



## 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 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, 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 Croydon Case Study

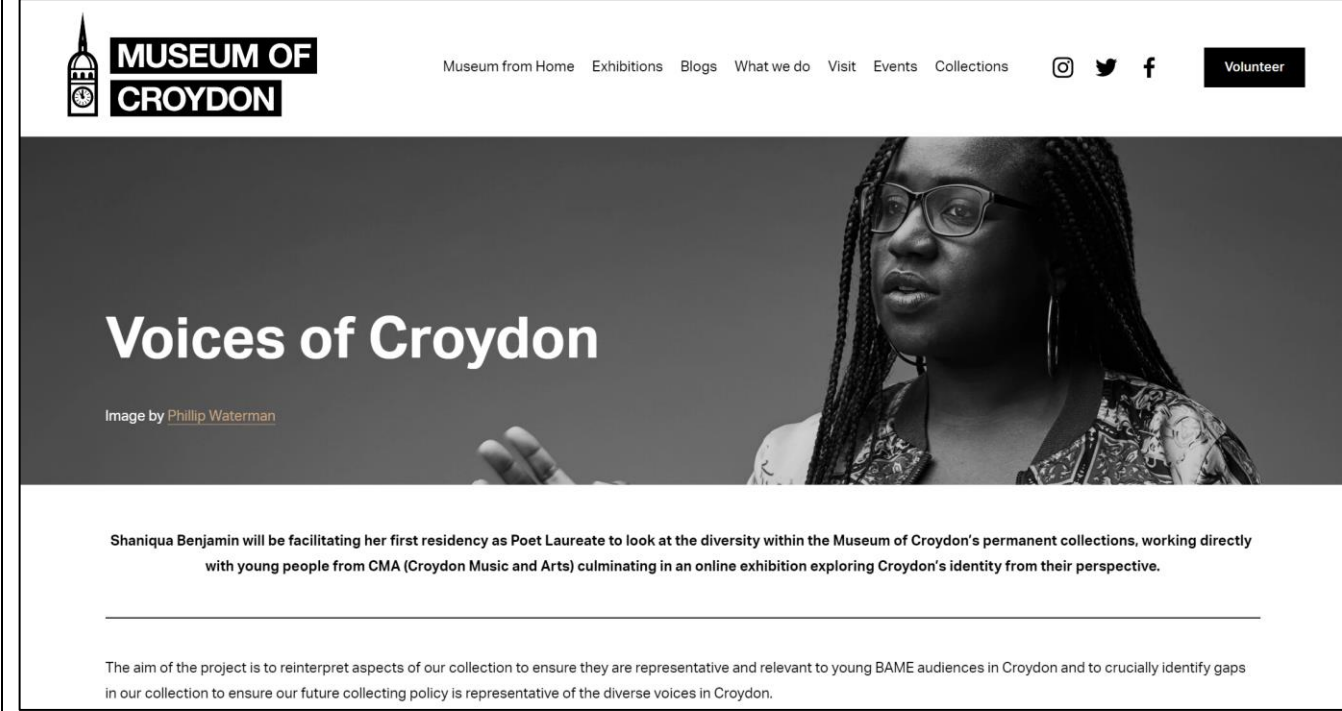


**MUSEUM OF  
CROYDON**

<b>Project Title:</b>	Voices of Croydon	
<b>Timescales:</b>	September 2020-March 2021	
<b>Budget:</b>	£1,000	
		<b>Yes</b>

<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.

<b>Overall area of diversity practice covered as part of project:</b>	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"/>
<b>Arts Council England's <a href="#">Creative Case for Diversity</a> evidence area covered as part of project:</b>		<b>Yes</b>
	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"/>
<b>Protected characteristic group museum worked with as part of project:</b>	Supporting diverse practitioners	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
		<b>Yes</b>
	Age	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<b>Contact details for further information:</b>	Race	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	Marie Tulley-Rose, Museum & Archive Manager: <a href="mailto:marie.tulley-rose@croydon.gov.uk">marie.tulley-rose@croydon.gov.uk</a>	



The screen-grab shows the Museum of Croydon website. At the top is the museum's logo and navigation links: Museum from Home, Exhibitions, Blogs, What we do, Visit, Events, Collections. Social media icons for Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook are also present, along with a 'Volunteer' button. The main banner features a black and white portrait of Shaniqua Benjamin with the title 'Voices of Croydon' and the credit 'Image by Phillip Waterman'. Below the banner, text announces that Shaniqua Benjamin will be facilitating her first residency as Poet Laureate to look at the diversity within the Museum of Croydon's permanent collections, working directly with young people from CMA (Croydon Music and Arts) culminating in an online exhibition exploring Croydon's identity from their perspective. A paragraph below states the aim of the project is to reinterpret aspects of the collection to ensure they are representative and relevant to young BAME audiences in Croydon and to crucially identify gaps in the collection to ensure the future collecting policy is representative of the diverse voices in Croydon.

