



MUSEUM
DEVELOPMENT
EAST MIDLANDS



Leicestershire
County Council



MARKET TOWN MUSEUMS' NETWORK CASE STUDY

2017-2018



EAST MIDLANDS MARKET TOWN MUSEUMS' NETWORK

PREFACE

In 2016, Leicestershire County Council (LCC), in partnership with Museum Development East Midlands (MDEM), successfully secured an Arts Council Resilience Fund grant of £87,300 to establish the Market Town Museums' Network. Initially comprising five museums, the Network has focussed on how small museums in market towns build sustainable relationships with their local communities. Each participating museum has received a grant to plan and deliver an audience development project, along with access to professional development opportunities and peer support. The member museums for the first phase of the Network have been: Melton Carnegie Museum, the Manor House Museum, Kettering, Mansfield Museum, Bassetlaw Museum and Newark Town Hall Museum.

The idea for the Network was sparked by Melton Carnegie Museum's desire to review its purpose and relevance to local communities who weren't engaging with the museum. Visitor numbers had been falling in recent years, and Melton Carnegie wanted to better understand why this was happening, develop their audience and strategies, and, crucially, create a peer network in order to support the team in doing this.

MDEM, hosted by Leicester County Council and funded by Arts Council to deliver support to accredited museums across the East Midlands, has been the Lead Partner in developing and delivering the infrastructure for the Network. Bright Culture Consultancy was commissioned to coordinate and facilitate the Network Meetings, provide ongoing support and mentoring to the museums in reviewing and connecting with their local communities, and to organise the programme of museum visits.



MUSEUM DEVELOPMENT EAST MIDLANDS – AUDIENCE DEVELOPMENT

MDEM annually undertakes a Business Diagnostic with museums, a self-assessment benchmarking tool to highlight museums' key development areas. For this cross section of market town museums, audience development was identified as a priority.

Due to the nature of an evolving funding climate and the highlighted lack of staff capacity within these museums, an intensive programme of support was decided upon, covering a 15 month period, with a substantial grant and development fund attached. This was based on previous successful intensive programmes which responded to other thematic trends from the Business Diagnostic. The approach allowed the museums involved to develop relationships both within the Network and with support providers. The grant enabled delivery against evolving action plans, and the flexible development fund built individual confidence and capacity throughout the programme.

The project has had a significant internal impact for both the museums involved and MDEM's working practices. For the museums it has provided a catalyst for significant change in audience development delivery.

A key benefit has been the space to test, trial and fail approaches, with built in reflection to ensure continual improvement. It has also allowed for the wider teams to be developed, with successful front of house training and networking opportunities provided alongside individual confidence building.

For MDEM, a key success has been building into the project a large development fund, a third of the total project costs. This has allowed for significant investment in the Network museums, not only through training, but peer visits, conference attendance and staff back fill when needed, ensuring the benefit was spread across the whole organisation.

Going forward, it is clear that the Network offers a huge amount of support to its members, as well as a safe space for challenge and inspiration. MDEM are committed to continuing the network in partnership with LCC beyond the life of this project, opening it up to the wider selection of market town museums in the region. This will build on the mixture of inspirational visits and facilitated discussion on the key topics affecting this segment of the museums sector.

Sarah Hartshorne
Museum Development Programme Officer



CREATING THE NETWORK

Market town museums in the East Midlands were invited to apply to join the Network through a competitive process guided by the museum's own identification of audience development as a priority in the MDEM Business Diagnostic. Each museum was required to commit £1000 towards the costs of the Network. For the member, the Network offered:

- Quarterly network meetings for the sharing of ideas and expertise.
- A grant to deliver a one-year audience development project.
- A budget to support training and conference attendance.
- Museum visits for staff and volunteers.
- On-going support from Bright Culture.

AUDIENCE DEVELOPMENT PLANS & DELIVERY

The first stage of the project was for each museum to review its own audience development needs and work with Bright Culture to write a plan and develop a focussed project for delivery in 2017/18. The projects are specific to the circumstances of each museum and are outlined in more detail in the individual case studies.

