



CHRISTMAS FOR KIDS 2025

EVALUATION REPORT



INTRODUCTION

Christmas for Kids is a unique project by Embracing Arts, run since 2009 and in that time reaching over 46,300 people in the UK. It consists of two main elements: a live performance and a digital show. Shows are fully interactive and multi-sensory, designed for children with complex and individual needs. An **annual tour** takes the live shows, free-of-charge, to schools and hospices across the UK.

The **digital show** is available to stream online from November-January, and is offered free of charge to schools, hospices, families and SEND communities. Christmas for Kids brings the magic of Christmas to children for whom shows in a traditional theatre setting are not accessible. It provides a fun festive experience children can enjoy with their families, friends, teachers and carers.



LIVE SHOW

The live performance **Chrimblesense**, is a fully interactive, multi-sensory exploration of Christmas. Two friendly characters, Joy and Frosty, share their favourite elements of Christmas ('Chrimble'). They encourage audience members to explore each element using touch, sight, hearing and smell, incorporating musical instruments, light stimuli, texture, and sound. The show has a flexible individual-led framework: sections can be extended, repeated or shortened as guided by the audience's responses.

DIGITAL SHOW

Phoebe's Green Christmas is a magazine-style show where audiences join Phoebe the puppet as she tries to give her friends the best (and kindest) Christmas ever, whilst considering the environment. Each episode features a song and sensory activities to be facilitated live 'at home'. The show is accompanied by a Resource e-pack guiding parents, teachers and carers on how to facilitate the sensory moments wherever they are, as well as suggested further learning, crafting and play exploration. Offered as both a 40-minute film and as eight short episodes (five to eight minutes long).

2025 TOUR

There were **63 performances** of the live show **Chrimblesense** with two teams of performers touring the Midlands and the South West of England. This was alongside 620 registrations to the digital show **Phoebe's Green Christmas**, bringing joy to a total of over **4,693 children** alongside their teachers, teaching assistants, carers, and families. Hospice staff, SEND teachers, parents and guardians of children with complex needs responded to a post-performance survey. Their feedback emphasised increased joy, calmness, engagement and confidence, with young people feeling included, understood and able to take part in meaningful festive experiences. Some of their responses are shared in this report, alongside a sprinkling of magic ingredients.

JOY AND LAUGHTER

100% of children and carers enjoyed the show¹

Embracing Arts' **Christmas for Kids** programme brings joy to children and their carers with significant positive health outcomes:

"I left feeling uplifted and encouraged."

"It was clear that the show had a positive impact on their wellbeing and mental health."

"He was very happy when watching it, smiling and laughing."

99% found that the show demonstrated an understanding of children with complex needs

Christmas for Kids shows cater for a wide range of individual needs:

"For me it showed how to deliver Christmas to our complex learners."

"My autistic son loved the music and characters which is rare, it seemed to captivate him."

"It was so lovely to see children who would usually show no interest in activities having such a brilliant time and enjoying themselves."

"Perfect for more complex students who would likely have difficulty accessing live theatre in the community."

ENGAGES children using multi-sensory storytelling, props, music, linked to craft activities

"Sensory aspect was really lovely and just what our children need."

"Story was simple enough for the children to follow and the music and props were set just right."

CREATES the opportunity for families to enjoy a Christmas performance together and make lasting memories

"It left us feeling very warm and happy inside."

"Watching families have a time to just be and immerse themselves in the moment was so special."

"Providing a performance for the children and families, meant they felt seen and heard and understood. It was mesmerizing and engaging for all."

PERFORMED by skilled, warm and responsive performers

"Calm and kind."

"Sensitive and talented."

"The actors were so good at reading the room and interacting with all of the pupils."

ENGAGEMENT

Children really engaged with the shows and the shows enabled them to engage with each other.



LIVE SHOW

"All class teachers talked about how engaged their students were."

"The engagement between the performers and the children was perfect - they seemed to understand them instantly."

"Performers worked hard to engage all the students and remember their names."

DIGITAL SHOW

"The children liked and engaged with the music."

"The characters were very engaging."

"Engaging good length episodes."

"The children came together and engaged with different classes from across the school."

ACCESSIBILITY

Finding inclusive creative arts opportunities for children with complex and individual needs is difficult. Schools, hospices and families are managing on tight budgets, prioritising essential needs, leaving little or nothing for enhancement activities. With the generosity of funders and supporters, Embracing Arts offers Christmas for Kids free-of-charge, and has done so since 2009.

