

**LONDON
MUSEUM
DEVELOPMENT**

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.

Museum of the Order of St John Case Study



Project Title:	Welcoming Families with Autism
Timescales:	October 2019-April 2020
Budget:	£650

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.

Overall area of diversity practice covered as part of project:		Yes
	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	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	Reaching diverse audiences to ensure its audience is more representative of its respective local community	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Arts Council England's Creative Case for Diversity evidence area covered as part of project:		Yes
	Integrating diversity in the museum's programme	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	Engaging a diverse range of people in developing/delivering programmes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Protected characteristic group museum worked with as part of project:		Yes
	Age	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	Disability	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
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Photograph of quiet space set up for families

What were the project's aims?

The aim of the project was to:

- Better equip the Museum to welcome families with special educational needs and neurodiversity, specifically autism
- Realise the museum's aspiration to be a fully inclusive organisation
- Establish a sustainable autism-friendly offer through consultation with families with autism and the procurement of the necessary resources, the training of staff and the trialling of activities.

Who did the museum work with?

The consultation session was advertised via the museum's website, Facebook page, Hoop and Twitter, as well as through a contact from Islington Council's 'Creative Art Group for autistic children and young people' who are based near the museum in Holborn. Spaces for 10 children (plus accompanying adults) were made available via Eventbrite, and all 10 spots were reserved within 24 hours. On the day only two families turned up to participate in the consultation and participate in the planned activities.

What did the project entail?

Staff ran a consultation session specifically for families with autism about how the museum could best cater their families' going forward. As part of the consultation session families were invited to participate in a family activity session, as well as trial and feedback on resources created as part of the project.

To prepare for the consultation session, staff organised [Dimensions' Autism-friendly museum training](#). This was delivered to 9 museum staff and as well as staff from Islington Museum and The Charterhouse (local non-national museums). As a result of the training staff amended the planned craft activity to be more inclusive. In order to ensure that there were activities to suit each child's needs, staff developed a range and choice of activities.

They decided to set up a second table with a pharmacy jar-themed activity and colouring sheets, alongside the one for decorating ceramic jar. The storyteller was also asked to provide a lot of props to aid their sessions such as dressing-up clothes, musical instruments, soft toys and puppets, which were to be used to engage the children throughout the session.

As part of the training it was also recommended the museum turn off all the hand dryers in the museum on the day of the consultation and activities and put up signs about this, thereby also creating an opportunity to make the general public aware of the museum's autism-friendly programme.

Prior the session the museum sent participating families a visual story specifically about the session and outlining what would be involved in each of the different activities. The craft activity involved families decorating little ceramic jars, inspired by the historic pharmacy jars in the museum's collections, as well as enabling the families to decorate crowns, swords and shields (inspired by the Knights of St John) with herbs and petals. The storytelling session included a visit to the museum's garden to look and smell the medicinal herbs that would have been stored in the pharmacy jars.

The museum also set up a quiet room in a next-door gallery with chairs, bean bags, cushions, blankets, fidget toys, colouring paper and pens, a jug of water and the museum's visual stories. This was for families to visit whenever they wanted to for as long as they wanted, to enable families to take a break from the sensory input in the activity room.

Alongside the craft and storytelling activities staff ran a consultation session. During the session staff asked for feedback on their newly designed and created visual story and sensory map about visiting the museum and going on a guided tour. In designing these, staff had looked at examples from other institutions, as well as guidance from [Kids in Museum's Guide to welcoming families and young people with autism](#) and the [National Autistic Society's Guidelines for achieving the Autism Friendly Award](#).

The families were consulted through informal conversations throughout the session. One family said their family did not need the visual story, whilst the other family said how useful it had been for the visual story to be provided in advance and was excellent in helping their child to know what to expect and prepare them for the visit. Staff observed that the children were evidently comfortable and happy in the environment staff had created and the activities on offer. Following feedback about the overall session, staff intend to run future sessions based on the same successful format.

Following the consultation session the visual stories and sensory map have since been published on the museum's [website](#) to enable families with autistic children to prepare for their visit. They have also been printed and bound and made available for visitors to borrow during their visit, along with emotions communication cards, fidgets and ear defenders as was suggested by the participating families.

