Children's Voices in Action

icandance believe it



# Child-Centred Evaluation Report

## icandance Annual Show

August 2023

Children's Voices in Action is the operating name for The Seaver Foundation reg. UK Charity Commission: 1157104

Children's Voices in Action

# TOP FINDINGS & RECOMMENDATIONS

In July 2023, Children's Voices in Action partnered with icandance to conduct a child-centred evaluation of the icandance annual performance. Top-level findings and recommendations are listed below:

## The show is achieving its goals!



**Children are experiencing positive emotions** about their performance, and their expressions of happiness, excitement, pride, and being "seen" increased after their performance.



**100% of dance partners said the dancer they worked with displayed positive changes after their performance.** Dance partners understand and agree with the show objectives.



**The audience's expectations are being met and exceeded.** They are inspired by the show. Their perspectives about the abilities of dancers with disability are broadened, and they feel supported and proud of the dancers.

## Recommendations



**Some spaces may be too crowded/overwhelming,** including some numbers on stage and backstage



**Explore ways for more dance partners to experience the show as an audience member**



**Further research into the audience's interval experience**



**Evaluation methods can be adjusted slightly** to be more accessible for all dancers, and remain unobtrusive to the show experience

# EVALUATION REVIEW

## METHODS

The evaluation was carried out on June 1, 2023 as part of the icandance Annual Performance experience.

The evaluation targeted three key audiences:

1. Dancers
2. Dance Partners
3. Audience Members (including dancer's families)

The evaluation aimed to:

- Evaluate key show objectives for each target group
- Capture the emotions and feelings of the dancers, staff, and dance partners - before and after the event, where appropriate
- Demonstrate the impact of the show in a powerful way, while remaining open and unbiased to capture challenges and areas of improvement

It was essential that evaluation methods were simple to use and accessible for children with varied abilities. Great care was also taken to ensure that the evaluation methods would not take too much time or get in the way of the show experience itself.

To gather insight from the dancers, evaluators used tactile poster boards, large laminated makaton images to convey emotions and key experiences. Responses were captured by evaluators using analogue evaluation log sheets. Verbatim answers were logged as well as additional non-verbal cues and insights gathered by the evaluators where appropriate. Evaluators were external staff of Children's Voices in Action and both had previous experience with icandance practice sessions and had seen and interacted with some of the children and young people before.

To gather insight from dance partners, a online survey was used and circulated post-show via whatsapp.

To gather insight from audience members, people were given small cards to write their expectations and submit anonymously through poll boxes. They were also requested to complete an online survey after the show as part of their 'thank you' email, on the show programme itself, and there were physical copies of the survey available at the performance for those unable to complete the survey online.

After 3 weeks, evaluators performed a thematic analysis of all data to capture key themes, learnings, and insights.

# OBJECTIVES AND EVALUATION QUESTIONS

**DANCERS**

**Key show objectives**

- Engage with and express themselves through dance
- Increased physical activity, joy, and fun
- Build positive relationships
- Increase self-confidence
- Celebrate achievements

**Evaluation questions:**

Pre-show:

- How do you feel about the show? (Happy, Excited, Calm, Sad, Worried, Scared, Embarrassed)

Post-show:

- How do you feel about the show? (Happy, Excited, Calm, Sad, Worried, Scared, Embarrassed)
- How did you feel about… i) dancing on stage; ii) people watching in the theatre, iii) your costume, iv) the music you danced to? (like/dislike via thumbs up/down icons)

**DANCE PARTNERS**

**Key show objectives**

- Develop inclusive attitude and approach
- Increased knowledge and skills
- Value creative therapeutic approaches when supporting families with disabled children/YP
- Change perceptions of dance and disability

**Evaluation questions:**

- Have you supported a show before?
- What word/phrase would you use to describe your experience?
- What was your most/least favourite part of the show?
- Did you feel your attitude or approach to supporting children and young people with disabilities has been affected by the show? Why/Not?
- Why do you feel the show is important?
- Did you notice any negative or positive changes in any dancers you worked with after their performance?

**AUDIENCE MEMBERS (including families)**

**Key show objectives**

- Increase feelings of support and community
- Changed perspectives - Reimagine dance and celebrate difference
- Build and connect communities by celebrating what's possible
- Increase pride in child and what they're able to do

**Evaluation questions:**

Pre-show:

- One word/phrase to describe what you expect the show will be like?.

