

Nära Dig och Vintergatan 2024–2026 (*Near you and the Milky Way*)

Summary of the project's aims, implementation and results

All children have the right to take part in arts and cultural experiences. This is a fundamental part of a democratic society and a right established by law. Despite this, it is a fact that many children with disabilities rarely or never participate in, or are represented at, arts and cultural activities in public spaces.

Through the project, we have addressed the question of how barriers can be removed in the long term so that families with children with disabilities can feel able, willing and confident to take part in, and feel genuinely expected and welcomed within, society's arts and cultural life. In relation to this overarching aim, the project has focused on the following questions:

How can relationships, trust and knowledge be built over time together with families?

How can knowledge within the sector be increased and the target group be given a long-term priority?

How can an inclusive and accessible arts and cultural life in public spaces and other settings become a matter of course for all children and young people?

Our intention with the project has been to set a positive process in motion through the concrete initiatives that we, as a performing arts organisation, can take. These initiatives can contribute to change both during the project and in the longer term. The project has clearly demonstrated *how* and *that* it is possible to remove barriers. This has been concretely demonstrated through the *five formats* that we developed during the project period in co-creating processes with children and the adults close to them in their free time. Families have chosen to participate, actively engaged, experienced, responded, returned and asked for more. The project has demonstrated the importance of relationship-building in reaching families and meeting their needs – those of the children, but equally those of the adults – to feel seen on their own terms and in relation to their specific and unique child.

Within the project, a range of *five formats* was developed in *co-creating processes* with children, their families and other adults close to them in their free time. All the formats are based on sensory communication and interaction. The collaborative processes have had a strong *relationship-building* focus, allowing children and the adults close to them to contribute both to the development of the formats and to our understanding of the conditions needed *around* an activity for them to feel safe and *expected* as audience members or participants.

The five formats – *Hemma på Vintergatan* (At Home on the Milky Way), *Besök på Vintergatan* (Visiting the Milky Way), *Vintergatans bibliotek* (Library of the Milky Way), *Sinnliga workshops* (Sensory Workshops) and *Vintergatans kompass* (The Milky Way's Compass) – have subsequently continued to be arranged and offered free of charge throughout the entire project period. Gradually, the project has reached more and more families with children with disabilities and has also worked through outreach in the places and settings where the children are. In this way, the project has made a tangible contribution to increasing the availability of accessible arts and cultural experiences for children with disabilities in their free time. The formats are now an integrated part of Kollaborativet's

artistic work and will continue to be offered in people's free time after the end of the project period.

Towards the performing arts sector, the project has been able to provide inspiration and a concrete example of an approach that invites children and the adults close to them to contribute to increasing knowledge and to become co-creators in the project's activities. *Communication, how people are met and treated, flexibility and freedom from expectations or demands* have become key principles and have been highlighted as important factors in gradually and successfully removing barriers.

In its work towards this secondary target group, the project has clearly communicated the importance of highly targeted initiatives combined with long-term priorities to ensure continuity and a broad range of activities that can take place in *different settings*, including outreach in people's homes, based on the needs of children and families. The project's advocacy work towards the sector has also consistently argued for *all* children's right to take part in arts and culture and to express themselves in different ways, while highlighting the wider societal problems that create barriers for people with disabilities. Examples include the lack of accessible toilets with hoists in public places, as well as the need for *structures for collaboration* between different municipal departments and other organisations in order to genuinely reach children and the adults close to them.

The problems addressed by the project are larger than what we, as a performing arts organisation, can solve within a two-year project. However, through the project we have made a strong contribution both by broadening the range of opportunities available to families *and* by acting as an eye-opener for the sector and decision-makers, demonstrating *how* it is possible to work systematically and with a long-term perspective towards a more inclusive and equitable arts and cultural life – including, and above all, in relation to children and young people with disabilities who have been excluded for a long time and for whom the need for adaptations is significant.

An inclusive and accessible arts and cultural life, both in public spaces and in other settings, needs to become the norm. The project's experiences demonstrate the need for a broad range of arts and cultural experiences, giving families with children with disabilities the freedom to choose based on their own circumstances. Inclusive activities are needed in public spaces, both activities organised and aimed at a broader public where everyone can participate regardless of ability, with adaptations that benefit everyone, *and* activities specifically aimed at families with children with disabilities.

In addition, there is a need for activities that can be fully adapted to the wishes and needs of individual families and that can take place within private or closed settings. In some cases, this can be a necessary condition for families to be able to participate at all.