



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 groups¹ 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.

The View (Epping Forest Collection) Case Study



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| Project Title: | Sensing the Forest |
| Project Timescales: | September 2018 – February 2019 |

¹ 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.

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| Project Budget: | £1000 |
| Area of diversity practice: | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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 Reaching diverse audiences to ensure its audience is more representative of its respective local community |
| Protected characteristic group museum worked with: | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Disability |
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Photograph of sensory workshop outputs and resources

What were the project's aims?

The project was based at two sites across two boroughs: The View (Waltham Forest) and The Temple (Redbridge)

- To make contact with, receive feedback from, and offer ways of making Epping Forest available, friendly and relevant to people with sight impairment.
- To extend and make a more stimulating offer to groups with other special needs as well as our general visitors of all ages.
- To develop a consultation framework that invites feedback.

- To increase awareness of our wider services and attract people with sight impairment to The View and The Temple.

Who did the museum work with?

The Museum service worked with pre-existing local vision groups in Waltham Forest and Redbridge. The original plan was to engage up to 8 sight impaired people from local vision groups who would work with The View as a consultative forum.

It was discovered there were several overlapping networks and therefore challenging to establish clear communication.

What did the project entail?

The View and The Temple have audiences from potentially 4 boroughs. The View attracts groups of young adults and social groups with additional needs, and have weekly sessions for people living with early stage dementia and their carers. However both the View and the Temple have only a small number of visitors with sight impairment.

The project to improve their multi-sensory interpretation and events to attract this group of potential users consisted of 3 stages;

1. Establishing connections with local vision groups,

The project commenced with liaison with local blind and partially sighted groups by the Museum and Heritage Manager and the Open Spaces Learning Team Community Officer who rang round individuals involved in local vision groups in Waltham Forest and Redbridge. The aim was to find a contact who would be able to invite the museum to meet pre-existing sight impaired groups and enable promotional material to be sent through existing networks. It was surprisingly confusing to find and to communicate clearly with overlapping networks of people involved in various groups, generally volunteer managed, which made it difficult to get hold of up-to-date organisers' contact details. This was narrowed down to the LB Waltham Forest Vision group who had a clear calendar of events in the autumn of 2018 with dates that would fit within the limited timescale of this project.

2. Consultation and testing

Participants were consulted by phone, at AGMs, at February targeted event, which led to a number of insights from the target audience:

- Preferred timing of events for this targeted group were weekday, daylight, not too early in the day.
- Refreshments were necessary and welcome.
- Indoor activities only in the winter months. Walks 'nice' for summer months.
- A range of seating (different heights, padded etc) requested.
- Regular museum object handling opportunities requested.
- Occasional guided walks for sight impaired requested.
- Lack of confidence in relevance of art activities for people Registered Blind though lots of enthusiasm from people with age related sight conditions.
- This participant group would have liked free transport. Though there isn't currently a means of offering this at the moment, potential partnership with existing services who do offer transport might be worth pursuing in the future.

3. Event delivery

- Promoted a weekday adult event – Multisensory birds, initially to the database of Vision contacts and then to the public.
- The art activities were adaptable to people with the full range of sightedness and included sound (bird song), scent (spring flowers), touch (replica bird eggs, carved wooden birds, taxidermy specimens) and art activities including linear (black and white markers); cut paper (solid colour shapes) and a foil embossing activity which resulted in a visual and tactile piece of artwork.
- A similar event was delivered in Half term as an intergenerational event.
- Several elements of the Bird activities were incorporated into a very limited winter public opening at The Temple, Wanstead Park (LB Redbridge) to assist a more multi-sensory telling of the Wanstead Park heritage narrative.
- The events were supported by an art exhibition 'Birds, Birds, Birds'. The exhibition was developed with opportunities for the public to add their own artwork in various ways.

What did the project achieve?

