

## DELIVERING STORYTIME WITH YOUR VISITOR EXPERIENCE TEAM

**The Museum of London tells the story of the capital and its people from prehistoric times to the present day. The museum has three sites, the Museum of London in the City, the Museum of London Docklands in Canary Wharf that charts the history of the River Thames and London's trade with the rest of the world, and the Museum of London Archaeological Archive in Hackney (the largest archive of its kind in the world).**

### SUMMARY

Under 5s storytime sessions have been running since 2008 and take place every Thursday at 3-3.30pm. All sessions take place in the galleries, they are free and visitors don't have to book in advance.

The Early Years Programme Manager works closely with the Visitor Experience team leaders to identify which Hosts would be interested in delivering a story or might benefit from the experience. We then run a training session (usually half day) where we find out about the Hosts' experience and skills, discuss how to deliver an effective story and observe established storytellers, including more experienced Hosts. The new Hosts are then given time off the floor to develop their own story. Stories range from traditional tales and well-known books, to made-up stories that are based on objects in our collection. It is important that every story has a link back to the museum in some way. For instance, at our museum in Docklands, many stories have themes exploring boats, pirates and water.

Once Hosts are ready to deliver, we ask them to sign up on the storytime rota, which is coordinated by the early years team. The team monitors the rota and ensures that there is a storyteller for each week, but there is enough flexibility to allow Hosts the freedom to select dates that suit them best. On the day of the sessions the early years team always provides practical support to the Host, including preparing resources and supporting set up and pack down.



## AIMS AND GOALS

### For our organisation

- Work more effectively and collaboratively across departments, eg improve communication and understanding of each other's everyday duties
- Build on and utilise the knowledge of existing Visitor Experience Hosts who already deliver adult tours and object handling
- Develop our Hosts' experience in working with this age group, enabling us to work with them in different capacities in the future

### For our audience

- Enable families to see the Hosts role as more than security, and to feel welcome in our galleries
- Enable families to experience a wide range of different styles of delivery and types of events
- Utilising existing staff meant that we could run events on a more regular basis at no extra cost

## OUTCOMES

### For our organisation

Communication has improved between the departments and we now have a key person to speak to who can act as a learning advocate within the Visitor Experience department. Hosts are also interested in supporting the Learning team in other ways, eg delivering family tours and family storytelling sessions, and some have moved into roles within the Learning department.

Each Host is assigned an area of focus as part of their professional development, including one host being a representative for the early years programme. This Host has designed, trialled and evaluated a new gallery trail on the theme of shapes, which would not have been created otherwise.

### For our audience

The sessions are very popular and families often remember Hosts and ask for them by name. Offering families a larger variety of stories and storytellers has improved the quality of our offer and under 5s storytime is a regular part of the early years programme. These sessions offer an alternative to our oversubscribed bookable activities, meaning that more families can participate in our programme.



## LESSONS LEARNT

Working with our Visitor Experience department improved the range and increased the size of the early years offer, and means that we can dedicate more of our time to other parts of the programme.

Training Hosts gives them the opportunity to gain experience of delivering to a different audience in a different style and supports their professional development. It also has wider benefits for the museum, eg Hosts feel more equipped to advise visitors if they have a better understanding of different learning programmes and how they work. We have learnt how talented our Hosts really are and that we should utilise their expertise more often.

Sometimes it has been difficult to ensure that Hosts have enough time away from their regular duties to develop and practice their story, as we don't have control of this. Not all Hosts are full-time and they all work across our two sites, so sometimes this means that people aren't available and the early years team need to step in and deliver the session instead. We have learnt to be flexible in this sense and are always prepared to deliver the sessions ourselves if necessary.

## TOP TIP

Utilising the skills and expertise of your visitor experience department (as well as other departments) helps to create a broader and more varied early years offer and shows an organisation-wide commitment to being family-friendly.

## BUDGET

Resources for storytime sessions are used over and over again. Replenishment approx £150 a year.

## FUNDING

The early years programme is funded by Arts Council England.

## FURTHER INFORMATION

Don't forget to see our [top tips for storytelling!](#)

This case study was written by Victoria Smith, Early Years Programme Manager at the Museum of London.

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