

Case Studies

Early Years

Vol.25 2020



What is GEM?

GEM champions excellence in museum and heritage learning to improve the education, health and wellbeing of the general public.

GEM believes that involvement with arts and culture is an enriching and transformational experience that provides distinctive opportunities for learning. We aim to make that learning accessible, relevant and enjoyable for all.

GEM works with its members and collaboratively with other learning organisations across the UK and internationally to:

- champion excellence in museum and heritage learning and participation enabling people to be inspired by, value and enjoy their and other's heritage;
- advocate the power of museum and heritage learning in transforming people's lives to sector organisations, national agencies, funders and government;
- influence sector organisations to deliver excellent learning and participation for their visitors;
- promote and explain the benefits of learning through museums and heritage which is inclusive, sustainable and respectful of communities;
- develop creative partnerships with other organisations to share effective practice in museum and heritage learning and participation;
- research and pioneer innovation in museum and heritage learning and engagement;
- inspire and support the work of museum and heritage learning practitioners;
- provide opportunities for practitioners to develop their practice through networking, mentoring and learning together

Editorial

By Devon Turner,
Case Studies Editor
Communications Manager, GEM

Welcome to our Early Years themed edition of *Case Studies*. There are a range of wonderful activities and projects detailed within these pages that are sure to inspire. Museums and heritage sites are perfectly poised to offer educational engagement for young children and a friendly and safe environment for parents and carers.

In this edition, contributors move away from projects that have a singular focus and expand their practice to include engagement on multiple levels; for children and adults. Some case studies detail the process of shaping programmes to a particular audience, whilst others explain the process of creating a programme that can help fill in gaps with other arts and culture programming.

From galleries to historic palaces, we're excited to present case studies that are applicable and helpful to a variety of organisations. Exploring the outdoors, health and wellbeing as well as engaging with heritage are all themes that are explored in this *Case Studies* edition.

In the first part of this publication, practitioners share their experience of starting a new programme to suit a tailored audience, new organisational initiatives and needs within the local community. Lynsey Anderson of Andrew Carnegie Birthplace Museum records her experience of introducing an early years programme with all of the successes and challenges that ensue. Heather Whitt, formerly of Orleans House Gallery presents lovely mindfulness sessions bringing together parents and children in calming activities. Katherine Mail takes us on a tour of what it's like to engage

under 5s within a historical setting at Historic Royal Palaces. Debbie Goldsmith of Tate Liverpool shares how a special residency set the stage for their early years offer. Victoria Smith of Museum of London Docklands recounts her efforts to bring a new audience into the museum by creating programmes through co-production. Finally, Emma Spencer takes us through what's it's like to build a programme from start to finish at Yorkshire Sculpture Park.

The second part of this publication includes case studies from contributors who were seeking to improve existing early years offers. Alex Bogard of Pallant House Gallery details how to breathe new life into static programming. Nicola Wallis of Fitzwilliam Museum updates the sector on their "Creative Families: Talking Together" programme and its challenges and successes. Amy Baird, Dr Bruce Davenport and Dr Kate Holden of Great North Museum: Hancock share how to update programming and displays to reengage young people and their families. Also of Great North Museum: Hancock, Kathryn Wharton details how to support families who are living in poverty, especially through museums and heritage sites. Lawrence Bradby takes us on a tour of his innovative programming for very young audiences at Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts, University of East Anglia, Norwich. Finally, Chrissie Weltike and Christina Parker of the Holburne Museum speak about innovating programming.

GEM is extremely encouraged about the bright future of museum and heritage learning and especially impressed by dedicated educators featured in this *Case Studies* edition. Once the *Case Studies* have become public on the GEM website, please share with your network. Let's work together as a strong and supportive membership organisation to upskill one another and remind ourselves of the merits of working in the field.

Thanks for reading.

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**Chrissie Weltike and
Christina Parker**

The Holburne Museum

Our first tentative steps toward Early Years provision

Background

The Andrew Carnegie Birthplace Museum is an independent, local museum which tells the story of Dunfermline's most famous son, Scottish industrialist and philanthropist, Andrew Carnegie. The museum's learning programme and learning officer post are fairly new and have traditionally focused on schools and family events for school-age children.

Project

In 2019, one of our goals was to encourage more families with Under 5s to visit the Museum. So, just like a toddler, we took our first tentative steps in this direction by setting up a new early years programme 'Bobbin Babies and Bobbin Bigs'. This involved developing and delivering monthly sessions for Under 5s, exploring collections-based themes through songs, storytelling, crafts and play.

Challenge

There were definitely a few challenges during this project. However, the biggest challenge was introducing an entirely new, regular (and sustainable) programme *in-house*. This was a departure from how things had been done previously when the museum's focus had been big, biannual, family events, usually using freelancers. Taking this step as a new-in-post, part-time Learning Officer with numerous other responsibilities (schools, families, accessibility) was risky and required strict management of time and budget (which hadn't increased).

It wasn't always easy, especially as other unexpected items of work crept up, but we did succeed, and I learned lots of lessons (and time/money-saving shortcuts) along the way.

As the project got underway, we also faced other challenges:

- Finding themes linked to our collections and stories that would be fun and engaging for an under 5s audience
- Sourcing suitable resources that weren't too expensive but were robust enough to survive 30 toddlers and which we could re-use in other sessions.
- If the session is free, people will book and not show up – this has been hard as we often have a waiting list and people end up missing out.
- Some parents/carers will see your sessions as a free babysitting service – we had to learn to be quite assertive to encourage adult involvement and family interaction.

Approach

To begin this project, we decided to research what other local organisations (museums, libraries etc.) were offering for under 5s. We found out that 'Bookbug' sessions were very popular locally so decided to adopt a similar approach but focus on museum themes rather than books. In terms of timing, our sessions are held on a day of the week when our local library doesn't offer Bookbug and decided,

due to our capacity, that once a month would be best.

I had already worked in an organisation with a very successful early years programme which provided fantastic inspiration and gave me confidence to develop and deliver these new sessions myself. I chose ten themes related to the story of Andrew Carnegie which we thought would be fun and engaging, including bunnies (did you know Carnegie had pet bunnies?), dinosaurs (he funded the excavation for Dippy the Diplodocus) and a walk in the park (he gifted the local park to the town). We even did one called 'Wee Weavers', themed after Andrew's father's profession in Dunfermline.



Each session is pre-booked and has 20 minutes of songs, rhymes and stories relating to the theme, including the use of props, everything from leaves to keys and musical instruments. I have become very adept at changing the words of nursery rhymes and stories to fit our themes, so we go on dinosaur hunts instead of 'Going on a Bear Hunt' and we also love the Dino Hokey-Cokey. To finish, we offer our Bobbin Babies (0–2yrs) a chance for free play with our sensory resources and storybooks and for Bobbin Bigs (3–5yrs) we offer a themed craft.

We are pleased to say that we have succeeded in building up a new Early Years audience who now attend our sessions regularly. Our sessions have been attended by over 200 under 5s and the equivalent number of parents/carers (the majority of whom were first-time visitors and have returned to other sessions).