Staff also wrote a [blog post](#) about the project on the museum's website. This and the visual stories were shared on Twitter for further feedback from users and received a number of comments, likes and retweets. As a result of this Autism in Museums asked the museum to share their project, experience and tips during [@museumhour](#) as part of Autism Week on 6 April.

What did the project achieve?

Outputs included:

Number of staff receiving autism-friendly training:	11
Total number of participants worked with:	4
Total number of sessions with participants:	1
Total number of general visitors made aware of the event:	56*
Total number of visual stories created:	2

* More visitors have seen the museum's blog post and social media posts about the event

Outcomes included:

- Both families stayed a considerable length of time at the activities and were evidently happy and relaxed throughout
- Having attended the activity session, both families felt confident enough to visit the museum galleries independently immediately afterwards
- Both families thought that in future they would feel able to attend activities planned and open to all families
- General visitors were very positive in their responses to finding they could not access certain spaces and finding out about the activity going on
- Following the blog and Twitter posts about the project, Autism in Museums asked staff to participate in [@museumhour](#) as part of Autism Week.

What impact did the project have?

On the organisation:

- Staff have gained confidence in working with this audience thanks to the autism awareness training and experience of working with them during the activities
- The museum has increased the visibility of working with families with autism by providing permanent resources on the museum's website and at the museum, as well as writing about the project in a blogpost and on social media
- The quick sign-up of the session demonstrated to staff the demand for such sessions and that families with autism want to engage with the museum's work, collections and public programmes, which has helped with the internal advocacy to continue to offer these sessions in the future
- As a result of the session the museum is looking at making its general family activities more autism-friendly, such as always providing a quiet room and a visual story
- The museum intends to keep offering regular autism-friendly family activity sessions, making use of the resources that were purchased that will follow the same format
- As a result of the project the museum intends to achieve the [National Autistic Society's Autism Friendly Award](#), which would enable even more families with autism to feel welcome and confident in visiting the museum.

On the participants:

- Neither of the families who came had visited the museum before and by the end of the session both felt able to visit the museum independently and now feel able to attend activities for all families in the future.

What lessons did the museum learn from the project?

Key lessons staff learnt included:

- By undertaking the autism awareness training staff were able to make changes to the project to make it more engaging for participants
- The museum decided not to have the visual stories embellished by a professional illustrator as following feedback from the families it was felt it needed to be as simple and clear as possible and not include any unnecessary or fictitious additions
- The museum also decided not to have the stories professionally printed as staff realised that it was important that they are very regularly updated and that the museum can print them to a sufficient standard in house
- Staff also saw the importance of providing a comfortable quiet room and following guidance from Kids in Museums bought some bean bags and fleece blankets for this
- Although only two families attended the autism-friendly family activity, this was a real highlight as it was clear this was a very special day out for these families
- A key lesson from the project has been about managing numbers. Not wanting there to be an overwhelming number of people at the session (which would have made it not autism friendly), we only made spaces for ten children (plus accompanying adults) available. However, only two turned up on the day. As a result, one family in the consultation said that it would have been nice for their child to have interacted with more children. The museum therefore intend in future to overbook to account for this. Staff are also considering introducing a nominal charge and/or emailing all those who are signed up a few days beforehand to let the museum know if they can no longer attend so that their spaces can be made available to others.

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

1. When running an autism-friendly family activity, ensure there is a choice of activities which participants can move between whenever they like – some can be very simple, like dressing up or colouring
2. If you can, turn off the hand dryers in all the public toilets, and put signs up outside saying that they are off so that people can be confident in going into the toilets that they won't be confronted with the noise
3. Consider overbooking for sessions as it can be difficult for families with autism to even leave the house to go to a new place, so you are likely to have a high dropout rate
4. Don't forget autistic children become autistic adults – think about how you can cater for them too
5. Try to find ways to offer autism-friendly sessions during normal opening hours – it is as hard, if not even harder, for families with autism to get up early for a day out.

Other photographs

Coming on a guided tour of the Museum of the Order of St John



You can visit the Museum galleries at any time during our opening hours. To visit the historic rooms upstairs at St John's Gate as well as the church and crypt you must go on a guided tour.

Photograph of first pages of the visual story



Photograph of one of the craft activities



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