MEETINGS

The core of the Network has been the five network meetings, held between February 2017 and March 2018, each hosted by one of the members. These have been an opportunity to focus on specific areas of audience development, to share ideas, discuss problems, reflect on progress on individual projects and to find support from peers within the sector.

CONFERENCES & TRAINING

Network members had access to a professional development budget that could be used for the museums' teams – staff and volunteers – to attend conferences or receive training. All five members attended the 2017 Museums Association conference in Manchester, which proved to be an important opportunity to cement the Network, as well as providing an opportunity to engage with the wider museums sector. In addition, staff members and volunteers from the five museums:

- Attended the 2017 AIM Conference.
- Undertook the GEM Foundation Course.
- Undertook Welcome Host Gold Training and received a City & Guilds qualification.
- Received oral history training from the Oral History Society.

MUSEUM VISITS

Visiting other museums was a key element of the Network's activity, offering an opportunity to be inspired by and reflect on other approaches to engaging with audiences. Each Network meeting was an opportunity to visit another museum in the region and two visits were also facilitated to museums outside the region. In addition, individual museums used the funding to support their staff and volunteer teams to undertake further visits.

The visits to museums outside the East Midlands were to The Higgins Bedford and The Panacea Museum, and to Ripon Museums Trust. Each visit included an opportunity to see the museum and a meeting with a senior member of staff to look beyond the public view and to hear about how their work is progressing. In selecting these museums to visit, a number of criteria were considered: size of town (small to mid-sized town), how the museum was funded, whether the museum was run by staff or volunteers, range of offer for diverse audiences and positive reputation of the museum.

The absolute beauty of this programme is that it provided a substantial sum of money which could be used flexibly. The support of Bright Culture and MDEM also meant that I did not have to worry about finance, administration or organisation. I could just get on with the job but with additional expertise available when needed. Small museums have the imagination, ideas and skills to deliver fantastic projects but often do not have the capacity or funds to turn them into a reality.

Sam Glasswell, Curator, Bassetlaw Museum



LEARNING

As the starting point for this project was the five museums identifying that they needed support with audience development, the ultimate measure of success will be the impact that the project has longer-term on audiences. Have the Network museums built a stronger relationship with local communities, leading to greater local relevance and engagement? The timescale for this project has been too short to measure this sort of change, but each museum has reported greater engagement by specific audiences through their individual projects, and increased confidence in their ability to build their audiences. The challenge now is to maintain the engagement activities and local relationships that have brought new audiences into the museums.

The first phase of the Network has run for around 15 months, however in this time there have been some very tangible outcomes, with the whole process being described as 'professional oxygen' by one member.

Short Timescale: The timescale for building the Network and delivering the audience development projects was short and it's difficult to measure sustainable audience change in this time. However, the timescale also created its own momentum with regular contact between the members and an intensive focussed period of work. All of the museums have seen new audiences or an increase in visitor numbers as a result of new programming.

Networking: Being part of a strong and close professional network has boosted members' confidence and has provided a safe and valued space in which to discuss ideas and challenges, and access expertise. This is particularly important for staff in small museums where they can be isolated from their peers. Informal mentoring through the meetings and group activities has become a core part of the Network process.

Encouraging Experimentation: The project has supported the five museums to try out a range of different engagement approaches and to target new audiences which they would not previously have had the capacity to do. This has been enabled through peer support, training, and a grant specifically for local community engagement.

Investing in People: Prioritising professional development over the year has enabled Network members to invest in themselves and their staff; and reconfirmed why this is so important. Critically, the option to pay for staff backfill has supported workers in small museums to attend conferences which might not otherwise be the case. The professional development support has enabled some of the museums to take a more proactive approach to engagement activity and to see how small changes can have a large impact.

Flexibility: There was an unusual level of flexibility in how the grant was used. This led to a process that was bespoke and responsive to the needs of individual museums, which could adapt as the year progressed, and which enabled the benefit of the funding to be maximised. The flexibility was welcomed by the Network members; it was seen as a positive approach that placed trust in their professional expertise.

