

We call ourselves a community museum – that means we aim to give Hackney communities a voice and a platform, to work closely with them, to invite them to get involved so that they can take responsibility, make proactive decisions and have a real sense of ownership of the Museum and their role in it.

We are a team of 3.5 FTE people and we work collaboratively with a wide range of people to collect, document and share the history of Hackney. We do not have a community engagement or outreach officer because engagement and outreach is part of everyone's role, and, since 2013, has been written into everyone's job descriptions so it means we can recruit staff who believe that people should be at the heart of collections and exhibitions as well as learning to all roles within the organisation.

I've selected a few examples of recent projects we have initiated or been approached to work on with individuals, organisations and groups of people with learning difficulties and disabilities to show three different ways we work with these groups or individuals.

1. A platform for local voices to speak out

Our Platform space in the museum is for community exhibitions. To highlight issues, challenges and things that groups of people want to speak up or speak out about and support the research, interpretation or development of our collections. This is a space where we hand over the message to local people. From community groups, to groups wanting greater visibility for their message, to people wanting to bring to light hidden histories or reveal previously unspoken or challenging truths.

People with disabilities are well represented generally within the majority of museum community exhibitions, but we have also provided a platform for many exhibitions specifically with local people or groups and organisations representing or working with people with learning difficulties or disabilities. Here are a few of the most recent projects:

Access All Areas 2015-17

Access All Areas is a theatre company that works with adults with learning disabilities. With the support of Hackney Museum and other partners, the company developed an accessible and interactive exhibition exploring the history of institutionalisation of people with learning disabilities. Museum staff provided training for the participants to research and develop an exhibition would be accessible to all, using touch, sight, smell and sound to open up the history of learning disabilities for all people, with or without disability, to think about, interpret and question.

During the research phase the participants decided to focus on the voices of those institutionalised who have long been ignored by or hidden from society. They wanted to create a display that aimed to change that.



During the exhibition run the participants were supported by the Learning Manager to devise and facilitate sessions with groups of other adults with learning disabilities to support them to understand elements of the exhibition that they themselves had found complex or quite challenging to learn about. The museum was keen to sharing these co-devised workshops with the wider sector as an example of best practice, so during Museums and Wellbeing week Hackney Museum and the participants led a workshop for museum and heritage professionals exploring their working processes; the use of drama and media in heritage learning; and in making history accessible to people with learning disabilities. The participants and museum and AAA staff talked about how we worked collaboratively to develop the exhibition and accompanying programme and museum and heritage professionals heard from the National Alliance for Museums, Health and Wellbeing who spoke about the wider wellbeing agenda.

Another unexpected outcome of this project has been how the participants have contributed to an ongoing conversation the museum is having with a range of Hackney communities about the use of labels and language when developing and cataloguing the collection. We strongly feel that how groups are labelled is a conversation with people within these groups who should be given the opportunity to discuss and debate suitable labels and search terms and involve the museum and archives collections staff so they have an awareness of the most up to date, fashionable and the sensitivities of words used with certain communities or groups. During this project the group challenged the museum and archives in its use of archaic terms such as 'cripple' and 'invalid' that had been applied in the past to describe material in our collection related to disability. We had honest and frank discussions about the sensitivities of language and how to improve our search terms for the collection without erasing archaic terms from our collective memory.

An unexpected outcome for many of the participants has been the opportunity to collaborate with the museum in other areas of the museum's work of our work as they began to learn more about how we work and as they began to share with the museum interests and aspects of their identity beyond being disability activists. Taking time to get to

know each other and having all members of the museum team (learning, collections and exhibitions) involved in the project meant participants were welcomed into the wider work of the museum. This isn't something we build into applications with the groups we support, because we never know who we are going to come across so it's an aspect of what we do that is built into our work practice. See section 3 **Co-Creating with Individuals** for specific examples.

Exhibition funded by HLF. Hackney Museum staff time to support the project and participants outside the project was provided in kind.

We Are Artists 2016-17



Since January 2016 Hackney Museum have been working with Advance UK to run a regular art group for adults with a wide range of learning difficulties and disabilities. The group is coordinated by one of the carers from Advance UK, but the customers and carers that attend are all considered artists and create work alongside each other. With support where needed the artists create artworks that respond to the museum displays, objects in the museum collection and the local area around them. This initiative has been instigated and overseen by the learning manager with the support of the Museum officer, who has exhibited the work in two displays by the group. In some cases museum staff have installed the work, but where possible the artists themselves have created work directly onto the wall or chosen where in the museum they would like their work to be exhibited. Some of the screen printed work will also feature in one of the museum's main exhibitions alongside the Andy Warhol's and American print makers later this year.