The project has also allowed us to trial a new programme for formal early years audiences using some of the same content and resources.

Outputs

- Developed and delivered 10 sessions for 0–5 audiences with most being oversubscribed.
- One relaxed autism-friendly early-years opening using the content of one of these sessions and using the resources.
- Developed links with local nurseries (through a nursery teacher bringing their child along to a session) and have now trialled a new formal nursery workshop.

Lessons learned

I have already mentioned a number of the lessons learned through this project. Some of them have been very strange, fun and unexpected – the ability to crochet carrots and adapt nursery rhymes, but others have been incredibly useful for our practice as a whole:

- That it is possible to create new programmes on very limited resources with a bit of creativity, craft materials and YouTube tutorials (my colleague even learned how to



“...the biggest challenge introducing an entirely new, regular (and sustainable) programme in-house.

crochet carrots) and swap/exchange sites. Also, look at the resources you already have, there will be lots of possible uses you maybe haven't thought of!

- How important it is to trial, evaluate and adapt sessions when introducing a brand-new scheme. We are currently reviewing all our sessions and updating them to deliver again in 2020.
- That to make this programme work for us, we had to make it bookable with low numbers due to space and resources but that meant we had to expect no-shows.
- While it is possible to run early years' sessions yourself, I recommend having an extra pair of hands if possible, you often need eyes everywhere!

Going forward, we are continuing with our Bobbin sessions from when we reopen in Spring and are also extending some of the sessions (dinosaurs, space and transport) to form part of a new formal early years offering.

Find out more

If you would like any more information, please get in touch:

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Baby Mindful at Orleans House Gallery



Background

Orleans House Gallery is a free public art gallery in the London Borough of Richmond upon Thames. As well as the Grade I listed Octagon Room, two galleries offer a varied programme of historic and contemporary art exhibitions. The gallery's learning and engagement team facilitate a wide range of accessible arts provision including a variety of activities for family audiences.

Project

Teaming up with an experienced mindfulness practitioner, we started by trialling free monthly mindfulness sessions from 10.15–11.15 on Monday mornings, taking place in our education space. The sessions were

funded by Achieving for Children through their Community Learning scheme. The sessions were specially tailored to new and expecting parents with the premise being that the sessions were predominantly for the benefit of the parents, although the babies also enjoyed the calming environment. Sessions were fully booked, with 15 adults at each one and each session ended with an opportunity to socialise over tea and biscuits.

Challenge

Having considered statistics on post-natal depression in the borough of Richmond we knew that there was a demand for activities to support positive mental health for new parents

as they went through the transition of pregnancy and caring for a new-born. We knew that this wasn't something currently on offer in the borough and that we were well placed to provide this because of our setting, contacts, and experience. We were already running a long-standing, and popular, art, music and storytelling provision for under 5s, taking place weekly. However, those sessions were child-centred and consequently more suited to over-ones so we wanted to offer a session which would support local parents with new babies.

Knowing that mindfulness was increasingly being practiced as a means of supporting mental health, we approached local mindfulness practitioners to see if they had any experience or interest in collaborating on something like this in a gallery setting. Being aware of the importance of social support networks for new parents we knew it was important that participants also had an opportunity to build friendships and share similar experiences, so we felt it was important to ensure sessions offered an opportunity for socialising.

Approach

Following the success of the free, monthly, mindfulness sessions funded by Achieving for Children, we collected evaluation data from participants on whether they would like the programme to continue and their preference of timings, content, price and whether they would like one-off sessions or a longer

“ Having considered statistics on post-natal depression in the borough of Richmond we knew that there was a demand for activities to support positive mental health for new parents as they went through the transition of pregnancy and caring for a new-born.

mindfulness course. As a result of our findings, we collaborated with the same mindfulness practitioner to put together a course of eight paid for sessions running on Monday mornings on consecutive weeks instead of months. Sessions could be booked individually at £10 per session, or as a block of four at a discounted rate of £30. Free places were available to those who expressed a need for them via email. The course was suited to all levels of experience but built on the participants' learning week to week. Some participants attended a mix of individual sessions, but most booked onto a block.

This time, sessions took place in our baroque Octagon Room and we were very keen that the sessions drew upon the gallery's heritage, setting, and art collection to inspire mindful practices. One session took inspiration from the Octagon Room's ornate ceiling using photographs of it as a mandala for mindful colouring. In another we practiced mindful eating inspired by Queen Caroline's banquet in the room in the 18th century. Other sessions engaged with the gallery's portraiture, looking at the relationship between parent and child, and explored mindful movement in the gallery grounds.

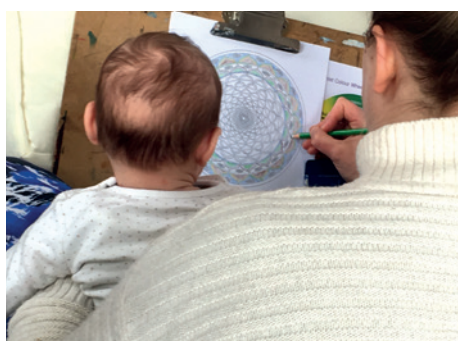
We wanted to utilise our gallery space for engagement sessions on Mondays when it is closed to the public, and, since our HLF-funded refurbishment we have also been able to make use of our beautiful baroque Octagon Room for non-messy sessions. We felt that the mindfulness practices really leant themselves to encouraging

our audiences to engage with the intricacies of its beautiful interior decor.

It has been positive to be able to utilise the Octagon Room and the main gallery on Mondays when it is closed to the public. We have effectively engaged with a new audience and we have also noticed an increase in audience awareness of the other activities we offer as a result of engaging with these new families. For instance, parents who attended Baby Mindful have since come to our weekly art, music and storytelling provision for under 5s, our holiday activities and booked children's parties with us. Sessions were popular, and feedback was positive. Participants told us that they enjoyed the 'space to relax', 'time for themselves' and the 'useful takeaway exercises' they could practice at home which made them 'better equipped to deal with everyday family stresses'. They noticed a calming effect not only on themselves but also their babies. A really nice tangible outcome was that participants made friends during the sessions and arranged to meet up afterwards.

Lessons learned

- Classes were never going to be comparable to a typical adult mindfulness course because the room was unlikely to ever be completely silent! It was important to reassure participants of this from the start to ensure that everyone felt comfortable.
- That being said, sessions did work best with the space as quiet as possible, so adults often liked to take babies out for a few minutes if they were grumbling for an extended period. This meant that a side room or quiet space nearby was ideal.



- This quiet space was also ideal to offer breastfeeding privacy should anyone like some.
- Inexpensive, silver-foil camping mats, or similar, were ideal to have in the centre of the room for babies to lay on when they were not being held since they were soft, and stimulating.
- In order to make the sessions accessible to male carers it was helpful to provide equipment for warming milk, as well as baby changing facilities which were accessible to males.
- These sessions worked best with babies who are pre-crawling. They become an entirely different type of session once babies can crawl, because the babies require more stimulation and the space and any obstacles needs to be considered.
- Consequently, we trailed follow-up mindfulness refresher classes for parents whose babies had outgrown the programme but who were still keen to top up their mindfulness practice. These sessions were shorter, took place outside in the summer, and centred around mindful eating which was a great way of engaging older children in the mindfulness practices.

