

## Outcome and Documentation

### Infant Imaginings –

### An arts-based research & development project with parents and babies



Infant Imaginings was a research and development project, which explored the use of the performing arts with parents and babies to promote well-being. Helene Hugel, in collaboration with musician Jonathan Wilson, facilitated exploratory sessions in a variety of health care contexts over a period of 3-4 months. They worked with parents and children aged 3 months – 2 years, and sometimes babies under 3 months. Tim Webb of Oily Cart, UK, [www.oilycart.org.uk](http://www.oilycart.org.uk), acted as mentor on the project. The outcome of their work was an interactive, intimate, work-in-progress performance for a very small audience.

The performance visited a local health centre during child development clinics. Positive feedback from staff reported that the project had a calming and relaxing effect on everyone, parents, babies, and staff. It also indirectly assisted nurses in their assessments. Finally, an early years specialist observed that the art intervention provided a positive role model for parents.

Parents written comments included:

"I think this is a brilliant idea. My daughter really enjoyed it and it totally took her mind off going to see the nurse!" (Mother of toddler 22 months)

"It was excellent, very interesting time, conscientious. Gave me great ideas to play at home with my little boy." (Mother of baby 3 months)

"I found the performance very interesting. My daughter likes the sounds and plays. Her

reactions were amazing. I was really surprised." (Mother of baby 7months)

"Fantastic idea for entertaining your baby, very creative and enjoyable to see your baby enjoying it" (Mother of baby 7months)"

An important aim of the project was to develop an artistic work of high standard, which would inspire parents to replicate some of the creative experiences at home. A forum to discuss the value of this work was held in October at Tallaght Community Arts, chaired by Tony Fegan, artistic director. It was very well attended by a diverse group of professionals from healthcare, children's theatre, arts management, and childcare. For a report on the forum and its outcomes please see [www.tallaght-arts.ie](http://www.tallaght-arts.ie). A blog documenting the project's process with photos (and eventually video) can be viewed on [www.practice.ie](http://www.practice.ie) (under projects, Infant Imaginings). A feature article on Helene Hugel's work practice can also be found on Practice.ie, <http://practice.ie/features/dec-08-helene-hugel-infant-imaginings> Finally, for further reading, an article in the Irish times is at <http://www.irishtimes.com/newspaper/health/2008/1104/1225523340742.html>

This project was produced by Helium, in partnership with Tallaght Community Arts, and the arts office in the Adelaide and Meath Hospital incorporating the National Children's Hospital, Tallaght, and in consultation with the IPPA, the Early Years Organisation. It was funded by a Bursary Grant from the Arts Council.

In partnership with Tallaght Community Arts, Helene is exploring with the HSE and other childcare agencies how this pioneering project can be furthered to produce a fully developed piece to play to children, parents and carers attending local health centres. Helene is also establishing a partnership with The School of Psychology in the University of Ulster to provide evidence based research on the value of such work.

Helene Hugel is supported by Social Entrepreneurs Ireland. She is developing a new performing arts in health company for children, called Helium. Helene can be contacted at [helenehugel@ireland.com](mailto:helenehugel@ireland.com).

**Photos by Maria Vesselko, participating mother and photographer**