Museum Visits: Although only a small part of the project, the facilitated visits have had a big impact. They were hugely successful for the Network members, providing an opportunity for inspiration, challenge and the chance to spend time with colleagues in an informal way. Network members have been clear that these types of visits are very valuable, but would not have happened without a facilitator responsible for 'making it happen'.

MELTON CARNEGIE MUSEUM

Melton Carnegie Museum is a small free market town museum located in Melton Mowbray, run by Leicestershire County Council. The Museum offers high quality presentation and interpretation of the local social and economic history of the area, with a focus on: food heritage including the world-renowned Stilton cheese and pork pie industries; local trades, the rural economy and fox hunting.

The museum was opened in 1977, with the displays refurbished in 2002 and 2010 supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund and the Museum of Hunting Trust. The Museum has an active events programme including school holiday activities and one-off events such as open archive day; which are supported by volunteers and a Friends group.

PROJECT

The Museum is located close to the centre of the town, but in recent years local audiences have started to decline. The Market Town Museum's Grant & Network provided an opportunity to start a process of organisational review, to increase stronger integration of the Museum into the local community; addressing work skills gaps to increase staff confidence; overcoming barriers for audience engagement, and improving joined up working with stakeholders, Friends and volunteers of the Museum.

In this first stage of the Museum's work to understand and build connections with the local community, activity has focussed on:

- Raising awareness of the Museum's collection and offer within the town, by setting up a pop-up museum stall as part of local town events.
- Understanding and developing the skills and confidence of staff and volunteers, to equip them in taking engagement activity forward.
- Development of family activities and provision for children during weekends and holidays, to increase local engagement and repeat visits.

The best part of the project was having the opportunity to try everything we have been wanting to do, including: participating in Painting the Town Red, The Food Festival and Victorian Fayre. Seeing the ideas come to life, attracting new visitors, reaching different audiences and seeing the dramatic increase in visitor figures has been wonderful and very fulfilling.

Market Town Museums Supervisor



OUTCOMES

The project has been a positive catalyst for prioritising and understanding the professional development needs of the staff. This has resulted in: the exposure of talents, development of skills and increased confidence and enthusiasm in implementing new ideas and seeing these through, such as the development of a Museum Map by the Front of House staff.

The learning from the project has effectively changed ways of working at the Museum, by embedding a more proactive forward-thinking approach, which focuses on understanding audiences, then programming and marketing activity in response to their needs.



Having a pop-up museum stall at local events, such as Painting the Town Red, East Midlands Food Festival and the Victorian Christmas Fayre has been very successful in raising awareness of the Museum. Taking the Museum out into the community, handing out leaflets and talking to local people who hadn't previously visited has resulted in an increase in footfall to family activities.

Enjoyed our time visiting Melton Mowbray's Museum. We started off by doing the Melton Mowbray Heritage Trail around the town and then went into the Museum. It was busy and packed full of items that brought back many memories.

Visitor feedback, April 2018

The Museum has become more proactive in regularly using social media, in particular Facebook, to promote its events. In response, audiences have been sharing posts and tagging friends and a greater awareness of events has been developing. This momentum has led to a doubling of the Museum's Facebook followers over the year.

There is a better understanding of audiences, in particular family audiences which is demonstrated in a more diverse programme of activities, which has been created in response to local family's interests. Greater consideration has also been given to the all-round family experience, from allowing families to bring in their own food and drink, to reflecting on when activities are timetabled and how they are marketed.

Visitor numbers to the Museum has increased substantially with visits being up 18% on the previous year (2016/17) and during town events an impressive, just under 3,000 people engaged with the Museum's stalls and activities. The Museum plans to continue its work to embed itself in the community, which will include further audience research and continuing to develop its marketing in particular the development of a new website.

