

**LONDON  
MUSEUM  
DEVELOPMENT**

## **London Museum Development Diversity Matters Programme 2018-2022**

London Museum Development's Diversity Matters Programme encourages London's non-national museums to embrace Arts Council England's [Creative Case for Diversity](#) and engage a more diverse range of visitors with the collections they hold, as well as support them with long standing issues about the diversity of their boards and workforce. Over the four years London's non-national museums will be encouraged to make diversity a key issue in relation to the programming, audience development, leadership and workforce of museums. The national agenda focuses on increasing opportunities for people from protected characteristic groups<sup>1</sup> and overcoming the challenges and the barriers to participation and engagement across socio-economic barriers and across geographic location.

As part of the wider programme, London Museum Development asked museums to share their experiences of developing responsive and diverse programmes, exhibitions, collections, audience initiatives, workforce and trustee boards for all its visitors. The following case study is showcased on the website as it addresses one of the four key areas of diversity practice:

- How museums have worked with its diverse visitors to diversify its public programmes, events, exhibitions and collections to ensure it is more responsive to its respective local community
- How museums have reached more diverse audiences and ensured its audience is more representative of its respective local community
- How museums have developed a more diverse board of trustees that is more representative of its respective local community.
- How museums have recruited and retained a diverse workforce which is more representative of its respective local community.

## **Royal College of Music Museum Case Study**



<b>Project Title:</b>	Music in the Museum: Relaxed concerts
<b>Project Timescales:</b>	October 2018 – February 2019

<sup>1</sup> Diversity is defined by Arts Council England through protected characteristic groups, as defined by the Equality Act 2010 and the Equality Duty 2011. These protected characteristics are: age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion and belief, sex, and sexual orientation as well as class and socio-economic status.

<b>Project Budget:</b>	£1000
<b>Area of diversity practice:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Working with diverse visitors to produce, present and distribute its public programmes, events, exhibitions and collections to ensure it is more responsive to its respective local community</li> <li>Reaching diverse audiences to ensure its audience is more representative of its respective local community</li> </ul>
<b>Protected characteristic group museum worked with:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Disability</li> </ul>
<b>Contact details for further information:</b>	Lydia Baldwin, Museum Learning & Participation : <a href="mailto:Lydia.baldwin@rcm.ac.uk">Lydia.baldwin@rcm.ac.uk</a>



*Photograph of concert goes taking part in relaxed concert*

### **What were the project's aims?**

The project had the following aims:

- To consult with people from within our local community who have a variety of physical and learning needs (and their support workers/carers).
- To understand what barriers individuals or groups with learning disabilities might face visiting the museum.

- To co-create a model for a relaxed concert in the museum that encourages them to see it as a safe space to enjoy live music and engage with the collections.
- To build a training package to prepare student volunteers to deliver relaxed concerts.

## Who did the museum work with?

In the past the museum has been restricted as to what could be offered to visitors with disabilities, in part because of the physical limitations of the museum building and lack of resources and expertise. There was demand for events from SEN groups but, due to the needs and expectations of different concert goers, it was necessary to do further consultation and possibly develop a targeted event.

The Museum worked with a local partner, Equal People Mencap, a resource centre for people with learning disabilities based in Kensington & Chelsea. Service users that attend their regular lunch club were consulted throughout the project, including evaluation of the final concert.

## What did the project entail?

The project developed a relaxed concert session with and for groups with additional needs. It consisted of 3 stages:

### Research and Consultation

- Researched and compared relaxed classical concert offers in London, all of which were different in scope and style. Some offered a standard concert with relaxed behaviour rules, whilst others deliberately encouraged audiences to participate in the music making.
- Chose to perform two mini performances during consultation sessions to trial the 'simply listen and respond' approach as well as interactive opportunities, i.e. singing, playing percussion, touching objects.
- Consultation phase took place with service users from the partner lunch club.
- Also researched creative ways to consult with audiences with additional needs in order for it to be effective and inclusive, and devised an appropriate set of activities and data gathering techniques.
- The consultation brought understanding of the barriers our partner group faced that prevented them attending live music experiences.
- Engaged in creative conversations with group about styles of music, length of pieces and programme themes that enabled participants to directly influence decision making for our concert output.
- We had hoped to talk about environmental preferences (light levels, for example), but we knew we wouldn't be able to test these in our final output as the museum is not yet built. It was still possible to talk about the experience of visiting our site and discuss chill-out spaces.

### Planning and Training

- Selected a theme for the pilot concert (animals), designed a programme of music and sourced a set of objects/stories from the RCM collections that they could engage with during the performance.
- RCM student performers were given disability awareness training and incorporated Makaton into the spoken parts of the concert.

### Pilot concert

- Chose an accessible space on the ground floor with toilet facilities opposite and an adjacent room that functioned as a chill-out space. The concert was fully subscribed, including a few extra unexpected guests which made the space feel quite cramped.
- Provided Welcome Assistants to make the arrival experience less intimidating.
- During the concert we observed freedom of behaviour, with participants smiling, conducting, swaying and in our final piece many got up and danced.
- There were opportunities to hear about museum objects and get hands-on, although this was slightly more challenging as the space was more packed than anticipated.
- One participant with autism and his support worker used the chill-out room.
- The concert evaluation showed that participants would have preferred a bigger space, but otherwise they had no problem with pathfinding, enjoyed the music, felt welcomed and supported and wanted to visit the RCM again.