Post-show:

- Have you been to an icandance show before?
- How that you've seen the show, write a word/phrase to describe your experience?
- Did the show meet your expectations?
- How would you rate your experience of the show?
- What is your most & least favourite part of the show?
- How has the show left you feeling?

*Parents/Carers only*:

- Do you feel your child benefited by being part of the show? Why/Not?
- Did the show… help you feel part of a community, help you feel proud of your child and their abilities? help you understand your child more, help you feel supported?

Children's Voices in Action

# ANALYSIS OF SUCCESS ON PROGRAMME OBJECTIVES

## AUDIENCE

39 audience members responded to the pre-show survey asking them to share one word or phrase describing what they expect the show to be like. All responses were positive. The most common response (23%) was that they **expected the show to be inspiring**. Other common responses included 'amazing', 'fabulous', and 'emotional'.

22 audience members responded to the post-show survey. 68% of these respondents were family members of the dancers. 73% had been to an icandance show before. It could be logically inferred that a small but significant proportion of the audience were new to the experience of icandance as a whole, indicating some support for the objective of building and connecting communities, and changing perspectives.

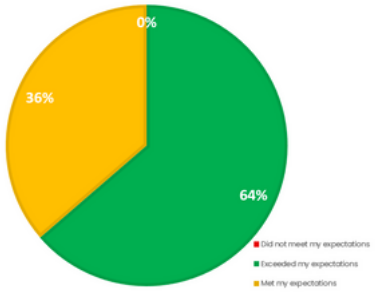
When asked after the show to provide one word or show describing their experience, again all responses were positive. **The most common responses included 'inspiring', 'fantastic', 'amazing'** (18% each). Responses also included: 'exhilarating', 'the most beautiful show', 'humbling', 'impressed', and 'grateful'.

Because the audience is self-selecting, responses show that participants already feel positive and prepared to be inspired. The responses after seeing the show display that the show is living up to expectations and is an inspiring, fantastic, emotional experience for the audience.

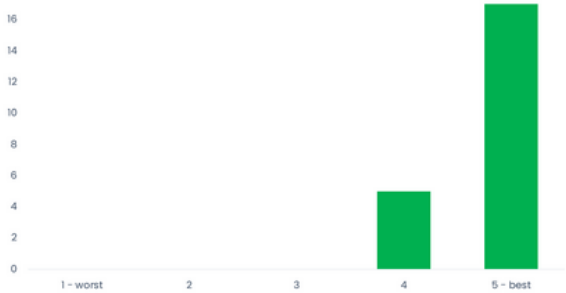
*'I don't have enough words to say how uplifted I feel seeing the children accomplishing such a wonderful skill.'*

Indeed, survey results show that **36% of respondents reported that the show met expectations, and 64% said the show exceeded expectations.** No respondents reported that their expectations were not met. **When asked to rate their experience, respondents rated the show 4 and 5 out of 5, with 5 being the most common answer.**

**Did the show meet expectations?**




**Rate your experience of the show**




**When asked what their favourite part of the show was, most audience members said everything.** Happy dancers, their own child's performance, the superhero dance, the slideshow, the finale, and guest dancers were all mentioned more than once.

**When asked their least favourite part, similarly most audience members said nothing.** Other responses included the groups being too large, the interval, transitioning into the show space, watching some dancers be uncomfortable, the show being too long, and the lighting being too harsh.

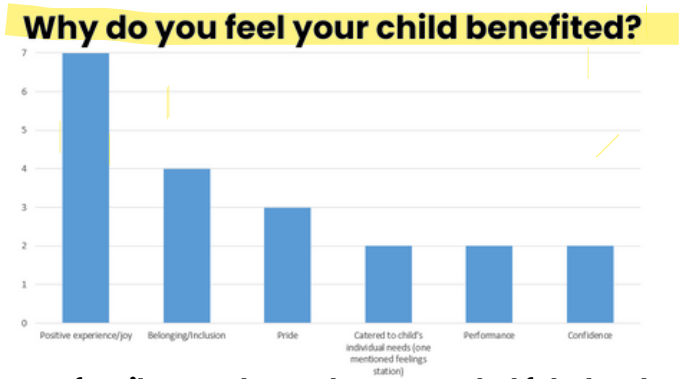
*"When the boy didn't want to leave the stage. I loved his confidence"*