BASSETLAW MUSEUM

Bassetlaw Museum is based in Amcott House, a Georgian town house just off the main square of the historic market town of Retford. At the back is a walled garden that is home to a small rural heritage centre. The Museum tells the story of north Nottinghamshire from its earliest people to the present day, with a broad collection reflecting the local area; a unique Anglo-Saxon boat; and artefacts telling the story of Retford's links with the Mayflower Pilgrims. The Museum also contains the Percy Laws' Memorial Gallery, a temporary exhibition space used by local artists as well as the Museum.

The Museum has a strong relationship with local families through the successful holiday activities and pre-school programme, and visitor numbers are stable, though not growing. It wishes to focus on growing a more diverse local audience, attracting visitors from further afield, including those who come to find out more about the 400th anniversary of the Mayflower Pilgrims' voyage in 2020.

PROJECT

The Bassetlaw Museum team identified a number of areas that it wanted to develop and invest in as part of their involvement with the Market Town Museums' Grant and Network. Guiding these plans is a focus on diversifying the audience base and addressing the slow decline in visitor numbers that it has seen since 2013.

- Re-designing the Museum's website to look modern and inviting, and to provide improved access to its collection of over 20,000 historic images of Bassetlaw.
- Exploiting the potential of the walled garden as a space for public events, theatre performance and for use by local community organisations, particularly in advance of the Mayflower 400 Anniversary.
- Exploring the potential for oral history recordings to enhance and complement the Museum's collections and the stories it tells.
- Trying out new family activities focussed on the slightly older age group of 7-11 year olds.

I cannot stress enough how thrilled I am to have a new website. It is the first point of contact for many users so it's essential that it looks good.

Sam Glasswell, Curator



OUTCOMES

The project has enabled the Museum to fulfil ambitions that it was finding challenging to achieve due to budget and staff constraints. In particular, it has allowed the Museum to invest in areas that can now be developed over the years to come. The new website was designed by a member of staff, and presents a fresh and modern feel for the Museum. The process has supported a staff member to develop their skills and also ensures internal capacity for updating the website. The Modes database provides fuller access to the historic images, and is now ready for on-going work by volunteers to improve and expand the information held on each image.



A Premises Licence was bought to facilitate greater use of the walled garden, leading to a successful partnership with the Retford Steampunk Society who used it for their August Festival, with around 2400 visitors coming into the Museum and Garden during the day and evening. Local partnerships are central to developing relationships with local communities, and the Museum, through the grant, has also been able to support the Civic Society with the reprint and launch of their walking guide to Retford.

History and fantasy art at the most recent steampunk festival; great central location, amazing building, history and grounds.

Visitor feedback, May 2017

Training in oral history interviewing, documentation and storage has been run for the volunteer and staff team, with the Museum closing for a day to enable the whole team to undertake this together. A number of recorders have been purchased for on-going use, providing the Museum with the potential to systematically collect and record interviews that complement its collection and enrich the stories that it can tell.

The support, new ideas, and visits to other museums that being part of the Network has offered, has supported the Museum to experiment with new ideas for family activities and events. During the Network visit to Ripon Museum, the work of their active Stitch, Knit & Natter group, which makes unique items to sell in their museum shop was seen. Bassetlaw is now experimenting with something similar, potentially linked to its costume collection.

The impact of the website redesign and the new activities on local audiences isn't yet clear, but early indications are encouraging, events have been well attended and the data gathered is informing the future programme. In particular, the Enchanted Garden, an idea which came from the success of the Steampunk events, will take place in 2018, with three artists' workshops, a family day, an event for young children and a theatrical performance, all in the garden.

MANOR HOUSE MUSEUM, KETTERING

The Manor House Museum is situated in an 18th century house, and sits alongside the library, the Alfred East Art Gallery, and public gardens in Kettering's 'cultural quarter'. Its collection reflects the long history of Kettering as a thriving market town, with strong agricultural roots and a historic boot and shoe industry. The Museum also runs a regular programme of engagement activities, focussing on the family market along with people interested in local history.