## What did the project achieve?

Outputs included:

- The museum developed an interactive relaxed concerts in consultation with the audience partner.
- A training package for staff and volunteers about disability awareness
- A suite of creative consultation methods, appropriate for working with people with learning disabilities.

Outcomes for the Museum included:

- There is now substantial knowledge about the nature of relaxed events and how to develop them within the Museum staff and student volunteers.
- The project showed a demand for this type of volunteering opportunity amongst students. The number interested in this project was overwhelming.
- The museum has now built a strong working relationship with a local partner, that will continue to advise on access programme development and take part in future events.
- Wider engagement across the Museum and College to provide a more accessible programme across the organisation.

## What impact did the project have?

Organisational:

The Performance and Programming department expressed regret that the RCM did not already offer more such targeted events for disabled audiences. They were very supportive in finding an accessible space within the building and wanted to make the concert part of their Chamber Week series in order to make it more visible.

The Learning & Participation department have experience of working with disabled audiences and have recently set new goals to do a more intentional work in this area. They were really keen for the Museum to share learning, and two colleagues participated in the Disability Awareness training funded as part of this project. They have joined a local SEND forum which met at the RCM in March 2019.

The Front of House and Box Office teams were also integral to the smooth running of the concert output. Conversations about emergency procedures, booking systems and risk assessments highlighted a need for further discussions in order to ensure that good practice for welcoming diverse

audiences is embedded in museum procedures. Finally, the Student Support Department are very keen to empower students who identify as having a disability to be involved in delivering future concerts.

#### Partners:

Consultation helped identify that participants were under-confident about travelling to new spaces and not knowing what to expect when they arrived were some of the barriers preventing them from taking up offers like this.

Working with participants to make the experience feel less intimidating resulted in the concert take-up far exceeding expectations. A few Equal People participants said they felt confident enough to come because they had met staff in a pre-visit, seen the visual story and knew they could expect a nice welcome from the Welcome Assistants on arrival.

The process of talking through what a concert would feel like and music would sound like helped participants feel confident to give their opinions on what they would like to hear and how long they wanted the concert/pieces to be. During the mini performances, a relaxed approach to 'audience behaviour' was adopted, allowing noise and freedom of movement. It was observed that, for many participants, expressing themselves verbally or physically during the music was an innate part of their enjoyment, which in turn empowered the Museum to train the student performers to expect and welcome this behaviour.

With the re-launch of the Museum in 2020, the team has agreed to work with Equal People Mencap to develop and test some of the general offer for audiences with additional needs (large print guides, audio described tours, etc.). They have expressed interest in being involved in co-curating future relaxed concerts, and a similar model (pre-visit, concert invite) may be used to encourage other service providers in the area to engage with the offer when we open.

The Museum will offer Disability Awareness training as part of their regular staff and volunteer training programme, and extending this to other departments within the building is being discussed.

## What lessons did the museum learn from the project?

The most significant staff learning points:

- **Take time** to consider the range of disabilities and additional needs that visitors may have
- **Get training** to better your understanding of disability and inclusive practice
- **Look around** with fresh eyes at your setting and start to see simple things you can do to improve the experience
- **Build confidence** (for participants) through inclusive consultation and (for delivery team) through training
- **Be sensitive** of being a new face or space

On a practical note, in future we would:

- Get more than one contact when working with community hubs (main contact at Equal People changed three times within six months)
- If asking the same question multiple times (i.e. was it too short, too long or just right?), ask in a different order each time to make sure participants aren't copying the last thing they hear.
- Share the training opportunities more widely within our organisation

It was an achievement to test the final output onsite as the lessons learned provided a significant insight into the visit experience. The main highlight was how the participants completed the two

sentences; 'Music is...' and 'Music makes me...' Their answers focussed on the power of music to help them 'de-stress, relax, dance, sing and forget about life's problems', giving a reminder not to underestimate the value or importance of music to disabled audiences' quality of life.

## What tips does the museum have for other museums undertaking a similar project?

Prior research or training on best practice for consulting with audiences with additional needs would have been useful, and having a framework to assess the inclusivity of the venue and procedures from the start.

### Our 5 tips to staff

- **Relationship building.** Both with staff/support workers and of course with the participants themselves. Developing a relationship with us helped our participants feel confident to visit a new space, and it made us more aware of the different types of needs they had.
- **Think about supporting all the senses** both in consultation and concert. Visual aids, sounds or music, materials to touch, smells if appropriate!
- **Inclusive consultation/evaluation methods.** We thought hard about data gathering techniques and how to minimise copying or power play within the group.
- **Learn some simple Makaton or BSL**
- **Don't forget the support workers** who know best how their service users communicate.

### Our 5 tips to museums

- **Create pre-visit resources** like a visual story or gallery plan for your museum or your event to minimise anxiety of the unexpected.
- **Think about your use of spaces** and consider setting aside an area or room as a quiet space for down-time.
- **Open up training opportunities** to other teams/departments and gather realistic scenarios to discuss.
- **Connect with service providers in your local area**
- **Take the experience to another level with interactivity** – make it more than a listening experience.

## Other photographs



*Photograph of relaxed concert*



*Photograph of concert goes taking part in object handling*

 @LondonMusDev



Supported using public funding by  
**ARTS COUNCIL  
ENGLAND**