*"So many kids on the stage at the same time, I couldn't take them all in at once."*

# AUDIENCE CONT...

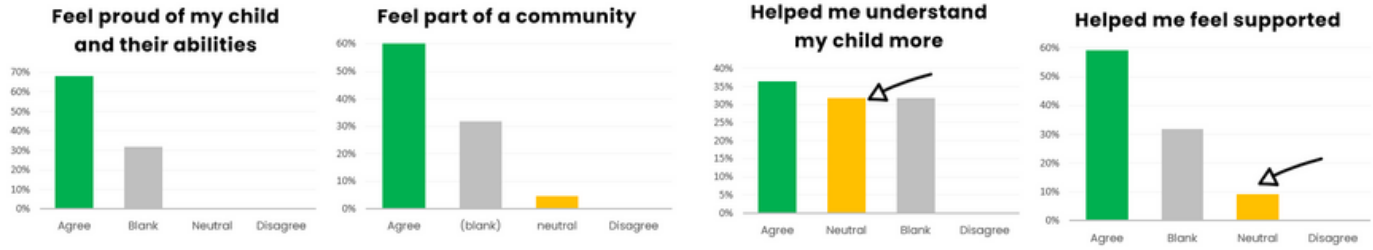
**When asked how the show left the audience members feeling, all responses were positive.** Most common responses included good/happy (10 out of 22 responses), emotional (9/22), proud (3/22), changed perspective (2/22), and hopeful (2/22).

**100% of the parents and carers who responded felt their child benefited from being part of the show.** Most citing the experience was positive and joyful, and others saying that they felt it was beneficial because it improved the feeling of belonging and inclusion, their child experienced pride, it catered to their child's individual needs, they were able to perform, and their confidence improved.




"His smile spoke a thousand words"

**Most family members who responded felt the show helped them feel proud of their child and their abilities, and helped them feel part of a community.** Many also stated that it helped them understand their child more and feel supported, however a larger percentage reported a neutral feeling toward these statements.




**KEY TAKEAWAYS:**

There was a low response rate to the survey, particularly after the show. This is quite common in satisfaction surveys, however it may be possible to increase this through incentives, dedicated time in the show or interval to complete the survey, and/or additional reminders via email.

The audience has clear, positive expectations of the show and their expectations appear to be being met and exceeded. The audience was inspired after experiencing the performance, which is directly related to the aim of the show helping to change perspectives of the wider community.

Parents are proud of their children and the show helps them to feel part of a community. They scored slightly lower but still positive on the show helping them understand their child more and feel supported. It should be noted that these are likely achieved in other aspects of the charities programming activities.

There are some improvements to consider around the group sizing and interval experience, as well as the evaluation station being more clearly optional for those children who need more time to transition into the backstage space.

In future, evaluations could include questions on some more specific elements of the show (length of the show, growth of the child, flow of the day, experience of the family/child, evaluation methods) to gain further insight. Also, because the pre-show and post-show surveys resulted in very similar answers, it is recommended that next year, audience members are encouraged to attach a word/phrase onto an artistic installation wall on the way out only, with a suggestion box with a slip asking what can be done differently next year. This will avoid 'doubling up' on asking for their time, as well as creating a participatory feature that is part of the show experience.

# DANCE PARTNERS

26 dance partners responded to the online questionnaire. 38% of these had supported an icandance show before and it was the first experience for 62% of respondents.