Find out more

Details of any future Baby Mindful programmes at Orleans House Gallery can be found here: www.orleanshousegallery.org/learning/children-families/families

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How we turn “a lovely day out” into a valuable learning experience?

Background

Hampton Court Palace is one of six unoccupied royal residences managed by the charity Historic Royal Palaces. We offer self-guided activities, facilitated sessions and online resources to support learning visits. In 2018/19 Hampton Court welcomed 60,000 students.

Project

2018/19, Historic Royal Palaces introduced a formal learning offer for under 5s. We had previously run a popular family programme for under 5s, however, our reach was limited as the same families tended to book each session. In line with our charitable purpose, we wanted to offer something for this age group that would reach a broader demographic of children, teachers and families. During the past

year 200 pre-school children have taken part in KS1 sessions due to our lack of pre-school provision.

In Autumn 2018, we held a focus group with local early years practitioners to find out what they felt the Palace could offer. Using this feedback, we worked with a specialist practitioner and an experienced education presenter to develop an offer which was piloted in Summer 2019.

Project aims:

- To develop a high-quality schools programme for Under 5s with clear impact on learning
- To build relationships with early years settings in the local area
- To encourage teachers and families to visit the Palace with younger children

Intended outputs:

- Pre and Post visit twilight training sessions for teachers
- Site visits including an interactive storytelling session
- Resources to support follow-up work in the classroom
- Celebration event for families

Challenge

“They had a sense of excitement but not the detail.” – Reception Teacher

The learning team had excellent feedback during the visits and, although we knew that some tweaks were needed, it was felt that the pilot had gone well. But when we followed up with teachers a month later, a different picture emerged. The children had indeed had a lovely day out, however, they couldn’t remember that much about it. Teachers found that they were working very hard to draw out recollections and connections. The children seemed to default to pre-existing associations such as knights and castles with no distinctive memories of Hampton Court or the storytelling session. Somehow, despite offering everyone an enjoyable overall experience, the offer had missed its mark.

Key issues:

- The session needed to be shortened and simplified. Teachers felt both the content and expectations of the children were too demanding.



- The session route was outdoors to fit the theme, however, this meant that children missed seeing the more striking internal features.
- We have a large, complicated site. Teachers were anxious about how to navigate this and engage children outside of their session time.

Approach

The project is free for schools but does require an investment of time to attend training, manage the visit and plan follow up work. We contacted local schools with nursery provision by phone and email, recruiting 8 schools (22 classes, just under 600 pupils). They attended a twilight CPD in March which we took them on the planned route, highlighting risk assessment points, and shared the session content and classroom resources. Classes then visited during the fortnight following Easter holidays. A member of our learning team assisted each session and an external evaluator observed a selection of sessions and followed up with teachers through phone conversations and WhatsApp exchanges where they shared classroom outcomes. We then held an 'exhibition' of children's work in our learning centre and invited families to attend 2 afterschool events to see this.

Project outcomes were that we successfully encouraged teachers and families to visit the Palace with younger children. We also developed a school's programme for under 5s which was engaging but did not translate into high quality learning outcomes. However, we did build strong relationships with early years settings in the local area (5 of the 8 schools are returning with new classes next year). However, we damaged relationships with a couple of schools who felt we hadn't delivered on what we promised.

Lessons learned

Allow more time. Moving from initial idea to completed programme in one academic year gave us little room to build relationships and negotiate obstacles. A longer lead-in would have allowed us to test the session and adjust before full roll-out. More time would have helped us to negotiate team rehearsals around

“Project outcomes were that we successfully encouraged teachers and families to visit the Palace with younger children.”



our presenters' other commitments. This increased familiarity would have allowed them to adapt better to each group and include more child-led interaction.

Plan the visit as a whole. For many children this was their first ever class trip. Our site is large, busy and complicated. Simple errors such as underestimating how much time they might need for lunch, and how far they would have to travel in total throughout the day, had a negative impact on the teacher's experiences and children's recall.

In preparation for Summer 2020, we have been revising our whole approach. We have altered the session route to maximise sensory and visual impact. We have simplified the session; halving the content to allow greater flexibility for children to influence the story. We will test

the new session in February allowing time for updates before the bulk of our classes visit after Easter. We will provide a full itinerary for the day to help school staff navigate the site with suggested routes and activities and longer lunch-room slots.

We are collaborating with the Centre for Literacy in Primary education (CLPE) to ensure that pre and post visit resources are rich in literacy and oracy links to maximise children's learning.

Find out more

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East Prescott Road School Residency

Background

Tate Liverpool hosts the national collection of modern and contemporary art. Tate's learning programme takes an active approach to creative learning working directly with its audiences from across the region to enable co-creation and participation in programming with the gallery.

Tate Liverpool is embedding school residencies within the children and young people's programmes in order to develop a shared learning experience between school and gallery. Schools take the lead on their own learning using Tate's collection as a starting point for creative exploration.

Project

Tate Liverpool worked in partnership with East Prescott Rd Nursery School, exploring how to take measured risks within early years practice through the lens of creative learning. The focus was on child-led discovery, development and the well-being of children and practitioners. Using the gallery as a framework, teachers were encouraged to step out of their comfort zone, enabling them to see how children learn within a different context.

Approach

The residency took place at Tate, which provided the framework for creative learning using both its spaces and collection. Children and staff worked alongside artist Denise

Wright, filmmaker, Jake Ryan, Debbie Goldsmith and Deborah Riding from the Children and Young Peoples' team.

Headteacher Colette Bentley was able to frame the project around her involvement as a fellow with the Specialist Leaders in Cultural Education (SLICE®). Colette worked alongside staff to deliver the project, making visible her support, investment in staff's personal development and wellbeing. Adults and children experienced active learning together through an exchange of ideas and led by the children's interests. Teachers used the gallery as a creative tool for learning, with the children taking the lead on conversations around artworks. There was no hierarchy amongst the artist, filmmaker or staff, expertise was recognised and teachers felt included and valued. It was invaluable to have an external evaluator, which was Rachael Holmes who evaluated and disseminated the project for SLICE®. Jake Ryan documented the residency from multiple viewpoints from children and practitioners.

Challenges

- How to ensure the gallery is welcoming and approachable for an early years audience.
- Anticipating how children might explore the spaces and orientate themselves around the gallery.
- How to provide a creative, safe and fun experience whilst respecting the other visitors and the collection.

- How to address being out of your comfort zone, not feeling equipped with the subject knowledge associated with the artists and artwork in the collection
- How to use the gallery as a tool.
- Dispelling the notion of 'the expert', encouraging teachers and children to take the lead.
- Managing risk taking in the gallery.
- Developing a sustainable model for nursery staff to use the gallery independently.

“The focus was on child-led discovery, development and the well-being of children and practitioners.”



