

Stronger



A moving and uplifting performance about families and disability.

Waverley School, a Special School in Middlesex commissioned a week of performances of *Stronger* for parents and professionals. They carried out in-depth evaluations to capture reactions and responses, which were overwhelmingly positive. The quotes from audience members highlight the way that people appreciate and relate to *Stronger* on a variety of levels, and the positive outcomes.

"It seems like a long time ago now that we had the performances of Stronger at Waverley but everyone is still talking about it!"

Louise Robinson, Waverley School

Parents and family members

1. How did the play make you feel?

"It made me feel better about myself and that I can get help and support. I should share what I am going through."

"Made me feel like they had observed my family. Very real and could relate to the whole thing."

"Emotional, spot on, strong, resurrected old memories."

"Very much like my family story, like watching my experiences in action!"

2. Did the play show how you felt/feel having a child with a disability? In what respect?

"The play resonated at a variety of levels in terms of the emotion you feel, stresses in relationship, the support you receive from family and friends."

"Yes. The pressures you go through and the enormous effort it can take sometimes to converse with other people."

"I empathised with both couples as they reflected my earlier experiences and the more settled position after 29 years of caring and experience."

4. What did you think about the chance to speak with the actors?

"Great idea, they made it feel real."

"Yes, again a good insight and to see that yes, I am normal."

"It gave a chance to hear other people's views and how people relate to a situation to where they are at this time, i.e. those who hadn't got children made the adults relationship the priority, those with young babies could relate to the despair of the young couple."

5. Were the discussion groups useful? How?

"Yes – new ideas, suggestions which hopefully taken into consideration by professionals."

"Yes, because you hear others and their experiences and coping strategies it helps to talk with people that know how difficult this subject is with all its complexities."

"Meeting other people. Listening to opinions of others."

"Yes as I got the chance to express opinions as a professional and a sibling."

Professionals

1. How did the play make you feel?

"Emotional – it was so well acted I forgot they were acting. I wanted to know more and see how it would move on."

"Made me realise how much the families go through that we as professionals don't see."

"That families all have different experiences and the range of emotions is huge."

"Very moved and engrossed."

2. Did the play help you understand how parents deal with the pressures and demands of having a child with a disability? In what way?

"Made me think about how we need to be understanding of parents own strains, concerns and to try to answer any of their questions and give them as much information as possible."

"Yes – the element of fear in young couple was an interesting angle I had probably not considered."

"I think it touched on a lot of issues, relationships, support, understanding, pressures of society. I knew these pressures and demands before, but it is good to have time to reflect on them."

"It was a powerful reminder of the complex emotions and issues that surround families who have a disabled child and how they change over time."

"Yes, clearly demonstrated. Emotions – clear, easy to watch, visual manner."

"I think it normalised the difficulties. It made me think how ordinary and everyday these difficulties are, which is in no way to minimise how very great they are."

"Yes, you can see why parents may bombard you with issues, concerns or even have a go at you."

3. What did you think about the chance to speak with the actors?

"I enjoyed the actors' abilities to think about and discuss the issues in the play – not just as professionals being good actors, but as human beings who could relate to other people."

"Enabled some clarification and a deeper understanding of why they had reacted like they did."

"Good exercise – especially when they stayed in role."

"Good to see them in and out of character. Showed how well they portrayed the characters!"

"It was really interesting to see how they had engaged with the subject and put a lot of research and time with 'real' families."

4. Were the discussion groups useful? How?

"Very informative. Points raised from different angles, from professionals to carers and parents."

"This was helpful to analyse issues further and have 'a place' to put 'your stuff' that came up as a result of the play."

"An opportunity to hear different viewpoints in a non-threatening context. Professionals don't always find out what parents really feel or want in terms of support."

"Yes – able to share ideas in smaller groups. Really good to mix professionals and parents and have the forum to be frank with each other without being involved on a professional partnership basis."

"To help us all from different experiences and insights come together i.e. practice what we preach."

5. Will this experience influence the way you work? How and why?

"I have been brought into a greater realisation of the potential of theatre to build stronger families, communities and organisations (what a powerful INSET for SIS colleagues this would be)."

"Will be more understanding – think more carefully about answering questions."

"Reinforce how parents deserve the best support/help possible from professionals."

"It will make me aim to listen to parents more and to understand why the system is so frustrating for them. Sometimes the work load is so great as a professional that it is not possible to give time or be as flexible as parents require – but we can keep on trying."

"Yes, it has brought issues to the forefront of my mind. It has also convinced me (by hearing from parents) of the principles I sign up to when supporting parents."

"I always tried to be understanding with the parents and this just tells me I am doing the right thing."

"It will make me more mindful of the pressures parents are under when we try to offer suggestions and wonder why they don't seem to respond as we had hoped."

"Even that I support these children on a daily basis, I will be more supportive towards the families, in the future."

"Yes, maybe in the way you work with parents – more understanding that yes we may have difficulties here at work but they must have 100 more at home."

**For more information or to make a booking please contact:
The Friends Institute. 220 Moseley Road. Birmingham. B12 0DG
Tel: 0121 440 4203. Fax: 0121 446 4280 Email: info@womenandtheatre.co.uk**