It will also help obtain external funding and create good relations with governments.

I will come back to what benefits I feel an open and inclusive approach brings to participants and society as a whole through the relationship between diversity and resilience.

You can't always expect to get it right first time. For example: you have come up with a theme that you are sure will be popular with your target audience; you have promoted the event widely using the networks that your intended audience use (eg Facebook, community notice boards and email groups); you have tried to breakdown as many barriers as possible;

and you have even booked a bus from the community to the Garden. Then no one, not a soul, gets on the bus and it leaves empty. It happens, we've been there. The important thing is to learn from these experiences, good and bad, building research and feedback loops into the process. Ask the question did you include members of the community you were targeting in planning the event?

Audiences

We work across the board with many kinds of audiences but I want to focus on just five:

- a) The very young
- b) Young adults
- c) The very old
- d) The socially deprived
- e) The ethnically diverse and newly arrived.

The Very Young

Our most popular exhibition, after 32 years of successful art shows, has just ended. The Lost Words by Robert Macfarlane and Jackie Morris is about connecting children to nature through language. In UK children spend less time outdoors than prisoners in HM Gaol. I am a father and grandfather of young children and I don't know a parent who doesn't wish their child to spend more time in Nature and less time in front of a screen. The problem is we haven't only lost the language of nature we have lost the memory of play. There is whole generation of young parents who never played in Nature themselves. I have spoken at a previous Congress about our work with these parents and their children but to summarise the GOOD NEWS from what we learnt – Nature play is instinctive, it doesn't need expensive or elaborate props or equipment, all it needs is access to Nature, imagination and permission to play.

Don't be scared. Active play, where under-fives engage with living plants and fallen material from the ground, may look destructive but is not likely to cause any long-term damage plants (and our planting schemes) can adapt and be stronger and more interesting and diverse as a result of such interventions. A film that explains the results of this work Nature Play: Nature Conservation can be accessed here <https://vimeo.com/123538964>

Young Adults

Often described as the missing generation in museums, as well as botanic gardens, the 16 – 35 year olds have been one of the hardest groups to attract. Previously we have gone to great lengths to attract this specific age group with ‘Late’ style events. We create bespoke science and art activities, appropriate for the age group, have a bar and street food, organise a dance band and even a silent disco. These Friday night after work sessions are immensely popular but still half of the adults buying tickets are over our target age group.

Then this year, appropriately Scotland’s Year of Young People, this target group came to us with a plan so preposterous we had to say yes. They wanted to build their own music venue in the form of an in-the-round auditorium, made entirely from discarded pianos. It seems that getting rid of pianos, especially the much-loved familiar heirlooms, is emotionally and practically quite tricky. The solution to upcycle the pianos into a structure which is performance space, art installation and gigantic acoustic instrument took a leap of faith on the part of our Senior Management which fortunately paid off with the ‘best new venue in the Fringe’, community events every day during August (thank you Creative Scotland for your support) and sell-out concerts every night. The lesson we learned: an event organised by young people was more successful in attracting a younger audience than an event organised for young people.

The Very Old

As I approach retirement, like many folk, the thing I fear most is loneliness. In our modern, transient society so many people are destined to live the latter part of their lives in relative isolation, feeling lonely and depressed. SAMH recommend volunteering as a way of avoiding loneliness and depression <https://www.samh.org.uk/about-mental-health/self-help-and-wellbeing/five-ways-to-better-mental-health> . We have a veritable army of volunteers, across the institution, who are retired or of retirement age, including a team of citizen scientists working on a long-term phenology project. This gives people an opportunity to give something back to society or to develop their own skills and experience, which are important in combating depression, but first and foremost they are opportunities for social interaction.

More specifically our community engagement programme includes regular social events for older people with dementia and their carers, and also an art group for people with Parkinson's disease. Why is a Botanic Garden such a good place for these interventions? It is familiar and safe, scents and sounds, like bird song, can evoke memories and inspire creativity, and activities like shared cooking and eating together are familiar and familial.

The ethnically diverse and newly arrived

I am proud to live in a small country that has not been afraid of the movement of people across international borders and has been welcoming to refugees from overseas. We like to point out to visitors that wherever they are from and whenever they arrived they will find something in our collection of 16,000 species of plants that will remind them of home! Plants, crops and food have become common currency in our programme with both established (mostly Bangladeshi and Nepali) immigrant community and more recently arrived refugees from Syria and Sudan. The community focused Edible Gardening Project supplies us with vegetables that the ladies of the NKS community group delight into turning in delicious curries, happily feeding everyone who is about with the gift of sharing. Even the most simple event becomes a celebration with the colours, smells and tastes of the orient mixed with those of our Scottish Garden.

Our recipe for success in organising a successful event with the Edinburgh-Asian community is that it must be inclusive of people of all ages from babies to white-haired matriarchs, it has to include a picnic with a variety of food that everyone can share, and it must be respectful of the cultural and religious beliefs of those participating (for example not offering meat products or alcohol, providing separate areas for men and women).

The Socially Deprived

The Scottish Government has mapped areas of multiple deprivation when communities suffer high unemployment, low income, poor health and high crime-rates. They tend to be in areas of high-density public housing where there has been a decline in industry and job-opportunities. Some of the most impoverished areas of multiple deprivation are not very far from our flagship Edinburgh Garden which is surrounded by middle-class houses and private school playing fields but is less than a kilometre from one of the most notorious housing

schemes in the City. Engaging with people from these areas, who identify themselves as being different from our typical visitors (it's not for people like us) has been especially difficult. Again food has been the common denominator and through the BigPicnic project we have given some of the residents from this area of Pilton a voice.

The technique of Digital Storytelling is a way of making a short documentary film that puts ownership in the hands of the protagonist. We write the story, record the commentary and add film or images using simple video recording technology as supplied on an iPad. The results are often quirky, deeply personal and very revealing. We have used them in exhibitions, to promote discussion and to document a project. We have even taken them into the Scottish Parliament and shared them with our Members of Parliament. Listening to these has been very humbling, giving a voice perhaps for the first time, to people who need to be heard and allowing us to think about where we would like to put effort and resources in future.

Conclusion

Ecologists understand the relationship between biodiversity and resilience and the need for disturbance to trigger regeneration. Actually this relationship between resilience and diversity also applies in almost every other field from finance to farming. And it's fundamental to our community programme. In the face of unprecedented change (social, economic, political, environmental) how can we help maintain and celebrate human diversity, in its many forms, and create greater resilience within society?

Our climate will continue to become more unpredictable. People will move, from necessity and sometimes in large numbers, across international borders. Populations, especially in the West will age, and older people will find themselves isolated and alone. Ever increasing reliance on technology for work and pleasure will deepen our disconnect with the natural world. These changes may seem inevitable but we can also seek to adapt, build resilience and steer change in a positive direction.

This is the big challenge for botanic garden community engagement. For four centuries botanic gardens have been employing their diverse collection for healing purposes. The Edinburgh Garden soon to celebrate its 350 anniversary was established by two doctors as a

physic garden, a kind of living pharmacy to make the City more resilient to the pestilent disease that ravaged the poor in the seventeenth century. Today our diverse collections remain relevant in helping to heal mind, body and soul. Our scientists are helping our heal the planet from which we derive all our sustenance and our educators and engagement team are helping to heal the rifts in society by tackling inequality and prejudice.