Outcomes

- A dissemination of the project amongst peers through a presentation of Colette's personal reflections on the project to schools and cultural institutions taking part in the SLICE programme.
- Observations by gallery staff on how young children orientate themselves around the gallery and experience the collection.
- An immersive experience of children's learning in the gallery- 'learning at the same time' was empowering to both the children and staff.
- Positive responses to being out of a comfort zone, providing a new context for staff to develop and reflect on their own practice.
- Staff confidently used the gallery as a resource.
- Reinforcing that it wasn't necessary to have subject knowledge to connect the artwork to your practice.
- The approach allowed child-centred learning and measured risk taking; allowing the children to take a lead.
- Staff were bolstered by the support of their Head; everyone having the same experience together and reported feeling more confident in using the gallery.

- The school is planning to advocate for other Liverpool schools to explore and experience this model themselves.
- The residency is an important strand of a much wider body of research at Tate with Dr Deborah Riding and partnership work with Edge Hill University. The partnership between Tate and East Prescot Rd Nursery School will continue.

Lessons learned

- Gallery staff gained a valuable insight into how children experience the collection, their interests and what they actively seek out.
- The project highlighted key areas for improvement at the gallery; a visual record of how children orientate themselves around the gallery spaces will be shared.
- An encounter in the gallery with one of the children informed the development of a new handling object for the early years resource at Tate.
- A new model for developing early years partnerships will be piloted at Tate.
- Working directly with the nursery has increased visits to family focused events at Tate.
- The residency has embedded new ways of working in teacher's

practice; the studio space at school is being used independently for creative, open ended learning activities.

- There is more of a significant impact in developing teaching and learning practice using the gallery when it is underpinned by wider research.
- The project highlighted the differences between a one-off visit and an immersive week at the gallery; this is part of the wider research around school residencies.

Find out more

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Treasures of the Museum

Background and project

Treasures of the Museum ran for five weeks in November & December 2018. The project was created in partnership with a local Children's Centre and a visual artist. There were two sessions each at the centre and museum, and families chose to be at the museum for the final session. Activities were focused on exploration and discovery and usually involved messy play. Seven families took part in the project.



The project was aimed at families with children aged 2-3 years who were accessing activities and services at Chrisp Street Children's Centre, and particularly to those who had never visited the Museum of London Docklands, or any other museum, before.

In line with Arts Council England's Quality Principles, we aimed to further develop families' sense of ownership and belonging within their local community, the museum, and the project itself. We also hoped families would connect with the story of their local area in Docklands.

We wanted families to focus on their experiences during the sessions rather than on a particular output, however each session provided an opportunity for families to take home something they had discovered or created in order to continue their learning at home.

Challenge

The museum's current early years programme is often attended by regular families. We wanted to reach out to families who weren't coming to the museum to show them

what we offer for them and their young child(ren), and give them an experience which would hopefully enable, and inspire them to make an independent visit.

Approach

We took a flexible approach when it came to planning the project. After initial meetings with the Children's Centre to identify potential families who could participate and their needs and interests, we worked with an artist to plan just the first session. We kept sessions open-ended and exploratory in order to maintain a welcoming and safe environment for families to get to know us and their fellow participants. Our approach continued to respond to the individual needs and interests of families, and we planned each session reactively based on our observations of families and feedback from the Children's Centre staff. For instance, children spoke about transport and so in the next session we provided them with toy cars to experiment with.

There were a few challenges within our approach. We were working with a brand-new partner organisation, so it took time to develop this new relationship and a shared vision. Assessing the learning outcomes of this project was challenging. We found observation was the most effective technique, but this was sometimes difficult for the museum staff to undertake as they often became co-

“We wanted to reach out to families who weren't coming to the museum to show them what we offer for them and their young child(ren), and give them an experience which would hopefully enable, and inspire, them to make an independent visit.”



“An unintended outcome was that many of the family adults told us that on completion of the project they felt more comfortable to do messy play activities at home than they had done before...”

facilitator alongside the artist, instead of an observer. In order to overcome this, we brought in an external evaluator to conduct post-project interviews with families five months after the project was completed.

Maintaining a regular group of families was difficult at the start of the project as there was an inevitable drop off of families over the weeks, partly due to the project taking place in December and therefore some families had to miss the final sessions. This meant that our target numbers for the project were not reached.

Many families who had never visited the museum before changed their attitudes towards museums.

“I knew they had kids’ stuff, but I didn’t realise how much... I didn’t realise how child friendly it was... you can touch lots of things, it’s not all glass cases and you can be a bit noisy. It’s not all quiet. The atmosphere is just a bit different; it’s not walking around in silence. It massively changed my idea of the museum and what it would be like.” – Family project participant, May 2019

Five months after the project was completed, six of the families had made independent visits back to the museum. An unintended outcome was that many of the family adults told us that on completion of the project they felt more comfortable to do messy play activities at home than they had done before, and that some of the children were more

comfortable to engage with it too:

“I think it [the messy play] really changed him. He used to feel really funny about getting dirty but now he’s bit more open to it. We try and do more of that kind of messy thing now.” – Family project participant, May 2019

Children enjoyed having something to take home with them after the sessions. The first session involved children discovering a special stone, which some of them brought back to the second session as well.

We took photographs throughout the project and the adults really enjoyed being able to look back at them. At the end of the project we created a photo album which was left at the Children’s Centre.

Lessons learned

- Investment of the Children’s Centre staff from the start, as well as their presence at every session, was key for families to feel comfortable and safe.
- Responding to families’ interests is important in order to make them feel represented and valued.
- Keep the relationship going and maintain an open dialogue with your partner organisations. The Children’s Centre were keen to continue to work with us and we will be working together again in early 2020 to deliver a project with their Parent Empowerment Group.

- Feedback forms that families completed at the last session were helpful for data analysis but post-project interviews with more open-ended questioning gave us far more insight into the impact we had made and the outcomes we had/had not achieved. A lot of these things we would never have known had we not conducted follow up interviews five months after the project. Collecting feedback and acknowledging opinions from staff is also important in order to maintain a strong relationship.
- After completing the project, we reached out to other local Children’s Centres to offer similar project work. This networking opened up the opportunity for us to meet a diverse range of families who had not heard of or visited the museum, as well as organisations who were keen for partner work. In November and December 2019, we ran another five-week project with a different local Children’s Centre.

Find out more

Becci Kenning of Art in Transit:
www.art-in-transit.com

The Museum of London’s Early Years programme is funded by ACE.

Welcoming the artists of the future

Background

Established in 1977 and set in 500 acres of 18th century designed parkland, Yorkshire Sculpture Park is an internationally renowned centre for modern and contemporary art. YSP's driving purpose for 40 years has been to ignite, nurture and sustain interest in and debate around contemporary art and sculpture, especially with those for whom art participation is not habitual or familiar. It enables open access to art, situations and ideas, and continues to re-evaluate and expand the approach to considering art's role and relevance in society.