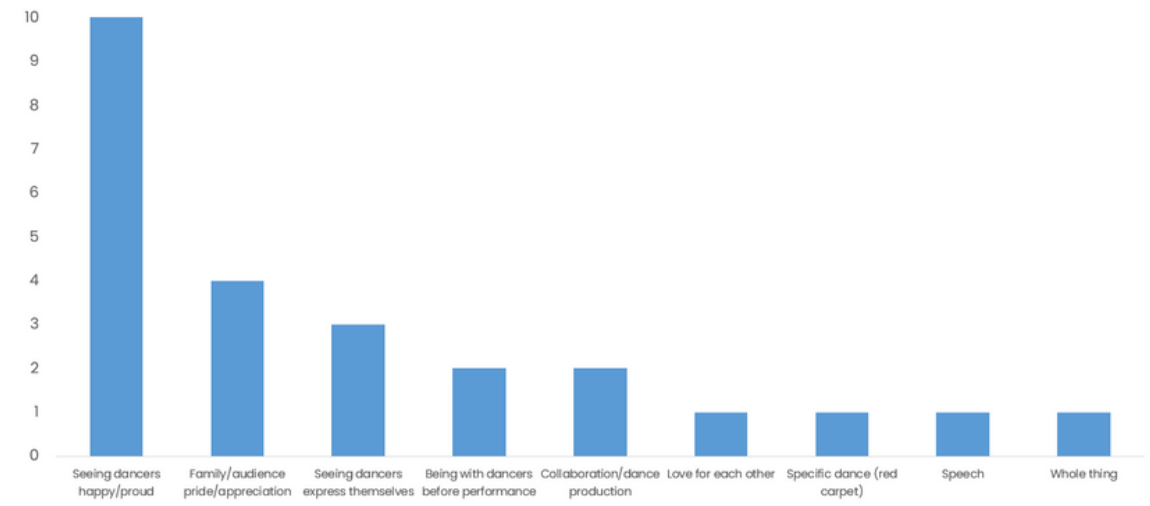
**All respondents noted positive responses when asked what words or phrases they would use to describe the show.** The most common were 'joyful', 'inspiring', 'unity/togetherness', 'empowerment', and 'emotional'. One mentioned that it is 'hectic but filled with love'.

**When describing their favourite part of the show, most dance partners said it was seeing the dancers happy/proud.** Other common responses were around family/audience pride/appreciation, seeing dancers express themselves, and being with dancers before the performance and being part of the dance production.

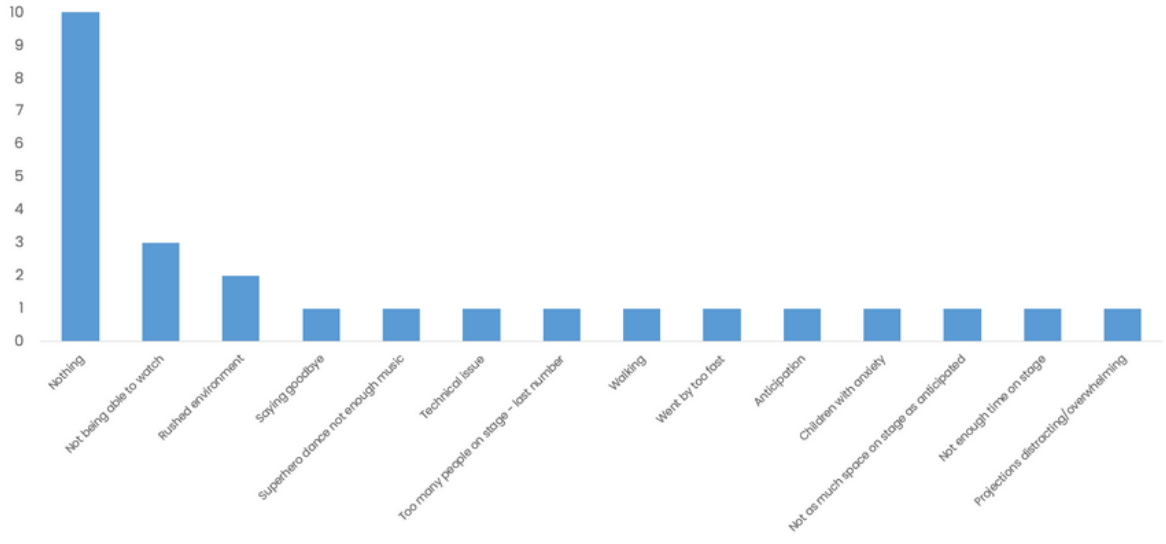
**"Seeing my dancer go from worried about being seen to smiling on stage."**

**When asked about their least favourite part, most dance partners said 'nothing'.** Three mentioned not being able to watch the performances, and two noted the rushed environment. There were several other responses of note, which while only mentioned once, is recommended to look into further. These include technical issues, having too many people on stage and not enough space on stage, and the projections being distracting/overwhelming.