Visitor numbers are stable, though they have declined since a high in the early 2000s. However, with the local population forecast to grow significantly over the next decade and with the immediate area increasingly focussed on restaurants and bars, the Museum is focussing on deepening its relationships with local communities: understanding and responding to their needs and interests.

PROJECT

The Market Town Museum's Grant & Network, provided an opportunity for the Museum to identify some priorities that would impact on its ability to engage with local communities.

The Museum identified three areas to focus on:

- Re-purposing a tired display area into a flexible community space that can be used for events, community exhibitions and family activities.
- Building a relationship with Kettering MIND and the people who use its services, by developing a local history project which engages people through visits and archival research. Resulting in a display of research journals in the new community area.
- Deepening their understanding of how people do, and don't, engage with the Museum through a programme of bespoke audience research.

Being able to make visits to other museums and conferences has been fantastic. It's given me time to think, discuss ideas with other colleagues and take new ideas back to the museum and the team.

Emma Buckler, Cultural & Heritage Services Manager, KBC



OUTCOMES

For the museum team, creating the new community space has been a very visible demonstration of change that they wanted to achieve. The space had not been touched for 29 years and looked dated and uninviting. Since opening, the space has provided additional capacity, with over 2400 people using it for family activities, a hugely popular Lego day, local history talks and simply as a space for people to sit down and enjoy being in the Museum.

The professional development opportunities of training and visits to other museums have given the staff team the confidence to try out new ideas and identify aspirations such as producing a museum map, as seen during the museum visits.

The museum was fabulous and – I don't understand why I haven't come before, there was so much of interest.

Participant in the Manor House Museum & Kettering MIND Community Space project.

Using the new community space for events such as the Folklore and Fairy Tale family activities in the February half-term has led to new visits from families which will be cemented during the year to come.

Creating and delivering a project with MIND was a new initiative for the Museum team, but the support available through the project gave staff increased confidence in trying out new approaches. Participants involved in that project have improved confidence and learnt about the history of Kettering.

The Market Town Museums' Grant & Network also leveraged further funding from Kettering Borough Council to enable the hire of a storage container for the agricultural items removed from the exhibition space.

Following the creation of the audience plan and the consultation, the temporary exhibition and events programme have been revised to reflect local interest more closely, with more local history exhibitions and regular family activities. In the medium to long term a future focus will be on using these activities to continue to engage with new audiences.



At the end of the year 2017/18 there has not yet been an overall increase in visitor numbers. However the success of recent family activities, which have been well attended, and a clear strategy for growing visitor numbers has led to a confidence in the Museum's ability to do this, over the medium to long term.

NEWARK TOWN HALL MUSEUM & ART GALLERY

Newark Town Hall Museum is based in the Grade 1 listed Newark Town Hall (a working Town Hall) and includes the beautiful Georgian Assembly Rooms. The Museum's exhibitions feature the Town Council's collection of silver plate, civic artefacts and gifts, along with a strong art collection, all relating to Newark and its history as a market town.

The Museum is based on the 2nd floor of the Town Hall, with volunteers leading tours of the 1st floor Assembly Rooms, Council Chamber, Mayor's Parlour and Little House (sometimes described as Newark's thinnest house, next door to the Town Hall). It has no frontage onto the town square at ground level and signage is limited, so the Museum has to work hard to maintain its profile locally.

PROJECT

The focus of the audience development project was to raise awareness of the Museum, which is perceived to be low in the town, and to build a stronger relationship with local families, identified in previous audience research as a core audience to engage. The Market Town Museums' Grant & Network enabled the Museum to focus on several key areas:

- Raising the awareness of the Museum through a more targeted marketing approach and developing a closer relationship with the local paper.
- Developing a year-long programme of young people's art activities, inspired by the Museum's unique art collection and architecture, to increase and widen engagement with young people.
- Evolving a strong 'family-friendly' brand, through a re-design and print of the children's worksheets, the family leaflet and the website.



Stumbled upon this hidden little gem with my two young children on a rainy day. Lovely little museum where my kids enjoyed dressing up as the Mayor.

