Harbourfront Centre created the following *Project Field Notes* in 2022 as part of their Balancing Act Level UP! Pilot Project.

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Harbourfront centre

BALANCING ACT

Harbourfront Centre
Level UP! Care Solutions Pilot
Project Field Notes

The following notes were written in 2022 by Rosie Driscoll, Harbourfront Centre's Company Manager at the time, after Harbourfront completed their Level UP! Pilot Program.

Project Focus: Creating childcare supports for visiting artists within a large organization.

Project Inspiration: Harbourfront Centre is a place that serves families in large part; offering childcare support to their artists aligns with this vision.

Planning and implementation

This pilot project was to provide childcare for artists coming with children for Harbourfront's JUNIOR festival. The project planning began in October 2021 and project implementation for our first childcare pilot happened in April 2022. The pilot involved supporting a performer from Sweden and his little one (two years old) who traveled with him to Toronto.

We set aside a budget to provide a babysitter, a hotel room that would accommodate them both, an airport limo company with car seat rental, and art supplies/toys for the child. We set up a childcare room in one of the dressing rooms backstage. It had play mats, toys, art supplies, books, and we had designated drinks and snacks for the child.

Email communication with the artist began in January 2022, and the following questions were asked in order to make sure all childcare and parent needs were met:

- Information about the child:
    - Age
    - Pronouns
    - Preferred language of communication
    - Allergies/medical conditions
    - Type of car seat child is currently using and weight of child

    - Nap schedule
    - Personality/interests (e.g. favourite activities/toys/tv shows)
    - Diaper/washroom protocols

- Amenities/equipment needs:
    - What type of bed is preferred (e.g. crib, bed)?
    - Is a room with a bathtub preferred?
    - What other types of equipment are needed:
        - Stroller
        - Highchair
        - Something else (please specify):
- Would you like to meet the babysitter virtually before you arrive?
- Based on the production schedule, when would you like to have the babysitter (please specify which days, and times of day)?

We scheduled the babysitter at the artist's request. It was important for the artists to have the production schedule well in advance so he could make these decisions, and so we had enough time to book the babysitter.

A couple of months later, for the Island Soul Festival in the summer of 2022, we engaged the babysitting service the Summerhill Club to care for the child of comedian Trey Anthony. We made the arrangements and we paid for sessions when the artist had to be working for us (in rehearsal or in performance). The artist paid for another one or two sessions when she wanted to go out and have dinner and see shows, etc. This babysitting was done in the hotel room at the Westin Harbour Castle.

Future planning

I think that these pilots will look completely different for each company participating. For many of the other companies, they were able to immediately implement a budget line and language in their contracts. At Harbourfront, we had literally just gone through a huge contract overhaul and negotiation that involved many months, many versions, and many stakeholders, including legal teams, so there was no way to adjust the language in the standard contract at the time, but the company is happy to provide childcare on an ad hoc basis, depending on the event, the artist, and the need. So it's different for everyone, and progress is still progress!

Language considerations

In terms of language, the one thing that has been interesting is dealing with parents and children whose first language is not English. Our first artist was from Sweden and his son did not speak any English, but the babysitter made it work! It was a reminder that parenting and caregiving looks different in every country. At Harbourfront we have to keep this in mind when arranging care and booking sitters. Also, it's important for us to let international artists know protocols here in Canada (e.g., breastfeeding in public is legal).

Sustainability

I wrote a summary of the project for our Chief Programming Officer to present to the Board of Directors at one of this year's meetings in advance of the project. At Harbourfront, because all of the different projects live in different departments and with different producers, it was discussed and agreed that providing childcare wasn't an item that was going to be included in contracts (as mentioned above, Harbourfront had completed a lengthy contract overhaul shortly before the pilot and did not want to reopen the contract review and negotiations process). It came down to the individual producers to set aside money in their budgets and offer it. Because this was new, I was reminding producers consistently about it as an option. I hope it has become more regular practice since my departure from the company! I think providing childcare options is completely sustainable, but it's going to require reminders and communication to all of the producers until it becomes standard practice.

To create even more support, we developed a *Resource Guide For Visiting Parents/ Guardians* that outlines everything a parent/caregiver might need during their time with Harbourfront–indications like ramps at the venue, change tables in washrooms, childcare services, family-friendly restaurants and spaces, pediatric walk-ins, etc. Rosie Driscll (former Company Manager at Harbourfront) and Tim Walker (Senior Manager, Education at Harbourfront) put this guide together in consultation with Balancing Act. It was sent to the Director of Cultural Engagement, and then to the Chief Programming Officer for final approval.

Key pieces of advice

Stay flexible, stay open. The more work and planning you can do and resources you can gather upfront while working on the pilot will set you up for success in the future.