"With tight budget the opportunities to access any show are very limited. In the area where I was teaching it is almost impossible to take the kids to watch a show. So, to be able to offer them this experience in their own setting was amazing!"

"[It is] hard to find companies that offer experiences for the children we work with."

Chrimblesense is performed where it is needed - in hospice playrooms, in school halls and classrooms, or in community halls. *Phoebe's Green Christmas* extends its reach to home settings. Ensuring spaces are comfortable, accessible and feel safe allows audiences to come together to enjoy a show providing a sense of normalcy for families under hospice care and inclusion for children in SEND school.



DIGITAL SHOW

"It is a gift! For parents living in poverty, or schools managing restricted budgets, it is a rich, high quality, creative arts offering. I do not know of another "free" resource of this calibre or depth."

INTERACTIVE INCLUSION

Embracing Arts has honed its casting process over the years, and has also built and nurtured a network of experienced, sensitive and talented actor-facilitators.

“The facilitators truly understood the students’ needs. There was no need for direction or rules - they used their skills of meeting the children where they were to intrinsically motivate and regulate them. The music was engaging and calming. I left feeling uplifted and encouraged. It was a beautiful model to all our staff of inclusive interaction.”

“[Children] were able to stand up, wander, make noises and explore and this was encouraged”



WATCH OUR
CRIMBLESENSE IMPACT VIDEO

LANGUAGE & LEARNING

The 2025 version of Chrimblesense focusses on core language and utilising lots of repetition. The structure of the show is broken up into clear themes. It is rehearsed so that actors have the freedom to remove dialogue, using only three words per section for learners who process language differently. Staff reported feeling inspired, uplifted and motivated to adopt similar approaches in their own practice.

“It has introduced more echolalia to pupils who are not analytical language learners, improving their language development along with the feeling of inclusivity in a safe, secure environment.”*

“One of our students is a gestalt language processor - the show captured his attention and we heard him imitate more language and spontaneously use more language than we have ever heard.”*

*See page 9 Glossary

DIGITAL SHOW RESOURCE PACK

Phoebe's Green Christmas was accompanied by downloadable PDF resource packs, which were available one month before the first episode aired. These were made in collaboration with specialist experts including Story Massage Programme, Orkid Ideas – TomTags, Twinkl, Twinkleboost, Willows Sensory Service, Inclusion Unlimited, Inclusive Teach and ACE Music Therapy. The packs include preparation notes for facilitators, cue sheets, speech and language tips, additional activities with things to do and make.

"I love the craft activities as a way to provide sensory play and exploration in preparation for the show."

"Episodes were helpful in my planning for Christmas."

"The show gives (pupils) a chance to access art in the broadest sense and to engage with it creatively and playfully. In this way, while it is designed for children with complex needs, it is also an amazing offer for children whose experiences of life can be limited in other ways."



BEHIND THE SCENES

Embracing Arts are experts in sensory theatre and SEND education. The Christmas for Kids programme has been evolving since 2009 with new live shows created every four years, and an increasing library of episodes of digital shows and accompanying resources. New learnings and feedback continuously improve and develop the show for more meaningful impact across its outcomes.

The casting process and preparation for the performers goes beyond the traditional, focussing on talent, experience, passion and resilience. Less experienced artists are paired with those with more experience, and all are carefully prepared for the audiences and environments that they will be performing in. For example, hospices are very welcoming and loving places but with a lot of medical activity going on around the children during a visit. Actors' own feelings of meeting potentially very sick children and experiencing the worry and grief of others are discussed in detail.

A Wellbeing Supervisor is available to all performers and staff during the tour, providing training and mentoring during rehearsals, as well as being present at an end of tour debrief where everyone can share their experiences, worries and successes.

LEARNINGS

Whilst more people preferred the digital show in episodes, some people preferred it as a full-length film so we will continue to offer both options.

Some people were unaware of the Resource e-packs and some people had trouble downloading them, so we will improve our communications to ensure they are clearly and technically accessible.



“Embracing Arts were so thorough with their dedication to us as artists but so importantly, as people. I can’t think of much more they could have done. I continually felt supported and thought of... even when miles away!”

- Performer



ABOUT EMBRACING ARTS

Embracing Arts is an award-winning charity² making inclusive arts accessible to all.

They enhance the lives of young people with complex and individual needs through interactive performance, play and the shared experience of creative arts.