## Favourite part?




## Least favourite part?

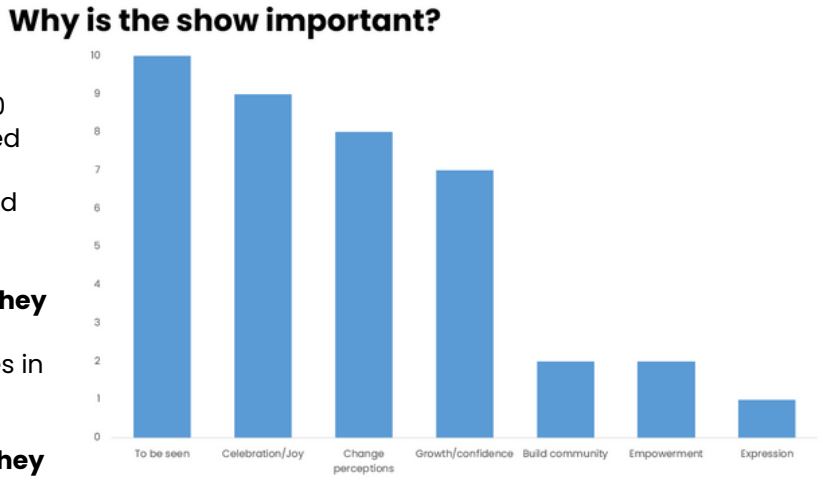


# DANCE PARTNERS

**"The solid relationship built during rehearsal period created a strong foundation to respond to any challenges the performances might bring"**

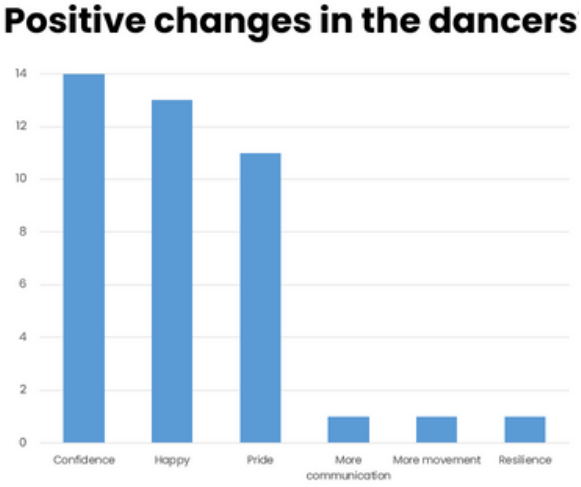
**65% of dance partners who responded stated that their attitude or approach to supporting children and young people with disabilities was affected by the show.** Most said this was due to being even more inspired. Some said that they have higher expectations of what performers can achieve now that they've experienced the show. 35% said that their attitude or approach was not affected by the show. They stated that this is due to the fact that their approach is already working so there is no need to change or because their approach was already shifted thanks to icandance before the show.

The majority of dance partners who responded said **the show is important because it helps young dancers with disabilities to be seen, celebrated, and share in joy with their communities, families, and fellow dancers** (10 out of 26 responses). 8 respondents also shared that its valuable because it helps change perceptions and it helps encourage growth and confidence.




**100% of dance partners who responded said they noted positive changes in the dancers they worked with.** Most referenced positive changes in confidence, happiness, and pride.

**15% also noted negative change in a dancer they worked with.** These comprised of 4 responses: anxiety and agitation but the dancer recovered and participated later, a busy backstage area, a child who was dysregulated/overwhelmed, and a young person upset about not being on stage long enough. Due to the various complex needs of many of the dancers, it is normal and expected that some dancers may experience these types of challenges. While acknowledging that the backstage area already included a sensory room to support overwhelmed dancers, it may be beneficial to explore additional measures to put in place to support dancers within the backstage area, particularly those with anxiety.




**KEY TAKEAWAYS:**

The response rate was not as high as expected. Sending the survey link to the staff and volunteer whatsapp group worked well and although the response rate was limited, it provides great initial insight.

