

## ART ADVENTURERS AT DULWICH PICTURE GALLERY

**Dulwich Picture Gallery is the world's first purpose-built public art gallery. It houses a world-class collection of Old Master paintings in its unique building, designed by Sir John Soane. Since 2017, the gallery has developed its offer for families, including the new toddler programme, 'Art Adventurers', launched in 2018.**

### SUMMARY

Art Adventurers was developed in collaboration with Early Years specialists Holly Dabbs and Helen Maier. It runs once a month at 10am on a Friday, is delivered by one early years specialist and a team of three volunteers, and is ticketed with a capacity for 15 carers and 15 children.

The workshop revolves around the narrative that Jerome the Lion (a lion puppet based on a painting in the gallery's collection) invites families on an adventure through our paintings. In the gallery, the group explore three paintings related to a theme (people, nature, transport or buildings), through song, movement and role-play. Jerome then rewards the group with materials which they will use in an art making activity in the gallery's function room. This ranges from painting themselves using mirrors (people), to making their own buildings out of scrap cardboard (buildings).

Art Adventurers was piloted twice in August 2018, with two groups of 15 children and their carers, before launching in September 2018. The greatest finding from our pilots was that gallery attendants were anxious about interacting with this new audience and caring for the collection, and this created an atmosphere that participants picked up on. Consequently Learning, Curatorial and Visitor Services staff met to discuss changes that could be made to the programme to ensure the collection's safety, that staff were confident, and that early years audiences felt welcome. These changes included: encouraging the group to sit in front of paintings instead of standing, providing families with a song to sing or something to hold when moving between paintings, and briefing staff across all departments about working with toddlers.



## AIMS AND GOALS

### For our organisation

Before the development of this programme, the Gallery had no offer for families with children aged 2-4 years old. Given that the Gallery is surrounded by areas that are highly populated by young families (East Dulwich, Forest Hill, Herne Hill), this presented a huge number of potential local visitors. Furthermore, the young families who were already visiting the Gallery were either bringing their toddlers to our workshops for 6-24 month olds, or our drop-ins for 4-12 year olds, so we were losing relationships with families once their children reached 24 months. There was clearly a need for a dedicated offer for 2-4 year olds.

### For our audience

Given the nature of our collection, building, and location, the Gallery can be an intimidating place for families to visit. Carers have previously expressed concerns about their children touching objects or making noise. Consequently, it was really important to develop a programme that ensured young families felt valued as members of our community, confident in accessing and exploring the Gallery space itself, and able to engage with an untouchable collection of Old Masters, which has the potential to feel irrelevant and not child-friendly.

## OUTCOMES

### For our organisation

The Art Adventurers programme has inspired a new approach to working with our visitors, especially young families. Across a number of our other family workshops we are now experimenting with storytelling, singing and movement. In a space that could previously be perceived as quiet and intimidating, it is no longer unusual to hear nursery rhymes being sung or children speaking aloud confidently.

It has also led to changes in audiences' perception of the Gallery as an organisation. A review from one participant: 'A lot of galleries can be quite stuffy and quiet – but not here, in fact noise is encouraged! And it made everyone in the gallery smile'.

### For our audience

We have witnessed a marked improvement in the confidence of young families visiting the Gallery. Many participants have commented that being part of a group, and the encouragement to sing and move by friendly staff, has made them feel more comfortable.

We are also just beginning to see regular families who had already been attending 'Mini Masterpieces' (6-24mths) moving on to Art Adventurers, ensuring we maintain a relationship with them.



## LESSONS LEARNT

As an institution, our biggest takeaway was how important cross-departmental collaboration is. By inviting our Learning, Curatorial and Visitor Services departments to discuss the development of the programme, we were able to agree to adjustments that would not compromise the quality of the programme or safety of our collection. This has now ensured that after initial anxieties at the programme's piloting stage, Art Adventurers has been running smoothly, with all parties feeling invested and confident in it.

Our biggest surprise was that other visitors were more open to accommodating toddler groups than anticipated. Some of those present during the pilots expressed a desire not to share the space with toddlers (mainly due to noise), but also a willingness to visit at another time if they were made aware of the times when 'Art Adventurers' ran. Communication is key internally and externally.

## FUNDING

Art Adventurers cost £1,700 to develop, including artists' development fees and materials. These costs were covered by profits from the Gallery's Mini Masterpieces programme for 6-24 month olds and their carers.

## BUDGET

Dulwich Picture Gallery is a charity, and receives no government funding. Consequently our family programme is charged-for.

Art Adventurers continues to run, with ticket sales covering the programme's budget. Tickets cost £12 including one adult and one child. This covers the early years specialist's delivery fee and cost of updating materials.

## TOP TIP

Make no assumptions. The young families, other visitors and gallery staff we worked with continually surprised us, and demonstrated how important it is to ask questions and communicate effectively.

## FURTHER INFORMATION

You can read more about the gallery's early years programme on our website: [dulwichpicturegallery.org.uk/whats-on/early-years/2018/summer/early-years-summer-2018/](https://dulwichpicturegallery.org.uk/whats-on/early-years/2018/summer/early-years-summer-2018/)

Please feel free to contact Rachel Prosser, the gallery's Adult and Family Learning Manager if you have any questions.

This case study was written by Rachel Prosser, Adult and Family Learning Manager at DPG, and Early Years specialists, Holly Dabbs and Helen Maier.

All images © Dulwich Picture Gallery, 2019