*Screen-grab of workshops to develop content for the exhibition*

### What were the project's aims?

The aim of the project was to:

- Enable the museum to better understand the BAME voices in its collection by working with young BAME adults to explore the diversity in the collection and crucially highlight where stories are missing
- Enable the museum to go back to its primary approach of co-curation and to focus on the significance of authenticity over interpretation
- Work with Croydon's new BAME Poet Laureate and local BAME young people to co-curate a new exhibition
- Collect and accession the young people's responses into the museum's collections.

## Who did the museum work with?

The museum worked with Croydon's new BAME Poet Laureate, [Shaniqua Benjamin](#) to empower BAME young people from the [Croydon's Music and Arts Youth Collective](#) to explore the revisit the museum's collection and create new interpretations of these objects to be accessioned into the museum's permanent collection. Together, they also co-curated a new online exhibition of their work. Alongside this Shaniqua was also commissioned to run workshops for local residents to create poetic interpretations of the collections to also be accessioned into the museum's collection and included in the online exhibition.

Shaniqua founded Young People Insight as an opportunity for young people in the borough to develop critical thinking skills, writing and debating skills through 'Kick Back' sessions where they discussed topics they selected. Shaniqua was therefore, very experienced in engaging young people with challenging topics, in a way that was meaningful to them and gave them full agency to explore. The museum wanted this approach because it wanted to be as hands off as possible, in order enable the young people to explore the collection fully, without influencing the conversation and discussions. Shaniqua therefore acted as facilitator between the group of young people and the museum to ensure the most came from the conversations and responses to deliver meaningful change.

## What did the project entail?

Shaniqua worked with 8 14-22 year old young people from the Croydon Music and Arts (CMA) Youth Collective as part of the project. This group were an existing engaged group of young people from predominantly BAME backgrounds. As part of CMA's youth collective they had a vested interest in the arts and culture within Croydon and were keen to have a role in promoting it, but also producing content for the museum.

This group came out of connection of CMA as part of Croydon Council and also Shaniqua's previous work on several projects so it was a trusted relationship to explore this new way of thinking with the museum. The young people attended 5 online sessions and created pieces of poetry, music and digital media in response to the museum's archives. The work created was then used to create a co-curated online exhibition, website and branding. The online exhibition will open shortly. The young people will also co-devise the exhibition launch event and corresponding Instagram takeover.

Alongside the young people's work, the online exhibition will also feature poetry and work from local BAME adults. As part of the project, the Poet Laureate was also commissioned to produce a series of online interactive workshops to enable local community members to view and participate during their own time and submit their poems online directly to the museum. The online self-led tutorials can be found [here](#). Additional poems were submitted from the community and have been added into the online exhibition.

The project also featured in an article in the East London Lines [here](#), talking about how the project has given BAME young people in Croydon a chance to re-write Croydon's history. The project has also had 6,368 Twitter impressions and 796 Instagram impressions, which have mentioned the project. One of the most important achievements from the project, was the fact it established a meaningful partnership with Croydon's Music and Arts Youth Collective, which will lead onto their wider Voices of Croydon project, which looks at diversity in the curriculum.

## What did the project achieve?

### Outputs included:

Total number of participants worked with:	8
Total number of sessions with participants:	6
Total number of co-curated events for general visitors:	1
Total number of co-curated online exhibitions for general visitors:	1
Total number of general visitors who have visited the online exhibition:	253*

\* \*\* So far, figures provided are from June 2021

### Outcomes included:

- Participants enjoyed the project - participants really enjoyed working with Shaniqua Benjamin especially as she is a practising local artist. One participants said 'I've really enjoyed working with you, can you come back next week?'
- Feedback on social media to the project has been really positive and has increased Shaniqua's profile as Croydon Poet Laureate and the museum has been applauded for looking at its collections openly from this aspect of diversity, with @Drew10years left saying on Twitter "Great approach to improving diversity in public involvement."

## What impact did the project have?

### On the organisation:

- This project allowed the museum to test and thereby reinforce its new mission statement: "The Museum of Croydon seeks to recognise its Communities, Cultures and Citizens as experts in their own histories. We seek to provide a radical space to celebrate our diversity and to explore how Croydon unites us..." Crucially it has allowed them to challenge their museum practise by questioning what role a local authority social history-led museum has in interpreting and displaying objects belonging to communities
- This project allowed has also them to really understand what was relevant to an audience, which has had very limited representation or engagement in the museum despite being one of the largest demographics in the Borough and who have a crucial voice in shaping the museum's future direction. They had previously tried to engage young BAME audiences, but with limited success and as such this project has created a methodology staff feel confident is a meaningful tool for engagement because it was co-created, which can be used again with other audiences going forward
- The project also showed staff the need to be totally flexible in their curatorial approach, from having to deliver this in a fully digital way to purposefully excluding themselves from the conversation and acting as a facilitator, staff felt it has been a really interesting change to their working culture that has brought many benefits to the team in understanding the extent to which the museum's collections can derive meaning and relevance from a multitude of perspectives and what the museum's role is within this
- Finally, the museum hopes to continue to evolve the methodology and thinking to inform their next service plan - the service is also undergoing profound change where it will work in a more outreach model whilst galleries are closed for vital collections care work – as such this project has given staff/team-wide confidence in how to reach audiences and work in a co-creation way going forward.