Project

Following a successful 3-year action-research programme, funded by The Paul Hamlyn Foundation, YSP appointed a full-time permanent Family Programmer which has enabled the YSP family offer to grown significantly in reach and impact. The aim of YSP family learning is to help families discover contemporary sculpture, making meaningful and relevant connections to their lives, creating family memories through creativity and inspiring the next creative generation. The family programme responds to the extraordinary world-class sculptures in the landscape and changing exhibition programme.

Approach

YSP family offer considers the whole family, adults and children, as active participants. All activity is shaped to generate positive intergenerational learning. During the research project, we developed a strong foundation with free gallery resources to pick up and play with, (family activity baskets, talking together cards and drawing together cards) which encouraged families to art think and art play together alongside the sculptures.

Playful family interpretation provided by these activities supported greater understanding of the work on display and significantly lengthened family dwell time in the galleries. Our under 5s outdoor offer, had been developed to maximise the unique context of sculpture in the outdoors, taking

place between Spring to Autumn in our dedicated outdoor learning space under a canopy of magnificent trees.

The next steps we identified for the programme were; to create an indoor immersive storytelling winter offer for under 5s, *Tales From the Gallery*, with the aim of encouraging our regular families to visit in the colder months; to develop *Sculpture Baby* – a sensory session for families with newborn babies, to nurture families in starting their creative YSP family journey.

Challenges

We were surprised to find that not as many families transitioned between the outdoor and indoor under 5s offer as we would have expected. Both the indoor and outdoor sessions share sculpture as the starting point, are active and child-led. We have found out that some adults were nervous about bringing energetic under 5s into the Gallery, a traditionally quieter place where there are more perceived rules to follow, whereas other adults were concerned about the vast scale the outdoor landscape at YSP offers or don't see themselves as an 'outdoor family'.

"I just thought it would be too quiet for my daughter to sit for stories, it was great that it was active, we booked on and will be back."

To encourage families to book, we cross-promote the indoor and outdoor offers during all under 5s events, we have found that conversation is as successful as flyers.



“We have found out that some adults were nervous about bringing energetic under 5s into the Gallery, a traditionally quieter place where there are more perceived rules to follow...

We have launched a dedicated family newsletter and are active engaging with families directly on social media platforms with #YSPFamily.

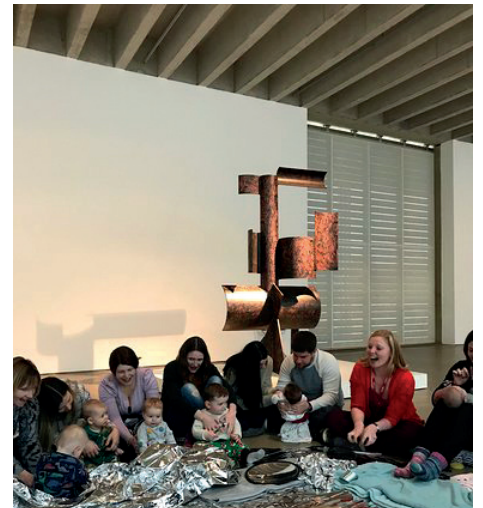
Lessons learned

- Importance of internal communication across all teams to understand offer and support family welcome.
- Provide regular opportunities through working groups for key staff from all teams to meet to develop a holistic approach.
- Sharing success and challenges, ally fears and concerns before they happen.
- Encourage staff to experience offer with their family.
- Support wider staff to observe, join in and ask questions.
- Identify key champions from different teams, front of house, curatorial, marketing, catering to understand programme.
- Programmer is present, open and approachable and the face of the offer internally and externally.
- All staff feel able to question and share.

Outside of the offer we have invested in developing a wider understanding at YSP of how to deliver a holistic welcome for families across the park. We have initiated an internal cross-departmental family working group to celebrate successes, identify

opportunities and share the unique challenges a large site like YSP can present families. We have streamlined internal communications, with briefings and feedback pre and post event which has allayed potential anxieties when working with fast-moving inquisitive children close to world class art. This has helped all teams feel invested in the family audience and has repositioned the family audience as not solely the responsibility of the learning team.

Staff have been encouraged to bring their own families to enjoy the activities. This has meant that they have seen the art through their own children's experience and therefore have a deeper understanding of the programme. Staff are encouraged to come and say 'Hello' during a family session, so that we can introduce them to families and help build relationships, making staff feel approachable to the public. We have noted that the increased confidence that wider staff now have has empowered them to promote the offer directly with visitors, which in turn has helped create a personalised approach to marketing to people on site. Our next steps are to identify a small group of family champions in the front of house team and create a family advisory forum, who will work closely with myself, the family programmer, in testing and trialling activity. We are now beginning to work closely with marketing to develop a vibrant brand identity for family offer across site at YSP.



As the family programmer I attend the events and help navigate the experience for participants, general audience and staff and model how to welcome general audiences when they encounter the family event. This was a new way of supporting families for YSP, by keeping everyone in a conversation about events, capturing and sharing feedback, thanking wider teams for their support we have brought all teams with us making the family offer part of everyone's role at YSP.

Find out more

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A new direction:

Early Years workshops at Pallant House Gallery

Background

Pallant House is a gallery of modern art which opened in Chichester, in the South East of England, in 1982. Changes to the team in 2018 provided an ideal opportunity to streamline various aspects of the public programme, including our offering for pre-school children. The early years programme consists of two 45-minute workshops, run at 10:15 and 11:30am, on the first Friday of each month.

Project

The early years programme at Pallant House Gallery was an expensive and time-consuming part of the public programme, with a static core

audience. Over the last 18 months we have worked to develop a more sustainable programme, which is cost effective and has a dynamic participant base.

Challenges

The challenge was in the programme not being sustainable due to the costs involved; including staff time to administer, co-ordinate and resource, and hiring freelancers to deliver the sessions. As it was free to attend, these costs were not offset. We were also keen to encourage more people with young children to discover the Gallery, but the static core audience left little room for new participants.

Approach

As a trained early years teacher it made sense for me to plan and deliver the workshops, rather than hiring in freelancers. We introduced a small charge (£5 per family), to cover some of the other costs. The small charge was also intended to discourage block booking, without being prohibitive or off-putting.

Instead of workshops following different structures each month, workshops now follow a regular format. Sessions always involve story-time, a visit to the Gallery spaces to 'get some ideas', and then a practical activity in the Studio to finish.

We envisaged these changes would save administrative time, money in freelance charges and allow us to make better use of our stocks of art materials. Having staff deliver the sessions would also engender familiarity for participants and provide more opportunity for us to interact with this part of our audience.



“Sessions always involve story-time, a visit to the Gallery spaces to 'get some ideas', and then a practical activity in the Studio to finish.



“As we have now become more confident about how we engage with pre-school children, we have also extended our School in Residence programme to include nurseries.

In making these changes, we feared that our freelancers would be disgruntled about no longer being used for these sessions, but as we were developing longer workshops elsewhere in the programme, we were able to offer them similar hours just differently configured.

The introduction of a small charge for the workshops discouraged block booking and enabled new participants to take part. However, it also created unintended friction with our core audience and has now been removed.