Visitor, April 2018



OUTCOMES

Participating in the Market Town Museums' Network has impacted both on audiences and the professional development of the Museum team. It has led to an overall increase of around 8% in visitor numbers, particularly families and young people engaging with the Museum and its collection through the programme of creative activities. It has also demonstrated that the Museum's three key strengths - architecture, civic history and art - have the potential to be relevant and interesting to young people when presented with a fresh approach.



The project has enabled the development of a bespoke programme of young people's arts activities, inspired by the Museum's collection of paintings and artwork with a local connection, and the architecture of the building. The creative events, led by a local artist, have included: making illustrations of the Little House in water colour; a still life drawing workshop of the Mayor and Mace Bearer; exploring the 18th century architecture of the building in ink and wax resist; and a Gorgeous Georgians event, where over 70 people came to draw people in costume in the Ballroom. The workshops have provided a starting point for a relationship with the Museum and its collection, with families already returning for further visits.

The overall project has been a 'win-win' for everyone involved – me, the volunteers, our visitors, the museum itself and the benefits of partnership working, now and into the future.

Patty Temple, Curator,
Newark Town Hall Museum

The purchase of advertising space in the well-read local paper on a weekly basis, has led to increased editorial coverage and a closer relationship with a local paper, this has resulted in raised local awareness of the Museum's offer.

This increase in public engagement activity and visitor numbers has also had an impact on the volunteer team who open the Museum every day, with the local publicity creating a 'feel good' factor, emphasizing the contribution that they make to the life of the Museum. This permeates through to visitors, who regularly leave feedback on individual volunteers who have enhanced their visit.

For the Museum Curator, a lone staff member, the opportunity to be part of a peer-network, to attend conferences and visit other museums has been hugely beneficial, enabling regular meetings with other museum professionals and the development of a deeper understanding of how small market town museums operate – in particular the differences and similarities, within the usual monetary and political constraints of small museums. Getting to know a group of friendly professionals is an important source of support, ideas and sustainability for small museums.

MANSFIELD MUSEUM

Mansfield Museum is a thriving local authority museum situated in the centre of Mansfield, a small market town in Nottinghamshire. The Museum's permanent displays illustrate the social and industrial history of the district using objects and photographs. A changing exhibitions programme ensures the Museum remains relevant to Mansfield's cultural life.

Mansfield Museum was the brainchild of William Edward Baily, a wealthy local collector and natural historian. In 1903 Baily offered his collection and a building - the 'Tin Tabernacle' - in which to house it and the Museum opened the following year. The Museum now focusses on working with diverse groups across the community from local schools, archaeological associations, to artists' societies; with a successful schools and activities programmes ensuring that the museum has a strong local audience, with a particularly significant family audience.

PROJECT

The Market Town Museums' Grant & Network provided the opportunity to address the Museum's growing challenge of re-engaging local people particularly as repeat visitors.

The Museum identified some key areas to focus on within this period:

