imagineNATIVE Film + Media Arts Festival created the following *Project Field Notes* in 2025 as part of their Balancing Act Level UP! Pilot Project.

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imagineNATIVE
Festival Childcare Pilot – Project Field Notes

The following notes were shared in 2025 by Lindsay Monture, imagineNATIVE's Artistic Director to share reflections and insights from the organization's Level UP! Project.

Project focus: To provide childcare services at the imagineNATIVE Film + Media Arts Festival for artists, industry professionals, and guests.

Project inspiration: Personal experience with the sacrifices parents and caregivers in the screen industry make to keep working.

Project Context

imagineNATIVE's Artistic Director Lindsay Monture and Executive Director Naomi Johnson are both mothers of young children and often have to leave them at home when attending other festivals for work. We are aware that the growth of Indigenous cinema is led by a large number of Indigenous women—many who are mothers themselves—and often have to make the same sacrifices to hold the space that we do in this industry. Both directors come from a matriarchal culture whose ancestors carried their children on their backs while working and taking care of their people. The role of the women surrounding them—grandmothers, aunties, older sisters—was to step in and support them in childminding so the work can be done. This is why Lindsay and Naomi wanted to offer support to parents and caregivers during the festival, allowing them to continue their work knowing their children were nearby in a safe, engaging environment.

Planning and Implementation

Planning for the pilot started at the end of March 2025, about two months before the 2025 imagineNATIVE Festival, which ran from June 4 to 8, 2025. Finding a childcare provider for the festival was difficult at first—we put a call out on social media and in our newsletter but weren't getting much response. At the same time, we were deep into festival planning and adjusting to a new timeline due to our changed festival dates. We had to figure out how to fit in a whole new initiative into the process.

Eventually, we found The Summerhill Club, a local babysitting agency, and they agreed to provide their services. They have been amazing at meeting our needs and requests. Rachel Fletcher, the manager at The Summerhill Club, made sure to find Indigenous childcare providers for us, which was not mandatory but preferred, and we were so pleased with them.

We needed a space to offer the childcare services, so we booked a large meeting room just outside our offices at 401 Richmond. We called the space *Seedlings.* The room was available at no cost since we work in the building. It offered plenty of space for activities and we stocked it with supplies provided by Naomi and Lindsay—including a play tent, a bean bag chair, books, games, toys, and arts and craft supplies. We also stocked the kitchenette in our office next door with snacks and drinks for the children.

We created a registration form that festival guests could fill out in advance or on-site. This allowed us to collect contact information and necessary information about the children being dropped off. We also prepared a First Aid Waiver form for parents and guardians to sign, authorizing the childcare providers to provide First Aid if needed.

Childcare was offered each day of the festival from 10 am to 3 pm.

After the Festival wrapped, follow-up for the pilot was minimal: just a few emails with The Summerhill Club to process payments for babysitters who provided childcare.

Key Conversations

All conversations and communications about this festival childcare were initiated by Lindsay Monture. Information promoting the childcare services was shared through our newsletters in the weeks leading up to the Festival and daily during the Festival. We also shared information over social media and via personalized emails from Lindsay to festival pass holders. In response, Lindsay received a lot of support and encouragement from board members, artists, and festival guests.

Language Considerations

It was important to make it clear that *Seedlings* was what we named the childcare space, and that The Summerhill Club was the agency providing the childcare services.

All of the language used in communication and registration materials, for example, the registration form and waiver form, was shared with and approved by The Summerhill Club to ensure nothing was misrepresented or misunderstood.

Sustainability

We did not get as many children as we had hoped for, but we were able to support a few artists who brought their children to the festival. We think this could be a sustainable program with more campaigning around the accessibility of offering childcare at the festival earlier in our timeline. Childcare at events is not currently a standard practice in the industry, so it's easily overlooked as an area needing improvement. It will take time to catch on, but we have only received words of encouragement and support, so we know there is a need for it.

To make childcare a regular part of the Festival and events, fundraising will be necessary. It is hard to find public funding or grant programs offered to support childcare specifically for events. We were able to work within the amount provided by Balancing Act, but we will need to seek other funding to continue—likely through corporate and/or private sponsors.

Future Planning

Through this pilot, we have worked out a lot of uncertainties and can improve upon our childcare offerings for future events. There will always be Indigenous parents/caregivers in need of childcare services in the industry.

As part of our continued support for parents and caregivers in the industry and those attending the festival, we plan to seek funding to expand programming that encourages families to bring their children. This includes contracting cultural education workshop facilitators and budgeting for child-friendly Indigenous film screenings. We also plan to promote the childcare service earlier and, if possible, feature it in our festival catalogue.

Advice

Keep pushing forward and you will find the support needed. This is an area of accessibility that is so often overlooked and undermined, so we need to keep pushing for this so it becomes normalized and acceptable to support artists with children.