Following the return to free-to-attend sessions, we have reached capacity with workshop bookings. However, we have also seen incidence of people booking but not actually attending. The workshops now run in a more sustainable, cost-effective way. The new regular format is well received by participants, with comments such as; 'Thank you, very engaging and

fun for me and my 3 year old', 'We had a lovely time', 'The children really enjoyed it', 'More of the same please', 'Very good format and timings and really friendly staff', 'We had lots of creative fun', 'Lovely props and story', and 'We will definitely come back again'.

Lessons learned

- Charging for early years sessions was unpopular.
- Providing sessions for free has resulted in an increase of people booking, but not always attending.
- Bringing the delivery in-house has allowed us to get to know our early years audience better, and save administrative and freelancer costs.
- Changing the early years programme as outlined has encouraged an increase in young children and their families visiting the Gallery.

We are now utilising technology to try to ensure that all available places are expended. Automated emails remind people of their booking and ask them to let us know if they are no longer able to attend, so that we may offer the place to other participants.

As we have now become more confident about how we engage with pre-school children, we have also extended our School in Residence programme to include nurseries. Our School in Residence programme provides free opportunities for school groups to spend more time in the Gallery, by visiting weekly over a period of five to six weeks. This has been a welcome and unintended outcome of the changes made to the early years programme.

Find out more

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Creative Families:

Talking Together at the Fitzwilliam Museum



Background

The Fitzwilliam Museum holds the art and antiquities collection of the University of Cambridge. For this project, we worked in collaboration with North Cambridge Child and Family Centre and The Fields Children's Centre. The Centres serve some of the most deprived areas in Cambridge, where around 30% of children are living in poverty.

Project

Creative Families: Talking Together is a course for families with children under five. It promotes early communication and language development through playful exploration of museum objects & spaces and experimentation with art materials.

Challenges

Research has demonstrated that there is a significant attainment gap at five years old between the most advantaged and least advantaged children in our city. This is especially marked in the field of language and communication, and contributes to increasing social inequality through primary education and beyond...

We wanted to make the course as easy to access as possible. There are numerous barriers to bringing young children to a museum and we addressed these in the following ways:

- Building confidence: by working in partnership with Child & Family Centre staff we were able to build on existing relationships. Even though we ran the taster session in

the community, and Family Workers attended all the sessions, some families still did not feel confident to visit the museum.

- Financial support: entry to the museum, all workshops and materials were provided free of charge. In addition, we refunded families' travel costs as this can have a big impact on weekly budgets. We had to adapt our existing system of claiming expenses to enable on-the-day payment.

Approach

Cambridgeshire County Council believe that 'it takes a village to raise a child.' They support parents, the early childhood workforce, and community organisations to promote environments and activities where young children can make their voices heard. Creative Families: Talking Together is funded as part of this approach.

Research has demonstrated that there is a significant attainment gap at five years old between the most advantaged and least advantaged children in our city.



“ Each included time in the museum galleries with music making, storytelling, sensory play themed around the artworks followed by an opportunity to be creative with materials such as clay, paint, and water in our art studio.

Museum objects and spaces often take us by surprise, and inspire us to be curious. We hoped that this stimulating environment would provide irresistible opportunities for families to have exciting conversations, expressed in a range of ways both verbal and non-verbal.

Each course had four visits: a taster session at the Child & Family Centre followed by three trips to the museum. Each included time in the museum galleries with music making, storytelling, sensory play themed around the artworks followed by an opportunity to be creative with materials such as clay, paint, and water in our art studio. The families made souvenir journals containing drawings, photographs and memorable moments.

Families said that they felt welcome and relaxed at the museum. The

course supported them to try new things and gave them ideas to develop at home. Staff observed the children gaining confidence over the course and sharing their ideas enthusiastically.

In addition to the course sessions, and the Creative Families journals, we also gave gifts to families after each visit. Art materials such as pens, paints, sketchbooks and pencils and resources for creative play such as toy tea sets meant that families could continue the kind of experiences, we introduced in the museum back at home.

Lessons learned

- We built and nurtured strong relationships with colleagues in the Child & Family Centres.
- The course gave us time to get to know families; to listen to and engage with them in a sustained way.

- This raised awareness of the challenges facing some families in our community and what a local museum might do to help.
- It is vital to develop an environment that enables adults to feel confident and capable as their children's first educators.

Our next project is 'Creative Families: Talking & Eating Together': a response to a temporary exhibition at the Fitzwilliam: Feast & Fast – The Art of Food in Europe, 1500–1800.

In addition to the gallery and studio activities which are all themed around the production, preparation, serving, and eating of food, the course includes a free shared meal in the museum café. This allows families and staff to chat informally and is proving really popular with our participants.



Find out more

Nicola Wallis, Museum Educator, the Fitzwilliam Museum
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Read more here:

www.museums.cam.ac.uk/blog/2019/03/15/talking-together-in-the-museum

The Creative Families Award official launch was in 2018 at this event.

<https://weareive.org/ive-launches-new-creative-families-award>

The County Council have a Facebook page where they share related initiatives and information for parents and carers about early communication development.

www.facebook.com/talkingtogethercambs

Learning to play together in the Museum

Background

As part of Newcastle University, the Great North Museum: Hancock inspires curiosity, learning and debate through a stimulating, innovative and provocative science and cultural engagement programme. We welcome around 470,000 visitors annually, of whom the largest proportion are families.

Project

Our dedicated under 5s' gallery, the Mouse House, opened as part of a major redevelopment in 2009 and forms the nexus for our extensive early years formal and informal programmes. Whilst still hugely popular, ten years on, wear and tear in the space needs addressing, but how we better connect with our youngest audiences in ways that are meaningful for them remains an active objective for the museum. Working with a transdisciplinary team of researchers

that includes psychologists, social geographers, educationalists, museum studies researchers, museum staff, and a core group of families, we hope to re-imagine the Mouse House as an engaging and powerful learning facility for our under 5s.

Approach

We have been undertaking initial data gathering to inform an application for research funding, which has included observation, video footage, and survey data. The results are surprising, challenging our own preconceptions of how families, especially their youngest members, engage with the space and the broader museum and providing an interesting and thought-provoking start to our redevelopment journey.

The beginning of our user-centred approach to the Mouse House redevelopment was to understand

what the museum looks and feels like to a small visiting child and we decided to use video footage to observe their activities. A group of children were invited to the museum along with their grown-ups (before general opening) and were given the chance to explore the museum as they wanted. Each child chose from a mix of resources to support this, including magnifying glasses, explorer wristbands, explorer sheets and picture cubes. The research team observed their behaviour as they explored.

The children and adults were also asked to wear a filming device so that footage from their visit could be reviewed in different ways by members of our transdisciplinary team. A variety of means of doing this were offered: Go-Pro helmets, a Go-Pro vest and "spy goggles" (a pair of glasses with a camera mounted in the bridge).

“A particular insight was that families viewed the Mouse House as a space with less stringent rules compared to the rest of the museum.”





“A group of children were invited to the museum along with their grown-ups (before general opening) and were given the chance to explore the museum as they wanted.