In addition to the Christmas for Kids programmes, they offer:

- Themed Artsmark-accredited and bespoke workshops for young people with additional and complex educational needs
- An interactive Circus Show for young people with additional and complex educational needs
- CPD for teachers and support staff to develop skills in sensory engagement and creativity in the classroom
- Themed Parties

“Through participation in EA sessions, children are provided with a safe and truly inclusive space where they can express themselves creatively and build confidence in themselves as learners. Each child is recognised as an individual and through the practitioners’ skilled work is given the opportunity to express themselves in their own way.”

- Assistant Headteacher, St Nicholas SEND School, Canterbury

The senior team are: **Sue Appleby**, Founder & CEO, an actor, singer, musical director and singing teacher with over 25 years’ experience in the performing and coaching industries. **Claire Sundin**, Creative Director and founding member, an actor, singer, and freelance drama facilitator with over 25 years’ experience of teaching and working with children who have complex needs and learning disabilities. **Katie Hecht**, Finance Director, a trained actress with numerous stage and TV appearances, now working towards full accountancy accreditation whilst still occasionally enjoying acting work. They are supported by a Board of Trustees and a team of creatives who create the magic behind the scenes.

² Winners of Children’s Charity of the Year at the Kent Charity Awards 2023

THE STORY

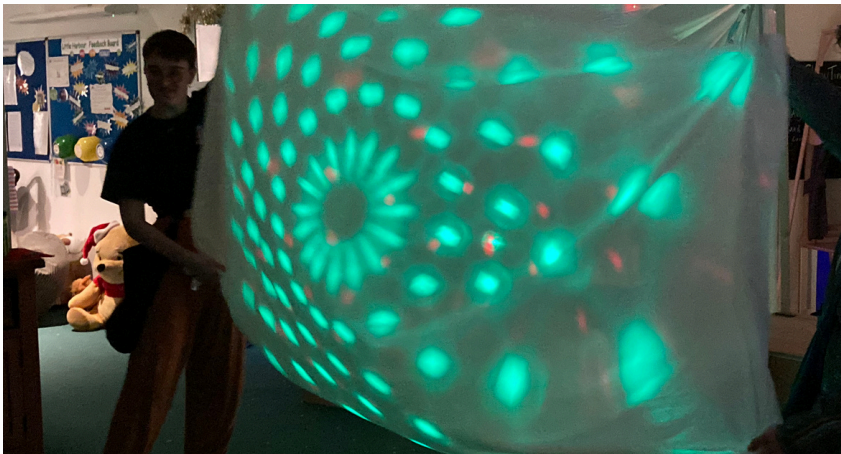
Embracing Arts was founded in 2009 by Sue Appleby & Claire Sundin who shared a mutual dissatisfaction with the barriers which prevent children with learning disabilities and those with complex educational & care needs from accessing high-quality arts provision. They joined forces, driven by a passion to make inclusive arts which were accessible for all.

In 2015, Christmas for Kids became a registered charity, and by 2019 was touring three teams of artists to 90 venues across England, Scotland and Wales.

They spent the Covid years expanding their services to incorporate year-round workshop and parties programmes, and also made their first Christmas for Kids digital show. This programme's capacity for wide outreach, versatility and accessibility made it a regular feature which is much loved by its beneficiaries.

Embracing Arts is a female-led organisation with eight part-time members of staff. They employ 20+ creatives and artists every year across five programmes and reach thousands of beneficiaries both on a local level in their home county of Kent and UK-wide.

In 2023, Embracing Arts was named **Children's Charity of the Year** at the Kent Charity Awards. They are active members of the sensory theatre community and seek to champion the Creative Health community across the South East.



GLOSSARY

ADHD	Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder
ASD	Autistic Spectrum Condition
CPD	Continuous Professional Development
Echololia	Repetition of words/phrases spoken by others as means of communication/language processing
EDI	Equality, Diversity & Inclusion
Gestalt	Working with phrases to process language, which is then broken down into words.
MLD	Moderate Learning Disabilities
PMLD	Profound Multiple Learning Disabilities
SEMH	Social Emotional Mental Health
SEND	Special Educational Needs and Disabilities
SLD	Severe Learning Disabilities

CREATIVE HEALTH QUALITY FRAMEWORK

Creative Health Quality Framework principles are at the heart of Embracing Arts work:

PERSON-CENTRED

Our shows are designed to be flexible and responsive to the children's reactions. This is possible through the experience and expertise our writers, designers and performers have in working with children with additional needs. We ensure that they are seen and heard and take away feedback from their carers and learning from our experience, to improve future shows.