Dance partners have a very positive experience with the show and it helps them feel even more inspired and have even higher perceptions of what the dancers are able to achieve. Dance partners have effective methods and approaches, many shaped by their experience with icandance. They agree that the show helps young people be seen, celebrated, grow, and positively changes the perceptions of those watching. All dance partners surveyed saw positive changes in the children they worked with, mostly to do with their confidence, happiness, and sense of pride. A small amount also saw negative changes, mostly due to anxiety and feeling overwhelmed.

Possible future improvements include enabling dance partners to watch more of the show and reduce the rushed feeling backstage. It's also encouraged to explore steps to take that could improve the response rate, including carving out time as part of the debrief at the end of the show for dance partners to respond to the survey before they leave. It's also recommended to include more pointed questions on some specific areas to gain more insight, including the dance partners own experience, the flow of the day, their ideas for improvement, the various methods/stations used backstage, and the evaluation methods and experience.

# DANCERS

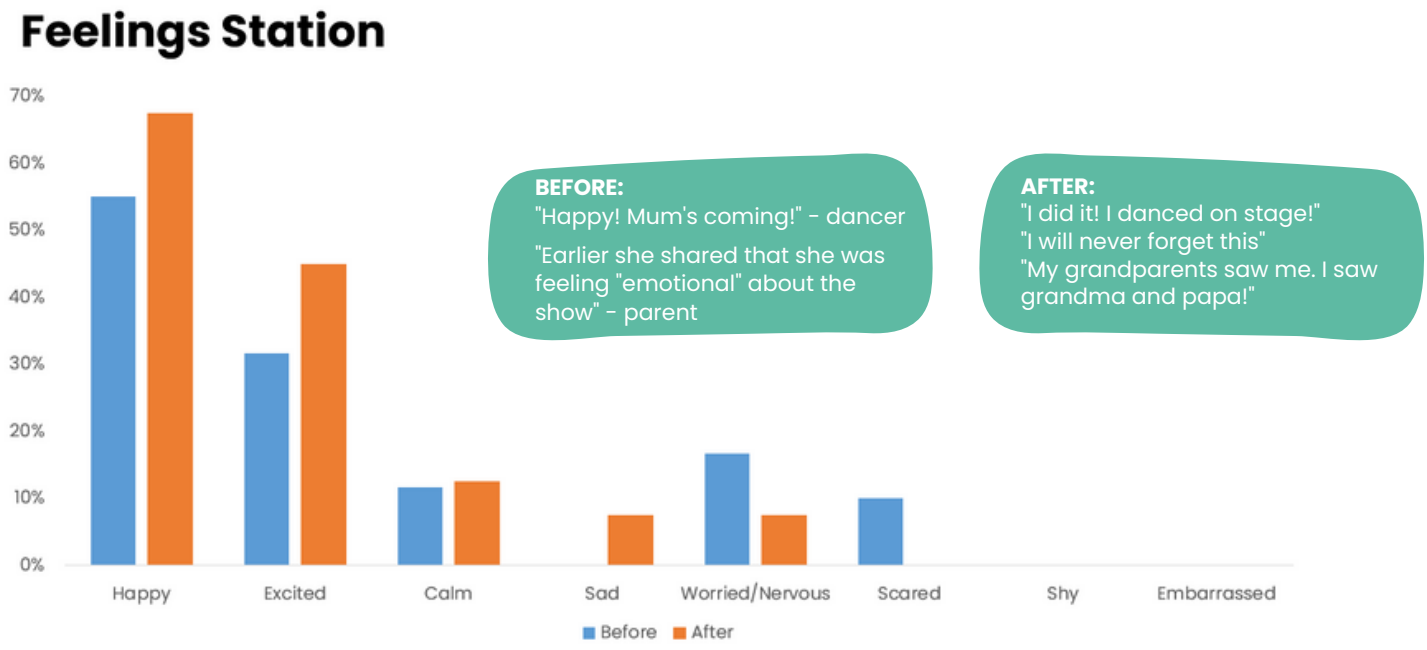
**100 response were collected in total.** 60 of 80 children before the show, and 40 children after the show. Whilst this is a good sample size, it is difficult to consider any sample within this group representative, due to the very individual needs of each beneficiary. This said, a range of children were able to engage with the methods.

