

The Great North Museum: Hancock is part of Newcastle University and Tyne & Wear Archives & Museums. With galleries featuring natural sciences, ethnography and archaeology collections, the museum is often described as ‘the world under one roof’. Our dedicated early years space the Mouse House is supported by an associated programme of under 5s activities.

SUMMARY

Approximately 152 toddlers and their parents and carers attended the museum for our Toddler Takeover morning. This was a free event but booking was essential so that we could keep numbers manageable. To reduce congestion at activities we staggered arrival times, and advised that each child should spend between 60-90 minutes exploring the activities at their own pace. We also provided a temporary buggy park and snack space to meet the practical needs of our participants.

The activities during the event were elements of different museum jobs. Each child was given a job list to help them explore which included Makaton symbols. We wanted to work with schematic play themes, as it hooks into young children’s common and natural behaviours.

Jobs at the Toddler Takeover:

Gallery Patrol

Each child was given a laminated Gallery Patrol bracelet with four photographs of objects. Their job was to check that the objects were still in the gallery.

Schemas: rotation/connecting



Packing boxes

Children were tasked with making puff balls and puff sausages to pack precious objects into boxes.

Schemas: covering/containing

Cleaning

Using cloths and microfibre dusters children were encouraged to clean the glass of low casing, and used dustpans to sweep up tissue paper squares.

Schemas: trajectory/connecting/transporting

Transporting objects

Toddle trucks were used to transport small boxes containing toy animals around the gallery.

Schemas: transporting/connecting/containing

Sorting our store room

A mock store room filled with animal toys was home to our sorting game. Using dice to help them, children sorted animals into the categories of fly/walk/swim.

Schemas: trajectory/orientation/linear/containing

AIMS AND GOALS

For our organisation

Part of the museum's strategic aims is the further development of our early years programme, and to raise the profile of our university museum by engaging with national initiatives. The Kids in Museums Takeover Day is a national initiative that gave us an opportunity to marry these aims.

For our audience

Working with the Kids in Museums Manifesto, we wanted to show families with young children that museums are places for them too. This event aimed to nurture the curiosity of some of our youngest visitors. In true takeover style we wanted to welcome toddlers and their families to engage in the daily running of museum life, by simplifying aspects of museum jobs, and designing activities that enabled opportunity for schematic play.

OUTCOMES

For our organisation

This event offered greater capacity than our regular under 5s activities and attracted a large number of new visitors. As a result our early years programme has expanded and grown in popularity. Capturing contact details at the booking stage of the event means we can keep our visitors informed about upcoming events and encourage subsequent engagement with the programme. Our growing popularity led to our museum being shortlisted for the Kids in Museums Family Friendly Award after being nominated by many of the families that took part in the Toddler Takeover event.

Following our first takeover event, the Kids in Museums team contacted us and wanted to write a case study to feature on their website which is helping to raise our profile.

For our audience

Opportunities for schematic play invited children to engage in activities that captured their interest and provided a platform for other learning opportunities.

Staff observed children being highly involved with their chosen tasks and adults commented that the activities were appropriate and exciting. The toddlers and their families discovered new ways to explore the galleries and many have returned to participate in other aspects of our programme.



LESSONS LEARNT

We had such a positive experience with running our first Toddler Takeover day. Visitors felt welcomed to the museum as it was an event especially for them. Since running our first takeover we have run another and plan to continue running them at least twice a year.

Our toddle trucks were so exciting that they did not always stay in their designated area and some visitors struggled to find and participate in this activity. Due to their popularity, we invested in a few more toddle trucks and now use them regularly for smaller toddler events such as 'On the Move' and 'Toddle Truck Tours'. We have changed the way we provide messaging for these activities to reflect the way that participants use them.

The Gallery Patrol bracelets were also a huge success and we have subsequently used this format to support other events in the museum.

Running the Toddler Takeover gave us the confidence to also run a takeover day for home educated family groups, and Baby Gallery Takeover events, which we developed in response to visitor feedback.

TOP TIP

Manage the expectations of an event like this by sending out pre-visit information explaining what participants should expect, such as self-guided activities to complete during their visit and basic practical information, eg where buggies can be stored and where food can be eaten.

BUDGET

To keep costs low we used existing resources, borrowed resources from other cultural venues where possible, and involved student volunteers to support activities.

FUNDING

This project was free to take part in for visiting families.

It was financed through our Mouse House budget, which is project funded through the Shears Foundation and core funded through Newcastle University.

FURTHER INFORMATION

Visit the Great North Museum: Hancock special projects page to learn more about Toddler Takeover, Baby Takeover and Home Education Takeover.

greatnorthmuseum.org.uk/learning/project-case-studies

To get involved with Kids in Museums national Takeover Day project, please take a look at their website.

kidsinmuseums.org.uk

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