

**LONDON  
MUSEUM  
DEVELOPMENT**

**London Museum Development**

**Diversity Matters Programme**

**2018-2022**

London Museum Development's (LMD'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 groups<sup>1</sup> 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, LMD asked museums to share their experiences of developing responsive and diverse programmes, exhibitions, collections, audience initiatives, workforce and trustee boards. 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.

## **Brent Museum & Archive Case Study**



**Brent**  
Museum & Archives

<b>Project Title:</b>	The Somali contribution to the First World War
<b>Project Timescales:</b>	June 2017 – March 2018

<sup>1</sup> 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.

<p><b>Project Budget:</b></p>	<p>£11,500 <i>This project was funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund.</i></p>
<p><b>Area of diversity practice:</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 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</li> <li>• Reaching diverse audiences to ensure its audience is more representative of its respective local community</li> </ul>
<p><b>Protected characteristic group museum worked with:</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Religion and belief</li> <li>• Class and socio-economic status</li> </ul>
<p><b>Contact details for further information:</b></p>	<p>Dorian Knight, Heritage Officer: <a href="mailto:Dorian.Knight@brent.gov.uk">Dorian.Knight@brent.gov.uk</a></p>



*Photograph of Launch Event*

**What were the project's aims?**

The project had the following aims:

- To explore and capture the contributions that Somalis made in the first and second world wars by focusing on training 10 young people with Somali heritage to gather stories about Somali men and women who fought in these wars

- To address the 'invisibility' of the Somali community within the UK and highlight positive integration stories
- To educate young Somalis in the contributions their grandparents made to the UK. Brent Museum & Archives hoped to document and share the contribution to WW1 centenary events and offer the opportunity to explore little known narratives of WW1 and military expeditions in East Africa
- To document and share the hidden history of Somali refugees in the UK and bridge the gap between the Somali community, service providers and policy makers as well as the older and younger Somali generations
- To fill an identified gap in Brent Museum and Archives' collections relating to the Somali community within the London Borough of Brent.

## Who did the museum work with?

Brent has a significant and growing Muslim population and Brent Museum and Archives and 'Learning Through the Arts' initially put a callout to community groups who wanted to be involved in the 'Back From The Western Front' Project. The Somali Advice and Forum of Information (SAAFI) with support from the Somaliland Scouts Association and as recognised members of the First World War Centenary Partnership Programme responded to this callout.

Brent Museum and Archives worked with SAAFI, a community-based organisation initiated and led by Somali-British mothers from refugee backgrounds in Brent to help each other and their families and to support others in need. SAAFI's purpose is to raise the profile of the British-Somali community in Brent and help them to integrate within mainstream British society through workshops, training and cultural events.

## What did the project entail?

The project explored the legacy of African soldiers in the First World War with the intention of bringing together community research, personal stories and artwork created by local families.

As part of the project the Museum:

- Provided agreed display spaces to exhibit the outputs of the project: specifically, the Civic Centre Display Wall, May-July 2018, and the display on the Community Wall at the Library at Willesden Green, August-October 2018
- Provided professional advice in setting up the exhibition. Specifically good practice in panel writing and design and some support in proofing and signing off the panels. Content for the panels was not generated by Brent Museum and Archives but by project staff
- Provided the Education Room at the Library at Willesden Green free of charge for an agreed number of volunteer sessions and creative workshops
- Provided an introductory tour of Brent Museum and Archives for project volunteers and staff.
- Provided access to view relevant archival material - such as local newspapers from 1914-1918.
- Assisted with publicising the project and any subsequent events via social media channels and other marketing channels available to them, in agreement with SAAFI
- Made recommendations of local contacts in the area
- Archived the oral history recordings and transcripts collected through the project
- Maintained regular email correspondence throughout the project with SAAFI.

As part of the project SAAFI:

- Provided a project plan to BMA for assessments and review
- Maintained correspondence and communication throughout the project life span with participants
- Led on all aspects of the project which fed into the exhibition
- Worked with BMA to ensure that outcomes and deadlines were met for the project.

