

Developing Sensory Friendly Performances at Seattle Children's Theatre

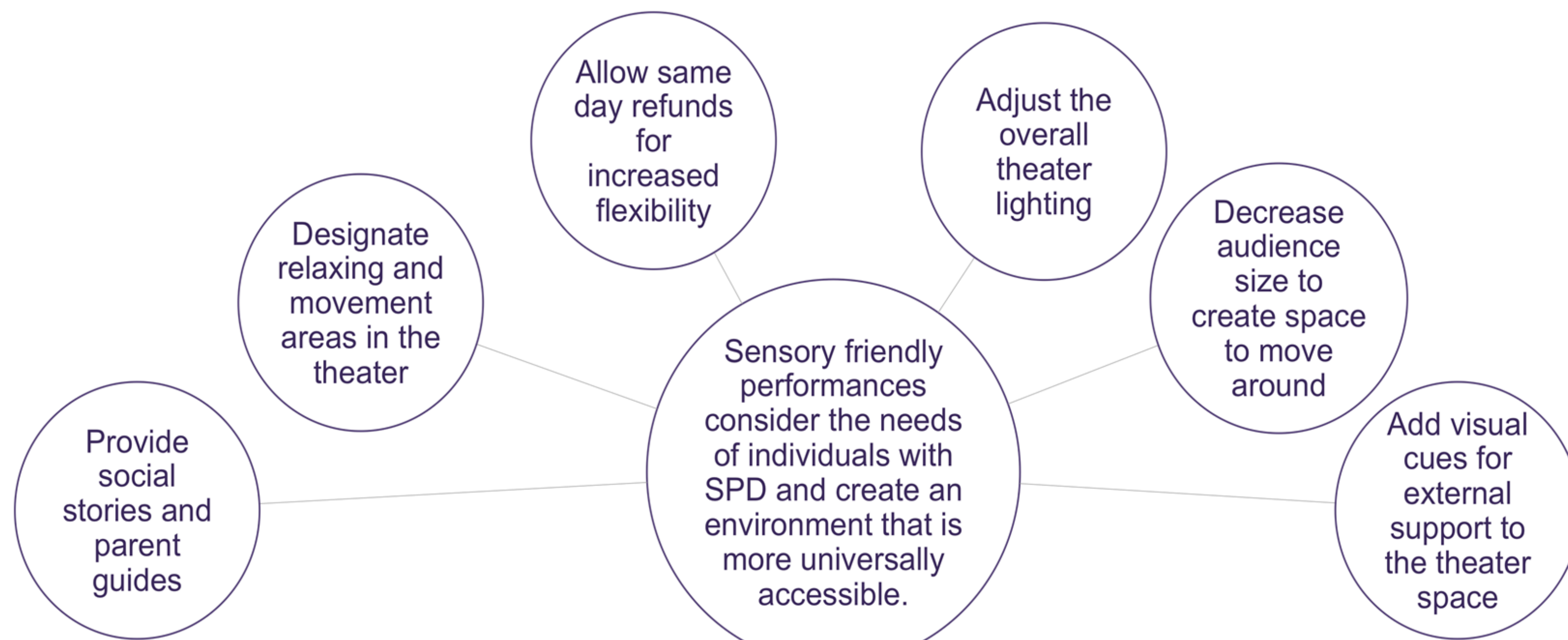
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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this project was to support and expand a sensory friendly performance initiative within a community children's theater in Seattle, WA.¹ The project aimed to meet the specific needs of children with sensory processing differences and their families as patrons in the theater environment. It also aimed to support the needs of the staff by providing education and training. We implemented key components of a sensory friendly performance. Finally, we aimed to increase the sustainability of this program so that it could be used in future theater seasons.

SENSORY FRIENDLY PERFORMANCES



BACKGROUND

- Sensory Processing Disorder (SPD): SPD impacts an individual's ability to perceive and respond to sensory stimuli in their environment, affecting their ability to function, and also their family and peers.²
- Social Participation: Participating in the community and with others is an important aspect of development. It creates a sense of belonging in children and increases overall resiliency.²
- Social Stories: Social stories help children understand different contexts, social cues, and appropriate ways to regulate behavior in situations they may find uncomfortable.³
- Environmental Adaptations: Modifying the theater space with a universal design in mind makes the environment accessible to everyone, including those with sensory processing differences.⁴
- Family Functioning: Creating opportunities that incorporate sensory friendly aspects in the community allows families to participate more fully.⁵

METHODS

ENVIRONMENTAL MODIFICATIONS

Modifications were made to the theater to enhance universal accessibility of the environment. Examples include: 1) stop signs and arrows to designate seating areas, 2) bean bag chairs to create a relaxing area, 3) stop signs lining the stage to provide visual cues, and 4) arrows on the floor lining pathways to the theatre, bathroom, and relaxing area.



SENSORY FRIENDLY TOOLKIT COMPONENTS

- Provided volunteer brief with tips for working with children with SPD and their families
- Suggested theater layout designating areas for technology and movement
- Created parent guide template for developing this resource for families and general theater social story
- Supplied timeline and checklist for creating a sensory friendly performance
- Included visual supports for adapting the environment
 - Tape for directive arrows
 - Stop signs
 - Arrows to designate theater areas



CONCLUSIONS

Participation in the arts benefits children with sensory processing differences as well as their families. We supported the implementation of three sensory friendly performances and developed tools and support that enhanced the sustainability, viability, and inclusivity of the program. SCT is committed to continuing this program through the 2016/17 season and will offer three sensory friendly performances. Our recommendations for the future include utilizing OT consultation to create performance-specific parent guides and information resources and provide support on the day of performances, expanding promotion to specific groups in the community, and expanding the sensory friendly program to include school performances.

REFERENCES

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