Challenges

We encountered a number of practical challenges with the technology, but nonetheless, we were able to draw useful insights from the footage. The children's differing (and occasionally unexpected) responses to the museum spaces became apparent, along with child-parent interactions. We were also able to distinguish points of interest and favourite museum objects. While these were generally not a surprise, the data will be useful in the next step of our research project and in the future when finding better ways to bridge the Mouse House itself with the rest of the museum.

Visitor surveys were obtained from 63 family groups, incorporating 109 adults and 137 children using the Mouse House to explore how they view and use space. Although asking parents to complete surveys whilst caring for small children took some tact, the questionnaire provided results which challenged our preconceptions.

Lessons learned

There had been a perception amongst the staff that some visitors viewed the Mouse House as all that was of interest for under 5s in the museum and an initial aim of the research and redevelopment project had been to lure visitors into the wider museum. The survey data didn't, in fact, confirm that perception and, instead, indicated that families use the Mouse House space in the middle of a visit (as a break) or at the end of the visit (often as a reward), demonstrating that they were already using many parts of the museum. A particular insight was that families viewed the Mouse House as a space with less stringent rules compared to the rest of the museum – even though these are mainly rules which visitors assume or infer, rather than being ones laid out by museum staff. As such, carers used the space as a place for small children 'to run off steam'. The two insights suggest that carers see the Mouse House as having an integral role in the dynamics of their museum visit.

During school term-time the data showed a common visitor profile of a single carer with a child under 5, whilst during school holidays families visit in larger groups with more, older children. This also raises questions as to how we proceed in developing the space: How can we transform the Mouse House into an area that works during term-time for the desired under 5 audience but also works during holidays for older children and family visitors? And, can we better integrate the Mouse House, moving towards a situation where the whole museum has unwritten rules that encourage playful engagement?

This initial data collection has provided useful information, but we look forward to the deeper insights that would come from the full research project.

Find out more

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Supporting families living in poverty

Background

At the 2018 GEM conference I was really inspired by the session led by Sarah Cowie, Learning Officer at National Museums of Scotland. Sarah's session looked at the potential barriers for families living in poverty in accessing museums. In February 2019, GEM North East invited Sarah to speak at a networking event to encourage more museums and cultural venues to think about how they can support families living in poverty.

For me, this session could not have come at a more crucial time. Poverty levels are steadily increasing across Britain, the North East has consistently had high rates of poverty over the past 20 years. The Great North Museum: Hancock aspires to be accessible to all families however, we had not considered what the implications of

“It is a great asset to be a free entry museum however, another of our challenges is that the exterior of our building is very self-imposing and puts some families off stepping through the threshold.



a family living in poverty could mean when planning a visit to our museum. Sarah's session enabled me to identify what our barriers were and come up with a proposal of changes and I hope sharing some of our work may inspire you to make changes in your own venues.

Challenge and approach

One of our biggest challenges is the lack of a permanent packed lunch/snack space. We have a very active under 5s programme and providing

that audience with a snack space is an ongoing dilemma. Our catering provision is operated by a separate company and has led to a lack of choice of affordable options. We negotiated the use of our learning rooms as a packed lunch space during the holidays or if this was booked for corporate use then families were welcome to use the café space (but paying customers have priority). We have also signed up to nationwide Refill scheme through Northumbrian Water to offer free tap water in the cafes.

It is a great asset to be a free entry museum however, another of our challenges is that the exterior of our building is very self-imposing and puts some families off stepping through the threshold. To alleviate this we are working hard with our local schools to make the children feel comfortable in the museum and want to come back with their families. Our under 5s' specialist has been working with staff at our Community Family Hubs to support parents in our community with under 5s' view the museum as a safe space to visit.

Holiday Hunger, like many other parts of the UK is endemic so in Summer

2019 we were just one of many venues in the North East to support Newcastle's Best Summer Ever, an initiative ran by Streetgames to ensure children remain fit and fed during the summer holidays. During term time we now emphasise to school groups to come in school uniform and to bring packed lunches in a plastic bag to make it less distinguishable which children are on free school meals after meeting with staff from the Poverty Proofing a School Day initiative.

Other small changes that support our under 5s' audience and their grownups is offering free nappies and wipes for anyone who has forgotten

“ In the future we would like to align our sanitary provision with Newcastle University who have committed to offer free sanitary care for students.

or ran out during their visit. Period poverty is something which is high on my personal agenda. In the future we would like to align our sanitary provision with Newcastle University who have committed to offer free sanitary care for students. We currently do have free sanitary products available if a member of the public asks for them but we know that this is not good enough so we are trying to negotiate how we can make them available in a more dignified way.

These initiatives did require staff time and a small budget contribution however the benefit for our visitors was worth it. We are only at the beginning of our journey but I hope reading this has inspired you to think about how your venue can further support those visitors who are living in poverty.



Find out more

Email learning@greatnorthmuseum.org.uk if you have any questions or would like to hear more about our journey.

Find out more about the museum at www.greatnorthmuseum.org.uk

Find out more about poverty proofing via www.povertyproofing.co.uk

Join the water refill scheme via www.refill.org.uk

Learn about child poverty in your area from www.endchildpoverty.org.uk/poverty-in-your-area-2019

Find out about Newcastle's best summer ever via www.streetgames.org/nbse

Story Pot:

Co-created stories improvised in response to artworks

Background

The Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts is an art museum at the University of East Anglia, Norwich, in the East of England. It opened in 1978 and was purpose-built to house the art collection of founding benefactors Lisa Sainsbury and Robert Sainsbury. To complement this collection, the Centre holds several temporary exhibitions each year.

Since 2005, when the learning team began offering creative play sessions for under 5s, the Sainsbury Centre has had a distinctive early years emphasis. Following staffing changes within the team it became apparent that the audience for children and family events,

was not representative of the wider population. This became more evident when we began projects with two early years organisations nearby: Earlham Nursery School and Earlham Early Years Children's Centre. None of the families we worked with on these projects came to events at the Sainsbury Centre, and in most cases they did not even know of its existence.

At the Sainsbury Centre itself, children and family events mostly took place in our learning studio. This is a large, well-resourced room but it has the double disadvantage of being discretely located at basement level, and also of being within a ticket-only gallery area.

Approach

Museums can be thought of as ritual structures, 'like a script or a score ... that prompts visitors to enact a performance of some kind' (Duncan, 1995). The predominant ritual for the Sainsbury Centre prompted visitors to 'enact a performance' of calm adult contemplation. We aimed to develop a new ritual, one which would allow families to feel at ease yet also creatively and energetically engaged within the museum.

We decided to achieve this through group story-telling. This seemed the most responsive and flexible format for inviting a wide range of individual sources of knowledge while looking at a particular object.

The Story Pot sessions we designed begin with the group working together to carry the heavy eight-foot square Story Pot carpet into the permanent collection. The children then choose three objects as characters for their story. The stories are not performed by a story teller, but are improvised as a group, with an artist-educator shaping, encouraging and prompting. The sessions are short – forty-five minutes – to suit younger children.

