

GOODSPEED AND FRANKLIN ACADEMY
Working in Partnership to bring *Sensory Friendly* performances to Connecticut
Audiences
October 2016

IS SENSORY FRIENDLY PROGRAMMING RIGHT FOR YOUR ORGANIZATION?

If your organization is committed to providing a safe, friendly, judgment-free zone for people with sensory processing issues then, YES, it is right for your theatre.

A SAFE, JUDGMENT FREE ZONE MEANS that the following things are acceptable in the audience:

- a. Noise
 - b. Vocalizations
 - c. Fidgeting
 - d. Leaving the theatre
 - e. Movement throughout
 - f. Returning to the theatre
 - g. Eating and drinking in the theatre
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ONCE YOU'VE DECIDED TO PROGRAM A SENSORY FRIENDLY PERFORMANCE

1. Find a partner organization or an expert on sensory processing issues
 2. Pick a title that is appropriate. One that has a movie or soundtrack affiliated with it is a huge bonus.
 3. Pick a performance date. A weekend matinee is ideal for families and caregivers.
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MATERIALS

Informational materials are key to the success of a Sensory Friendly Performance. A person on the autism spectrum, or who has other sensory processing issues, will use information about the setting, the seating, the plot, the music and anything else you provide to help them prepare for their experience. We call this "front-loading."

Once you have chosen a performance date, then begin to build these "front-loading" materials. It's best to post this material on your website in an easy-to-find-place.

1. Create an FAQ sheet with time, date, ticket price and planned accommodations.

2. Goodspeed created a plot synopsis for the show. Goodspeed imbedded the songs into the scenes for easy listening.
 3. Goodspeed created a written Social Story.
 4. Goodspeed also created a video Social Story which we found was more popular with our audience than the written social story.
 5. We also created a character guide and used our regular audience guide as a supplement.
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TICKETING

Once all of these items are live on your website, figure out your ticketing policy and procedure.

1. Goodspeed offered a special discount for the Sensory Friendly Performance. We did a \$12 (movie priced) ticket. Partially for affordability and partially because families don't know if their loved ones will be able to "make it" through the whole (or any) of the show. A \$50 or \$75 investment is a lot to ask if you don't think they'll get through more than 10 minutes of the show.
 2. Goodspeed did not offer tickets to its Sensory Friendly performance to the general public. Anyone wishing to buy a ticket called a special number and talked with a designated person (KATE) who could take time to speak with families about their individual needs and seating requirements. She became friendly with many of our families over the phone and on the day of the performance, many came looking for their buddy, Kate.
 3. We planned to sell only a portion of our available seats. Many families needed extra space around them.
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MARKETING AND PROMOTION

Create your marketing and promotional materials as well as your mailing list of appropriate service organizations. We started seriously promoting the event about eight weeks out. We found the majority of ticket sales to happen in the last three weeks. And we had a significant number of walk-up ticket sales.

1. We created a "one-sheet" PDF that could easily be emailed to anyone.
 2. We created a social media friendly graphic that could be posted almost anywhere.
 3. We created a "pass it on" graphic so schools, teachers, friends and families could share the information.
 4. We did get a public radio interview that helped share the story so families knew about the program.
 5. We chose not to let TV Cameras into the event.
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PARTNERSHIPS

Goodspeed connected with and partnered with Franklin Academy to help with the planning of the actual experience. Franklin provided clinical expertise, staff experience and expertise, as well as student expertise. They also volunteered their time the day-of as:

1. Student greeters
 2. Student ushers and helpers in the theatre (handing out fidgets)
 3. Clinical help in the quiet rooms
 4. Staff help in the theatre to escort people out to the quiet room
 5. Staff help to recognize a “melt-down” and provide assistance to any family who needed it.
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STAFFING AND IMPLEMENTATION

The type of event is truly organization-wide in its impact. A significant number of our staff and artists were involved.

FRONT OF HOUSE

1. Front of house staff (as did all staff volunteers) received training from Franklin clinical experts on how to best interact with the population and their families.
2. We hired extra bar-tender and gift shop workers for the day.
3. We supplemented regular house staff with Goodspeed and Franklin staff volunteers to usher, direct patrons, guide patrons, and generally just check in with patrons to accommodate any needs.
4. We ran the elevator during the show.

PRODUCTION

1. Stage Management informed the actors of the performance and invited them to meetings and training sessions.
2. We asked the actors to visit seats in costume, at half hour. Many did.
3. We asked the actors to be willing to do some preshow demonstrations.
4. We kept the house lights at 40%
5. We brought the sound down (at sound board) by almost half
6. If possible, do this on a one-show day. The Principals found it tiring

MUSICIANS

1. The musicians were informed of the performance and we invited them to meetings and training sessions.
 2. We asked the musicians to play at half volume.
 3. We asked the musicians to participate in preshow demonstrations.
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UNIQUE SERVICES PROVIDED TO OUR PATRONS AT THE SENSORY FRIENDLY PERFORMANCE

Many of these items are unique to the historic Goodspeed Opera House. Each theatre should assess its own space through the eyes of someone with sensory issues.

1. We tented our plaza for extra lobby space
2. We handed out fidgets at the elevator, on the grand stair case and in theatre
3. Everyone wore special volunteer t-shirts
4. Quiet rooms were staffed by Franklin experts
5. We removed seats for wheel chairs
6. We had a staff person man the outside elevator
7. We had six extra volunteers in the theatre (aside from ushers) for escorting around the building to rest rooms, quiet rooms, etc.
8. We created a “pre-show” talk back as well as a “pre-second act” talk-back.
9. During the “pre-show” talk back we demonstrated some of the more “difficult” parts of the show for the audience.
10. We left the gift shop and the bar open during the show.
11. Franklin student volunteer formed a welcome brigade from the parking lot to the theatre along the pathway.