EQUITABLE

We target underserved groups, children labelled with profound and multiple learning disabilities (PMLD), ADHD, ASC, SLD, MLD, SEMH, SEND (see Glossary) and Hospice service users. Embracing Arts has an EDI policy that informs all their work.

SAFE

Safety is at the forefront of our work. Our considerable experience of bringing shows into places not designed for performance enables us to work with venues and carers to risk assess physically. We establish close relationships with carers to ensure we understand how the show can be a safe space for audiences to relax and be joyful. We look after the mental wellbeing of all our staff and performers.

"The first call with Embracing Arts was not about business/shows/scheduling it was about our wellbeing and ensuring that we felt safe and secure"

- Performer

CREATIVE

We work with sensory theatre artists to develop new work that is adaptable and child-led through response. Well-respected practitioners engage with rehearsals and provide mentorship. We encourage creativity within our audiences both during live shows and in the additional resources provided with the digital show.

COLLABORATIVE

EA actively engages with national networks and undertakes training for continual improvement and sharing of best practice, in creative and SEND professional spaces. We work in partnership with the venues where we perform, ensuring our shows meet the needs of their audience. We have collaborated with a wide range of SEND industry leading professionals, to help us create ideas to support all viewing styles in the design of the digital show to ensure it benefits a wide range of children.

REALISTIC

17 years of experience ensures that we operate a realistic schedule that is tried and tested and achieves clear objectives without pushing everyone to their limit. Our mantra is "Keep it simple, do it well!"; we never overpromise or under-deliver.

REFLECTIVE

We conduct an annual review as part of our strategic planning cycle - reflection is not just for funders but for our own learning and development. Evaluation is planned and budgeted into each main project. Ongoing evaluation gathers feedback from artists, participants, teachers, parents and carers on their experience, namely, their views of what went well and areas for improvement. Feedback informs service planning and development.

SUSTAINABLE

Embracing Arts seriously consider the long-term legacy of our work on the people and planet through our Sustainability Policy. We take advice from a sustainability champion and a mentor (a global director of sustainability within the creative industry); use Julie's Bicycle to calculate our carbon footprint and follow the Theatre Green Book for sustainability targets. Wherever possible we use recycled and recyclable materials in our props, introduce environmental themes for our audiences and plan to use more sustainable transport in future

THE DATA

This is an excerpt from an evaluation report prepared by Cornish and Grey, available on request.

Table 1: Percent of respondents agreeing with statements about having fun

Outcome measure	% agree / agree strongly							
	Live show				Digital show			
	2022	2023	2024	2025	2022	2023	2024	2025
I enjoyed the show	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	97%	97%	97%
The child(ren) in my care enjoyed the show	99%	100%	99%	98%	100%	95%	92%	100%

Base: 94 for the live show in 2025 (80 in 2024, 50 in 2023, 20 in 2022) and 35 for the digital show in 2025 (37 in 2024, 38 in 2023, 35 in 2022)

The sense of fun experienced by the children was captured in some Vox pops recorded by the performers, and on some feedback cards.

“I found it very funny. I enjoyed the show!”

*Performer: “How did the show make us feel?”
Children (shouting): “Happy!”*

Table 2: Percent of respondents who viewed the show agreeing with statements about understanding of children with complex needs

Outcome measure	% agree / agree strongly							
	Live show				Digital show			
	2022	2023	2024	2025	2022	2023	2024	2025
This show demonstrated an understanding of children with complex needs	95%	98%	99%	99%	100%	87%	95%	97%
The child in my care found this show engaging	100%	100%	99%	98%	100%	95%	89%	94%

Base: 94 for the live show in 2025 (80 in 2024, 50 in 2023, 20 in 2022) and 35 for the digital show in 2024 (37 in 2024, 38 in 2023, 35 in 2022)

BENEFICIARIES

*Children with complex needs
Carers of children with complex needs
Creatives with visible and invisible disabilities*



KEY ACTIVITIES

*Live tour of Christmas for Kids Show
Christmas for Kids Digital Show*



OUTCOMES

*Children and carers have fun/enjoy themselves
Children experience creative arts interaction and exposure to culture
Children feel valued and understood
Carers feel less isolated and less stressed*



IMPACT

Improved wellbeing and enhancement of quality of life for children with complex needs and their carers

Contact us:

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 [xmasforkids](#)

 www.embracingarts.org.uk