Between January 2018 and February 2019, there were thirty-five Story Pot sessions. Six artist-educators delivered these sessions and 350 people took part. Responses from families were strongly positive, with some returning for over fifteen of these sessions. This success is largely

Challenge

We summarised our challenges:

- low uptake from surrounding communities.
- low visibility of children and family events within the museum itself.

Our response:

- to change the frequency of children and family events from monthly to weekly.
- to shift the location of these events from the designated learning area (the studio) to the more public and open spaces of the permanent collection galleries (known as 'the Living Area').
- to deliver this in the form of story-telling events.



“The stories are not performed by a story teller, but are improvised as a group, with an artist-educator shaping, encouraging and prompting.

due to the artist-educators. Their ‘cordiality, receptivity and stamina at sustaining interaction were all fundamental to the success of each session, as was the high degree of skill shown in managing to enable activity, by, for example, responding to the needs of the narrative and of the child, or making use of repetition as a form’ (Yarker, 2019).

Obstacles and issues

Finding storage for the Story Pot carpet between sessions proved a challenge. Moving the carpet was a potential problem: some museum staff were uncertain about letting families carry it through the collection. The artist-educators skilfully made sure that the moving carpet presented no risks. Carrying the carpet has now become a part of the museum’s Saturday routine.

Running weekly (with some breaks during school holidays), Story Pot is a considerable commitment of staff time. Most of the delivery is carried out by artist-educators employed on university zero-hours contracts rather than by core learning team staff. The artist-educators wages for Story Pot make up a quarter of the current children and family’s budget.

The artist-educators who delivered Story Pot were chosen for their experience in group work. Nevertheless, working in this improvisatory way was a challenge.

After two years, Story Pot still has a low visibility amongst children and family audiences. A frequent response at the end of a session is: ‘That was really good. You should publicise it.’ Visibility of Story Pot is also an issue for families who visit at other times.



How do they access the ease of talking, looking and naming that takes place during Story Pot?

Although the nearby early years organisations consistently publicised Story Pot to their communities, we have had very low uptake from these areas.

Lessons learned

- When developing future children and families activities, we need to work more closely with the marketing, communications and front of house teams. This could allow new initiatives to be embedded within the museum’s routines of promotion and support.
- Switching to a weekly rhythm removed some barriers to participation and helped to bring in new audiences, but it was not enough to bring in the particular audience we were targeting.
- Artist-educators needed support to develop their skills in leading this type of session. We began employing two artist-educators for some sessions. Co-leading also allowed them to share skills.

Next steps

We have commissioned illustrator Rose Hughes to make story cards representing four of the group stories created during Story Pot. These story cards will be available for families to pick up and use whenever they visit the museum.

Find out more

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References

Duncan, C. (1995) *Civilizing Rituals: inside public art museums*. Abingdon: Routledge
Yarker, P (2019) ‘Story Pot, a framework for looking’, unpublished observations of Story Pot sessions, personal communication with the author.

Paint and Custard:

Parent and Child Bonding through Creativity

Background

The Holburne is an independent art museum in Bath. At its heart is the collection of Sir William Holburne (1793-1874) which has been added to significantly and includes porcelain, silver, bronzes, and portraits. The museum also has a lively programme of exhibitions and contemporary art installations. The museum's vision is "Changing Lives Through Art".



“An unexpected outcome has been the importance of the groups for parental wellbeing and for building social networks.

Project

The museum has been running creative Early Years sessions for fifteen years – starting with one monthly session and now five sessions per week in term time. They are designed for different age groups: *Arty Babies* for parents of pre-crawlers, *Yearlings* for 12 to 24 months and *Toddlealongs* for 2–5 years. Children mostly attend with a parent, but some are accompanied by another relative or a childminder. This case study explores the unexpected outcomes of the sessions and shares some of the practical lessons that we have learned that can be applied to similar groups.

Approach

The sessions are run by Chrissie Weltike, a highly experienced Early Years practitioner with a background in nursery education. They take place in the cosy Gardener's Lodge, in the adjacent Sydney Gardens and offer a mix of song, storytelling and creative, sensory activities inspired by the museum collection, exhibitions, grounds, and the seasons. The availability of the Lodge, leased from the Council, enables us to run far more sessions than would be possible in our main Learning Space. Each session lasts 1.5 hours, with spaces for between ten and twelve children plus accompanying adults, depending on the group. We charge for the sessions in order to cover the costs of the practitioner, materials and refreshments.

Parents tend to be people who visited museums and art galleries before they had children and are attracted to the groups because of the setting. They often perceived the Holburne as an adult space but seeing the collection through a child's eyes enriches and broadens their experience. Many of the parents are professionals working in the health sector, education or media. Whilst not a natural target for a socially-engaged museum like the Holburne, they too have needed what the sessions help address. This is not something that we had anticipated; groups that were initially just about art have become about parents' wellbeing too – as discussed ahead.

Many of the parents lack confidence in relating to their children. In these collaborative sessions, both parent and child benefit from exploring, playing and making together. Some parents have high expectations of their children but discover that when you're being creative – it's ok to make mistakes. The sessions sometimes involve messy, safe, creative play with sand, clay – and even custard; parents gain the confidence to continue the creativity at home – albeit with more conventional materials such as paint. Sessions in the galleries also help parents to develop skills for exploring museums and other places with their children – independent of the group.

An unexpected outcome has been the importance of the groups for parental wellbeing and for building

“**...Parents gain the confidence to continue the creativity at home – albeit with more conventional materials such as paint.**

social networks. Parents have often moved from outside the area and some are suffering from post-natal depression. These friendships can last right from *Arty Babies* to the end of *Toddlealongs* – and beyond.

Obstacles and issues

- It's important to have the same format each time – it re-assures both parent and child.
- If possible, be flexible within that format, e.g. adapt to the weather or an object that a child has brought in.
- Adapt to group dynamics too, e.g. if a group is particularly noisy, more focused activities may be necessary.
- Make the room welcoming and beautiful; we all have to deal with multi-purpose learning spaces in museums but music on arrival, displays of artwork etc. make a big difference.
- Provide nice refreshments for both parents and children if you can.
- When travelling around the museum, make behaviour concerns part of the journey or a story e.g. 'we're walking like mice'.
- The museum spaces are just as important to a child as the collection.
- In the galleries, focus on pattern, form, colour.
- If possible, make links between your collection and the seasons e.g. look at bugs painted on ceramics in the summer – that they may then see outside.
- Ensure that gallery activities are focused e.g. a 'bingo' sheet of objects to find.
- Singing and doing activities in the galleries shows the museum in a different light – both to participants and other visitors.
- Ensure that other visitors are made aware of activities like singing; most love it but give them the option to avoid it!

We are very aware that the group is only accessible to people who can afford to attend and would like to be able to find funding to address this issue. However, we currently have waiting lists for some of the groups and don't have the capacity to run

more sessions. Other factors such as the pending end-of-lease for the building may mean we need to consider different ways of running the groups in future.

Find out more

www.holburne.org

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