

# Tots TV

## Fact Sheet



### PBS Series

**TOTS TV** is a combination of possibility, imagination and exploration. It captivates young children through the adventures and special friendships of Tilly, Tom and Tiny. The Tots live in a secret house in the woods with their friend Donkey and a mischievous creature (unseen by the Tots) called Furryboo. The Tots care for their house and garden and venture forth for preschooler-sized adventures from which they learn important lessons about how the world works. A mixture of puppetry, live action and animation, the show is filmed inside the Tots' cottage and outdoors in real locations. The series has been developed as a natural extension of children's creative play. Through their day-to-day examples of cooperation, sharing and peaceful problem solving, the Tots help children develop important emotional and social skills. It is the only children's television program in the U.S. that features a main character (Tilly) who speaks only Spanish.

Targeted to children aged two to five and beyond, this charming half-hour series for children was launched on PBS in October 1996 with 40 half-hour episodes. In October 1998, it expanded its franchise with 25 new programs plus a one-hour special, "The Tots TV Big Treasure Adventure." TOTS TV was created by Ragdoll Productions (UK) Ltd. in association with Carlton International Media Ltd., and produced in partnership with The itsy bitsy Entertainment Company.

To celebrate October 13 as the premiere week for TOTS TV, the producers arranged for a simulcast between the Web site and the broadcast of the television show in which there was a 24 hour window when the first 30-minute episode was offered online.

### National Outreach Campaign

Launched in 1996, TOTS TV offered the largest and most comprehensive bilingual preschool Web site on PBS. The central outreach campaign asset, **Tots TV Theater**, was developed by Outreach Extensions and The itsy bitsy Entertainment Company in association with PBS Internet Publishing Group. **Tots TV Theater** offered exciting play activities and learning tools to English and Spanish speaking parents so they could help their children learn. The campaign's goal was to help stations develop creative projects to build awareness of the series and expand families' utilization of this innovative online site. Funding for the outreach campaign was provided by The itsy bitsy Entertainment Company and Anchor Bay Entertainment, Inc., distributors of children's entertainment products including TOTS TV. Outreach Extensions designed and implemented the campaign.

### Outreach Resources

**Tots TV Theater** -- The outreach campaign, with its creative puppetry and play, brought Tilly, Tom and Tiny to life for children through the bilingual (English/Spanish) **Tots TV Theater**, which was featured on the TOTS TV Web site. Presenting the ever-curious Tots, eighty puppet scripts, two for each episode of TOTS TV, set the scene for parents and children to role play and have fun. Age-appropriate for 2-5 year-olds, the plays brought children closer to the world of the Tots and supported parents as their children's first teacher. The entertaining scripts also led to hands-on activities that engaged children in science, music, art, games and practical life activities such as gardening. Play situations, questions for parents to ask their children, and the experience of puppetry all incorporated principles of early childhood education. Designed for families to use in the comfort of their homes, the plays could also be used in other child-friendly environments such as preschool classrooms, impromptu community theaters or the children's area in local libraries.

**TOTS TV Parents Manual** provided an orientation for parents on how to access and use the online **Tots TV Theater** and how it is beneficial and educational for young children. All content, in English and Spanish, was developed by Outreach Extensions.

- “Browsing Tots TV Theater: A Manual for Parents” was a welcome letter and invitation to visit the Web site, highlighting the site’s advanced technology and creative plays.
- A set of black and white slicks was provided so stations could reproduce them for use in parent information and training sessions. Slicks included profiles and puppet patterns for Tilly, Tom and Tiny; a sample puppet script; a directory of the episodes; and *Behind the Scenes* information on the production and outreach.
- Plays: Show Time presented the actual puppet play featuring two or three of the Tots; ACTivities accompanied the plays and television episodes; and Read On suggested books on similar topics or themes.
- Beginning with the Home Page, each screen on the **Tots TV Theater** site was presented along with an explanation of the content available.
- Suggestions on how to watch TOTS TV and Family Play Tips on how to use the play scripts were also provided as reproducible slicks.

**The Bolsa Magica** (Magic Bag), created by Outreach Extensions, functioned as a station outreach toolkit to prepare stations to conduct local campaigns in support of the television series and Web site. An important objective was to support stations’ interest in conducting parent, teacher and child care provider trainings – especially as part of Ready To Learn or diversity training.

- Sections described the series and characters as well as the outreach campaign, and provided resources and strategies for community implementation.
- Sample plays and activities were provided as well as suggestions on how to integrate TOTS TV into Ready To Learn workshops.
- Projects designed by three stations – KPBS/San Diego, CA; WLRN/Miami, FL; and WIPB/Muncie, IN – were presented as ideas for replication to inspire station campaigns.
- A minigrant application and guidelines for stations completed the toolkit.

**Station Minigrants** – Managed by Outreach Extensions, two sets of minigrants were offered to public television stations to support their implementation of the TOTS TV educational outreach campaign. Fifteen were offered in Season One, and ten in Season Two. Minigrants were awarded on a competitive basis; stations were required to broadcast the series.

**National Partner: American Library Association** – On the national level, the Association for Library Service to Children (ALSC), a division of the American Library Association (ALA), helped to make children’s librarians aware of **TOTS TV** and the opportunities it presented. The campaign encouraged stations to partner with the ALA in their local markets. *Kids Connect @ the Library* was the theme for National Library Week, April 13-19, 1997. The campaign created tie-ins to the week’s activities, especially to *Log-on @ the Library Day*, on Wednesday, April 16. ALA’s goal was to have every library online by the year 2000. The campaign highlighted how parents without home computers could have access to **Tots TV Theater** at their local libraries. The U.S. premiere – a screening, food, and festivities – of TOTS TV was held at the New York Public Library.



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