## What did the project achieve?

Outputs included:

- So far, 2,080 visited the travelling exhibition comprising of photographs, interpretation panels, maps and objects exhibited at two locations within the London Borough of Brent
- 15 interpretation panels written by 10 young people and other participants
- Archive and oral history training to 10 young people across the Somali community in the London Borough of Brent. Objects donated to the museum included: a collection of postal stamps from the First World War, a water harvester, a milk can and several spoons, all objects were in use until recently in rural areas of Somaliland
- Transcribing and digitising collected oral histories deposited with Brent Museum and Archives (BMA) to become part of their permanent collection. This has included 6 interviews (of which 2 are audio interviews and 1 video interview)
- A number of celebratory events including performances linked to Brent Dance Month and talks aimed at an adult audience.

Outcomes included\*:

- An improved inter-generational understanding within the Somali community
- Better understanding of Somali heritage both within and outside the Somali community
- The project addressed 'invisibility' of the Somali community in the UK and the given prominence to the historic record of the Somali contribution to the First World War
- An improved reflection of the borough's diversity in Brent Museum and Archives' (BMA's) collections.

*\* Please note that evaluation is ongoing at the time of writing, so these outcomes are based on initial reactions.*

## What impact did the project have?

- The project has strengthened ties between the museum and the Somali community within the Borough of Brent and has laid the foundation for future successful partnership work between The Somali Advice and Forum of Information (SAAFI) and museum
- Part of the offer within the partnership agreement was an introductory tour of the museum for all SAAFI project staff and volunteers. Access was also provided to view material relevant to the project such as local newspapers from 1914-1918. The popularity of such events suggests a great awareness of the museum by members within the Somali community and will hopefully encourage future visits to the museum and archives
- The museum has a strong history of working with community partners. The success of the partnership agreement between SAAFI and the museum will be used as a blueprint for all future partnership working.
- The legacy of the project is rich and varied. All oral histories gathered have been digitally preserved and have become part of the museum's permanent collection which will be showcased in future exhibitions and which will be publicly available through the museum's website.

- All objects collected as part of the project have been donated to the museum and form part of museum's permanent collection which the museum aim to showcase in future exhibitions and which will be publicly available through the museum's online catalogue
- Resources developed throughout the project will be utilised at special events on an ongoing basis such as during refugee week and throughout black history month
- SAAFI have shared the outcomes of the project with relevant organisations such as schools and authorities who work with the Somali community to address issues raised throughout the project
- The museum has also widened their number of contacts within the Somali community and those connected to the Somali community.

### **What lessons did the museum learn from the project?**

The museum felt it learnt the following lessons and would do the following thing differently next time:

- Have all relevant policies already in place to back up organisational decisions
- Ensure responsibility for community engagement across your organisation. This includes getting museum volunteers and interns involved where possible
- Have a standardised approach to exhibition development. For example, agreed upon installation methods at the start of the project
- Have a well thought out plan about how the project could have a wider impact outside its immediate remit, for example exploring how the named project with SAAFI could have worked with nationwide events like Black History Month
- Having an evidence framework agreed upon with the partner organisation
- Staff training to identify steps and formal building blocks of community engagement
- The partner organisation would deliver training to museum staff on relevant community issues, which would help strengthen the impact of the project.

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

The Museum would offer the following tips to staff working with this group:

- Ensure other staff in your department are on-board/aware they may need to be involved/offer advice
- Maintain regular contact to ensure the project is on schedule
- If the exhibition is travelling make sure the exhibition is well suited to those various locations.
- Develop an honest self-evaluation/reflection process
- If you have new members of staff on-board ensure that they are very familiar with the history of how your organisation has worked with a specific community group.

The Museum would offer the following tips to those working on a similar project:

- Set out a partnership agreement with very clear guidelines delineating responsibilities for both your organisation and the partner organisation
- Be open to what the community group want if you aim to have a truly co-curated approach instead of the partner organisation just being beneficiaries of the museum
- Be well prepared by having policies and in-house guidelines already written, as you will get asked a lot of questions and you should have these documents ready to refer to
- Try and streamline how events are marketed early on, i.e. do you and the community group both share Facebook events, do you design your own promotional material, etc.

- Figure out a way early on in the project how to deal with the perception that increasing audiences conflicts with income generation.

## Other photographs



Left Image: Invite to the private view / Right Image: marketing for the exhibition

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