As the children and young people arrived and walked backstage, they were asked to visit the 'feelings station' to choose the face that matched how they feel about performing in the show. Most children selected the happy and excited faces, with a few choosing the worried/nervous or scared faces. Many were able to communicate the reasons why they were experiencing such emotions, often relating to the performance element of being seen, for both positive and challenging emotions.

They were also asked this same question after their performance. A significantly higher percentage reported being happy and excited after the performance, less children chose the worried/nervous face, and no children chose the scared face. Many children who had formerly felt nervous or worried were now experiencing positive feelings. Research shows that overcoming these emotions and having a positive experience is a key factor in building resilience and confidence.

A few children said they were sad to see the show and the experience end. No children selected the shy or embarrassed faces - neither before nor after their performance.

During this activity 4 sets of parents and carers expressed appreciation for the methods and time to reflect, noting that their child or young person was expressing themselves well emotionally using these methods and it supported their own understanding of their child's position. It should also be noted that some parents and carers attempted to respond for their children, or contested their child's responses. These were noted by the evaluators and only expression made directly from the children themselves were used as valid responses in the data.




Evaluators asked some dancers to participate in a like/dislike exercise with four key questions: How did you like (1) dancing on stage; (2) people watching in the audience; (3) your costume; (4) the music? 13 dancers were surveyed. None of them disliked any of the elements, and one dancer provided feedback to match the costume and theme more next year, include animals, and the icandance logo. This exercise was a pilot and was quickly deemed unsuitable for the backstage area in the format tested. Evaluators did not feel their presence was appropriate in the busy, high-energy backstage area. It was important that the evaluation did not contribute to any sense of anxiety or dysregulation. It was also crucial that it respected the privacy of dancers who were changing costumes. There was a distinct bias toward children who were more verbal and calm in order to provide their feedback.

# DANCERS CONT...

**KEY TAKEAWAYS:**
Dancers experience very positive emotions both before and after the show, and certainly experience increased happiness and excitement after their performances. The show is a positive experience for dancers, where they are able to express feelings of pride and being "seen" by their family, friends, and community at large. In these ways, the show clearly meets its objectives in the dancer's eyes. Dancers seem to enjoy dancing on stage, being watched by the audience, and feel positive about both their colourful costumes and the music.

**Evaluation methods:** The feelings station worked very well pre-performance and helped ground children as they came in. One family member even called this out, saying it really helped her child transition into the space. For a few individuals, this station was not appropriate, one parent mentioned that it was more important that their child was able to get immediately to the backstage area to settle into the new surrounding.

It is suggested that the feelings station remains part of the settling-in process, as a distinct area for the children to visit when they check in, but further down the hallway, so dance partners can monitor whether or not the exercise is appropriate for the child at that time. For the few children who would be best served by transitioning straight into the backstage area, their dance partner can be given a hand-held survey card to complete with the child once they are backstage and settled. There could be an envelope or box in each backstage room to collect these cards once they are completed. While it will be crucial for some dance partners to conduct the evaluation for those children who require this, it is not recommended that all dance partners complete the evaluation themselves, as the evaluators felt there was merit in having a distinct evaluation station. It helped to ensure consistency in evaluation methods and seemed to positively contribute to the transitioning experience for the majority of children. It is also suggested that evaluators use laminated A3 or A4 pages to work with each child, rather than poster board. The poster board was too large and slightly bulky for some children, and for a few, the evaluators felt the children may have selected the icon closest to them. Having a more hand-held version of the exercise would reduce this risk and allow children with less mobility to engage. It is also suggested that 'shy' and 'embarrassed' are removed and that 'worried' is changed to 'nervous' as many children identified this face as nervous when they spoke out their choice.

For the post-performance evaluation, it is suggested that the feelings station remain in the same area so dancers can stop and respond as they move back to the audience after their performance, or upon leaving at the end of the show. This creates consistency and familiarity for dancers, whilst being a very brief activity it does not majorly interrupt their experience of leaving or joining the audience. It is also recommended that the like/dislike exercise is removed and instead in-depth sessions are conducted with 10-15 children and parents/carers of different ages and abilities. This would allow further insights, without disturbing the dancer's experience of the show. It is also recommended that dance partners who participated in this year's show are also asked how they felt about the evaluation methods and if they have any further ideas or recommendations.