

SINGING AND STORIES AT LONDON TRANSPORT MUSEUM

London Transport Museum opened in Covent Garden in 1980 and explores the story of London and its transport system over the last 200 years, highlighting the powerful link between transport and the growth of modern London, culture and society. The collection holds 450,000 items from trains, trams and buses to uniforms, maps, tickets and posters.



SUMMARY

The under 5s Singing and Story sessions began in November 2015. They run every Tuesday during term time for children aged 0 to 5 year olds and their adults. There are six sessions that focus on a different type of transport, and they are delivered four times a day at 10.45am, 12pm, 1.45pm and 3pm. The sessions include parachute games, singing bespoke songs, dancing, stories and object handling. They are free for families to join and run on a drop-in basis. However, there is an entrance fee to the museum of £17.50 per adult for an annual ticket.

We commissioned a company called Artburst to develop the content of the sessions and they also deliver most of the sessions. Artburst is an award-winning social enterprise providing creative educational workshops that improve the lives of young people and their families. Artburst not only developed the sessions but wrote and recorded associated songs which are available on Spotify. The hope is that this makes the sessions more familiar and accessible to returning families.

The sessions both start and end with a song welcoming and saying goodbye to the families. Families play together using a parachute to explore the colours of London (eg red bus, green traffic light), hold and touch handling objects from the museum's collection and read a story together based on the weekly rotating theme. Then there is some music and movement time, including transport themed songs written by Artburst specially for the sessions!

AIMS AND GOALS

For our organisation

In March 2015, the museum opened the All Aboard family play zone aimed at children under seven years old. Following an increase in family visitors with children under seven to the museum and a positive response to All Aboard, we decided to offer sessions to complement the play zone and link it to the museum's collection. The development of these sessions also supported the museum's Enjoyment to Employment scheme, which seeks to offer inspiring opportunities for young people, teachers, parents and carers to engage with a diverse range of engineering careers. Furthermore, the sessions were to be part of a core museum family learning offer with the aim to open up more of the museum's stories and to 'provide appropriate interpretation of collections, exhibitions and events for all visiting families' (one of LTM's Family Learning Programme aims).

For our audience

Just under 50% of museum visitors to London Transport Museum are families and they don't just visit during weekends and school holidays. Many adults bring children under five to the museum regularly as part of their routine. The Singing and Stories sessions provides those returning families with a more varied experience. Furthermore, it encourages families to explore the galleries outside All Aboard, and look around them at the wider collection.

Another important factor that led to the development of the sessions was that we wanted to ensure that families feel welcome and that they have a sense of belonging in the museum. Some parents and carers might feel that if their child is running around, being loud or playing that they do not belong in a museum space. The museum's collection is full of buses, trains and other vehicles, which is a very popular topic for children under five, and we wanted to ensure that families with very young children felt welcome. We believe that targeted programming reassures families that they are welcome and considered.



OUTCOMES

For our organisation

One of the most significant outcomes of the sessions was that it has led to a further recognition of how successful programming can be if it's aimed at a specific audience/ age. This has now led to the museum's schools team offering nursery sessions. Previously nurseries would book to come to Year 1 sessions in which the content was often too advanced, despite experienced freelancers attempting to adapt them. There are now nursery sessions specifically designed to fit with the experiences and ages of some of our youngest school visitors.

Our biggest obstacle is space. Being in the old Covent Garden flower market building, the museum has an unusual layout. With the sessions taking place during term-time, our learning 'Transportorium' room is booked for primary school sessions, meaning the under 5s sessions take place in the galleries where it can often be loud, and where large objects can be distracting. But this is also positive, as the families are surrounded by the collection and we are able to make connections with museum objects during the sessions.

For our audience

A significant barrier for many families coming to the museum is our admission charge for anyone over the age of 17.

Despite this barrier, in 2016 1,175 under 5s and their adults took part in the sessions, which we consider to be a great success. An outcome that we celebrate is that once families attend a session, many will return each week. Regular families recognise songs to sing along to and have formed relationships with the facilitators.

Financial barriers are something that we will continue to consider: how can we ensure that families are not excluded from attending sessions simply because of the admission fee? In April 2018, the museum will be developing an outreach project in west London to expand the under 5s sessions and reach local communities around the museum's Depot site in Acton Town.

The four songs written by Artburst have been collectively listened to over 5,000 times on Spotify. The impact of having the songs readily available on Spotify has meant that the experience families have is not limited to the museum, but follows them home and in turn, hopefully creates excitement about returning. For outreach groups, we were easily able to direct families to the Spotify music so if they wanted to, they could listen to it before they came so they would find it familiar.



LESSONS LEARNT

Just because you programme something, it does not mean people will come. Whilst our programme has been successful, there have been times when it's been very quiet. We've needed marketing and have reached out to local community centres to make families more aware of what we offer.

The sessions were initially developed with the intention that a volunteer would be present to support the activities, although this wasn't essential. We have since found that the support of a volunteer is essential. We were not surprised by this discovery, as volunteers are a key part of the Learning team at the museum already, but what we have taken away from the sessions is that volunteers are vital to ensuring the involvement of parents and carers. The more adults jumping and dancing and singing along, the more it encourages the children to do the same, and the more fun is had by everyone!

TOP TIP

Get the experts in! Commissioning Artburst to develop the content meant that every element had been considered based on experience and knowledge of the under 5s audience.

BUDGET

Approximately £9,000 start-up costs, including development and resources
Approximately £6,500 annual delivery costs, including design, marketing, resources, training and delivery

FUNDING

Sessions are run using funding from our core Family Learning Programme. From 2018 we have funding from Arts Council England to expand the programme and engage the local community in west London surrounding the museum's Depot in Acton Town.

FURTHER INFORMATION

Visit our website. For more about family learning, visit:

ltmuseum.co.uk/learning/family-learning

Or for information about our schools programme for early years, go to:

ltmuseum.co.uk/learning/schools/early-years

This case study was written by Stephanie O'Neill-Winbow, Family and Community Learning Officer at the London Transport Museum.

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