### On the participants:

- The fact that participants were able to see how their work would feature as part of the museum's collection, was a great motivator as it enabled them to see how their voices would be heard and the platform in which to share their thoughts and many are excited to see their work exhibited online going forward
- This project has set a precedent for working with the Youth Collective to create spoken word pieces and share them online. The museum will use the processes and techniques explored in this project to continue working with the group to create a Young People's Manifesto as part of the museum's preparatory work for its Borough of Culture year in 2023
- The museum has learnt that spoken word and performance poetry as a means for interpretation works well for this age group, as young people can develop their poetry pieces to suit their own artistic preferences – for example as a monologue, a rap or song – giving the young people agency to represent themselves online as they wish, which they very appreciated and has encouraged them to want to continue to work with the museum on subsequent activities/projects
- Finally, the young people involved have felt empowered not only by this process, but also by the 'disrupting' of the archive and museum exhibitions through the opportunity given to them to interpret the collection.

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

Key lessons staff learnt included:

- There were inevitable challenges when working with a group of teenagers online – the museum had to work hard to support the group to feel safe to put their cameras on as the culture of online learning at school is to keep cameras off
- One participant who had additional learning needs and was not a confident writer, was uncertain if she would participate fully in the project – however, she particularly connected to Sislan Fay Allen in the Windrush exhibition, who was the first black female police officer in the Met in the 1960's, and with scaffolding exercises set by Shaniqua, the participant was able to write a personal and moving piece which will be featured online – demonstrating to staff the importance of developing meaningful approaches for participants to connect and be encouraged and enabled to interpret the collection in their own way
- For museum staff the ability to delve into collections in only a digital format was a challenge as they had to rely on collections which were only available to them in that format and had the correct copyright permissions - whilst it was envisaged Shaniqua would have more free rein to explore the collections it actually benefitted the project by having a more specific collections focus for the museum to truly test the co-curation methodology.

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

1. Have more sessions to support participants to create their artistic responses
2. Allocate more time to exploring branding and online representation
3. Hold the sessions in person where/if possible!
4. Although the online format helped define the methodology for engaging with the collections, it was very limited to only collections they had available online, so where possible enable participants to handle and look at your collections in person
5. More deep dive into conversations regarding the role of the museum in not being neutral in its curatorial choices in what it has historically collected and acknowledge to the group/participants whose voices have been excluded as a result of this and why it's important to capture these voices now and how they will be used by future museum visitors/curators.



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# The poet giving BAME youth a chance to rewrite Croydon's history

by Fiona Holland / February 9, 2021

Shaniqua Benjamin, Croydon's poet laureate. Pic: Shaniqua Benjamin.

While the museum stays shut, the borough's poet laureate is helping young people in the area introduce a contemporary twist into its collection.

Now more than ever, museums are being challenged to make their collections more inclusive for their visitors and local communities. The British Museum has been called out for not acknowledging the violent, colonial context that accompanies many of their artefacts. And since the Black Lives Matter protests last summer, some museums in the UK have been reviewing their public collections and exhibitions.

In Croydon, 28-year-old Thornton Heath local Shaniqua Benjamin is initiating change in the Museum of Croydon with her *Voices of Croydon residency*. From January 27, for two months, Benjamin is working together with local 18 to 25-year-olds from Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic communities, as well as under 18s from the Croydon Music and Arts youth collective. Through a series of online workshops, she invites them to explore the museum's collection. These interactions will culminate in a virtual exhibition.

Participants can create their own responses to the collection through the varied mediums of prose, poetry, sound, visual art, and film. Once they are shown in the exhibition they will be placed permanently in the museum's archives and visual art collection - making their own mark in local history. "This is a great way of getting [young people's] voices heard but also for them to be part of Croydon's legacy and contribute art that will be part of the museum in the future," says Benjamin.

**Museum of Croydon**  
@MuseumOfCroydon

@ShaniquaMarie is looking for young BAME adults (18-25) to help address the gaps within the Museum of Croydon's collection and how it can best represent modern day Croydon. Follow the link to sign up to 'Voices of Croydon' now!

[bit.ly/VOC5B](https://bit.ly/VOC5B)

3:41 PM · Dec 17, 2020

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Since the start of the pandemic, The Museum of Croydon has put much of their collection online. Most of the artworks on the museum's *Art UK page* are pieces that previously decorated the walls of the borough's civic buildings, or were donated

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