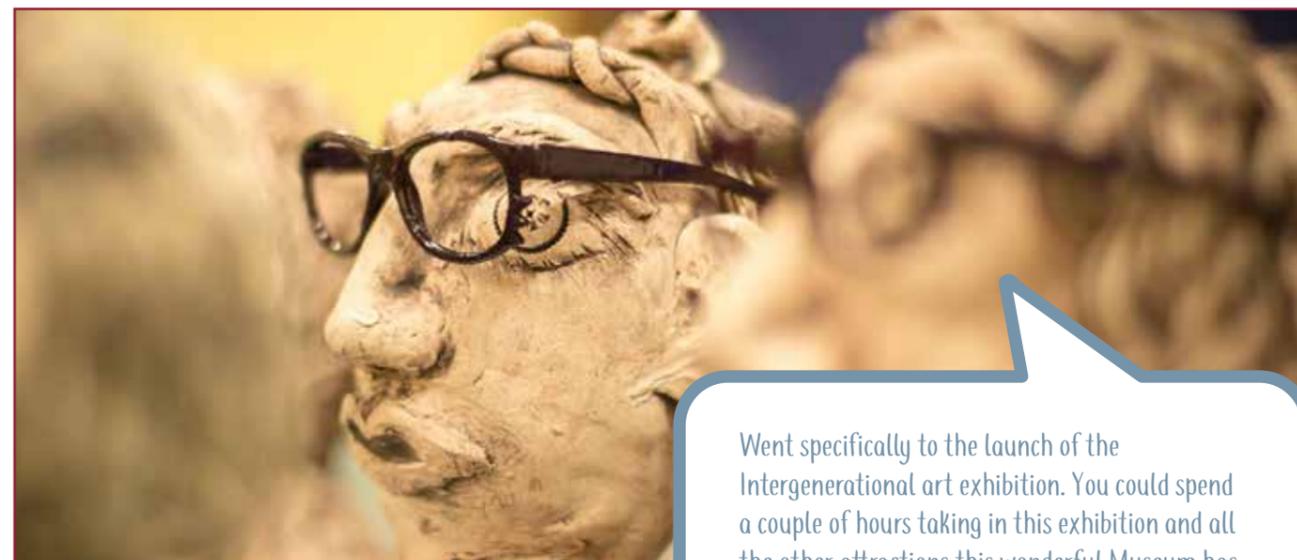
- Identify and work with local communities that have not previously engaged with the Museum by developing a series of intergenerational activities and events to provide better understanding of needs and interests for future engagement.
- Provide a platform to highlight the creative work of participants taking part in projects and encourage further engagement with the Museum through an end of project exhibition.
- Ensure that the project engaged with a wide range of audiences both new and existing both at the Museum and in community locations.



mansfieldmuseum

The Market Towns network project has engaged a wide range of people across the generations in Mansfield. It's created a real sense of pride for local people and for the local treasure trove that is Mansfield Museum. Community engagement at its best!

Clare Taylor, Project Manager and Artist



Went specifically to the launch of the Intergenerational art exhibition. You could spend a couple of hours taking in this exhibition and all the other attractions this wonderful Museum has to offer. There was a buzz about the place because all the children who had took part in the clay modelling were there to see their efforts displayed. Plus some excellent acoustic music by the towns teenagers, plenty of talent in this town.

Participant Feedback

OUTCOMES

The 'This is Me, This is Mansfield' intergenerational art project successfully engaged 969 local residents with the Museum. The project resulted in the creation of multiple three dimensional clay figures which were displayed in 'cabinets of curiosity' and fostered a sense of pride in the locality and encouraged interaction with the Museum.

This project gave Mansfield Museum the opportunity to expand upon its work in the local community and engage with a cross section of groups. Some of the relationships were new whilst others were groups that the Museum had lost touch with, including: preschool groups, schools, libraries, adults with learning difficulties, an over 60s group, families and local businesses.

The workshops were pitched so all ages and audiences could be involved, sometimes with a competition element to encourage adult participation. One particularly effective session was the evening business challenge, where local companies were invited to come in a team and compete to see who made the best clay likeness. This event created links for the Museum and has resulted in ongoing interest in its work.

The work produced through the project was displayed at the Museum in an exhibition with a launch event attended by over 300 participants, friends and supporters of the Museum. Families in particular have also returned on other occasions to see their work displayed at the Museum.

The project has given the Museum the opportunity to try out new ways of working and developing partnerships. An example of this was the 'Family Rave' that the Museum hosted in partnership with a local FE college and organisers 'Big Fish, Little Fish', attracting over 160 people who were predominately non-visitors.

Being involved in the project has had a positive impact on staff and volunteers at Mansfield Museum through the professional development opportunities of museum visits, training and conferences. The visit made by the Gallery Assistants and Volunteers to the Herbert Art Gallery and Museum in Coventry Museum was particularly successful with everyone returning with ideas and inspiration. The Museum is looking at ways of supporting further opportunities like this in the future.