Output:

- Increased awareness of the museum offer through promotion of the cultural offer at Vision group meetings.
- Development of 4 sensory events:
 - Adult events
 - Family half term events
- Development of the 'Browse room'. A ground floor of The View with comfortable chairs, activities for both adults and children, to make a welcoming social and rest space for all users, including sight impaired and disability groups as well as families and those looking for quiet space to reflect.
- Art exhibition - 'Birds, Birds, Birds'

Outcomes:

- The bird-related activities were supported by an art exhibition 'Birds, Birds, Birds', the exhibition was developed over the course of January with opportunities for the public to add their own artwork in various ways. The full exhibition focussed on black and white artwork and included sound recordings of birds and toy birds which incorporate recordings of their song. These exhibitions in place to the end of March.
- Several elements of the Bird activities were incorporated into the very limited winter public opening at The Temple, Wanstead Park (LB Redbridge) with carved wooden birds, RSPB singing bird toys and a drawing activity as well as other handling replicas (pineapple, apricots, box trees) to assist a more multi-sensory telling of the Wanstead Park heritage narrative.
- The author Simon Barnes was not available to give a Bird Song talk but further initial discussions could lead to possible volunteer bird enthusiasts locally, leading bird listening walks in the more suitable spring months of the year when the birds are more vocal.

What impact did the project have?

On participants:

- The pleasure that people can take in handling museum objects: the participant described how handling the green woodpecker specimen ranked for him as a key life experience.

- A continued working relationship with an enthusiastic participant, especially in relation to future development of services in Wanstead Park, his local area of the Forest that he walks in with his partially sighted wife. His feedback really suggested that the activities were important and significant for him.

On the organisation:

- The contact with the single informative participant was so encouraging and confidence-building for the project leader to develop and re-offer these activities. At the targeted event they were delighted to 'test drive' a whole range of activities and give their feedback.
- A better understanding of access issues:
 - a. Language and sensitivities around using 'visual' terms and phrases.
 - b. Guiding – how staff can best assist with showing blind people around, getting through doors, how to give verbal descriptions.
 - c. Publications and promotion: Braille was offered but very few people now use it so only make available on request; apps and readers of online information are more commonly used, though there are great differences between age groups and at what age people lost their sight.
- The activities confirmed that all visitors, enjoy and benefit from objects they can touch, hear, smell – and that at a range of levels they want to 'do' and create as well.
- The various events will be reported on to the Epping Forest and Open Spaces Committee, governing body. This will be a useful advocacy tool in promoting how the museum service are working to bring quality and diversity into our visitor services offer.
- Four members of staff, and a volunteer, were able to participate in the activities as well as assist in their delivery which provided some 'bite-sized training' and confidence-building hands-on activity.

What lessons did the museum learn from the project?

The project confirmed that there is a magic for people of all ages, backgrounds, protected characteristics and otherwise, to actually touch and be up close to museum objects, probably particularly when this is as a 'special opportunity' to be up close to frail objects such as the stuffed bird collection.

It had been felt that adults would object to paying for their place alongside their child for family events. However it was positive putting on ticketed cross-generation art and craft events at half term as well as the usual drop-in provision.

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

1. Liaison with volunteer led Sight Impairment groups is time intensive and needs a very long lead-in time to successfully make contact, get information into networks, newsletters.
2. A continuing dedicated staff member in that role for the duration of the project would have been very useful. Our Community Liaison officer (and her post) ended a few months after the project began.
3. It also needs a long-term commitment to a one to three year project so that an organisation becomes more known to this targeted group.

4. Expect a different culture of communication: attendees at the AGM of the Vision group showed quite different dynamics than expected with a big range of non-sighted body language, alternative communication etiquette and differing discussion narratives.
5. Expect people to be individuals. Although as consistent with the demography of sight-impaired, the majority of the people encountered were over retirement age, the sight impaired and blind people that worked with had a very wide range of interests, abilities, levels of confidence, level of interest to our offer.
6. Be open to people not attending, even when they have booked, or otherwise expressed interest in attending. The feedback showed an expectation of a free event for Sight impaired visitors, but as with free bookable events, there's not an incentive to necessarily attend if other commitments or difficulties arise.

Other photographs



Photograph of sensory workshop resources



Photograph of outputs produced by workshop participants

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