Museum staff have been building strong relationships with the artists who attend every Wednesday and more recently they have started coming on other days of the week with different carers, recognizing the museum as a safe and welcoming space for them. In most cases these are adults with profound learning difficulties, who are often non verbal, so the

relationship we have developed with individuals and with the group collectively is very instinctive and responsive

We discuss potential opportunities with the artists, carers and group coordinator to identify where there could be overlap and where our work naturally supports each other. As a small team we have heavy workloads, but we don't want the museum to just 'provide for' these artists, we want the museum to be changed and improved by them, so we build this partnership into our workplans and work across the team depending on the type of opportunity identified as being of interest.

It took quite a long time for the group to settle into a comfortable working environment and they were initially described to me as a group of adults who typically don't socialise or work well in a group, but over time the artists have settled into a rhythm and found a way to work alongside and support each other in the space. Something we've also noticed quite recently is that the group are inspired by new people coming in and working with them, so we've opened up the doors and give an open invitation to anyone in the museum to join in. The group have worked with families, teenagers and other adults who they have invited into the space to create art alongside them. One of the group, Mr Chang said: "I like to be here, at the Hackney Museum, to draw, to be with friends".

Specialist support staff and materials are provided and funded by Advance UK with in kind support and room hire from Hackney Museum.

Fifth Word & Stormont House 2015/16

Hackney Museum worked with Fifth Word Theatre Company to support 22 young people (with varying learning difficulties) in a special needs secondary school to research, develop and design an interactive touring exhibition about their school as a hospital during World War One. The theatre professionals used immersive theatre and mantle of the expert techniques to bring WW1 to life for the young people and the museum supported the project by recruiting volunteers to research Stormont House in the archives and supporting the young people to access the research to develop their exhibition.

Museum staff provided training for the research volunteers about how to identify archive material that will engage young people with learning difficulties and training for the young people in how to design exhibitions. Museum staff also supported the young people during the launch, allocating them team jobs and supporting them to carry out tasks such as preparing refreshments for guests, welcoming VIPs and explaining the exhibition to Hackney councilors and their headmaster as part of their development. The learning manager and Heritage Assistant also regularly went into the school to work with the young people there, to better understand how they learn and their specific needs so we could design a better project for them.

In their evaluation the teachers told us that one of the highlights of the project was visiting the museum and archives with pupils, the skills they learnt with us and the benefits of being involved in a project from beginning to end, being taken behind the scenes and treated as experts and making decisions about the whole process as young curators. Apparently many of the young people expressed an interest in future careers as archivists. The positive impact this project had on the school led to them requesting to send a sixth form student on a work placement with our Museum officer in the museum. The school informed us that as a special educational needs school they struggled to find organisations willing to support the additional needs of their students, but through the project knew that Hackney Museum could be the ideal environment for this particular student could be supported to thrive. The project and placement have been so successful that the school have approached us about supporting further students. (See section 3 **Co-Creating with Individuals** for specific examples.)

Funded by HLF and led by Fifth Word Theatre Company

2. Co-creating with groups

We work with groups on projects that help us to learn, grow and change as an organisation and provide opportunities for groups who need additional support to access museum activities. Some of these projects culminate in an exhibition, some don't. We have a relaxed attitude to outputs and instead build projects and exhibitions that are right for the participants and the audiences they are hoping to engage. During these projects we aim, with our partners, to test and trial new ways of working, challenge stereotypes, promote wellbeing and increase access and representation in the museum.

Picture Taking (2014)

The learning manager worked with staff and students at The Garden School in Hackney to design, develop and deliver a programme of photography workshops that would lead to a museum exhibition for a group of 7 non-verbal young artists aged 9-13. Following a really successful Garden School and Hackney Museum Black History Month (BHM) collaboration the previous year where the museum had supported the whole school to explore African textiles and studio portraits with students, the photographers, who happened to be Learning Assistants in the school, wanted to support the pupils who had really engaged with camera work during BHM to explore and capture their lives in Hackney today. The learning manager supported the photographers to write an ACE bid, which was successful and the whole project was initiated, delivered and displayed within 6 months.

It was important that the timescale was quick, so we could capture the children's interest whilst they could still remember the previous museum project. To allow for unexpected projects that arise, the museum balances its long term forward planning with space for

movement, so having the museum manager and collections and exhibition officer on side from the start was key so they could create the physical space in the museum for the work to be exhibited.



On the ACE application the project and exhibition had been entitled Through Our Eyes, but as the project got underway and the young people took an active leading role its direction, it became clear to us all that 'Through Our Eyes' made little sense to non-verbal young people with autism, so the title was changed to 'Picture Taking', as this more closely reflected the language used by those participants with functional language. This was also the title of the photography class at school and became the title for the exhibition to allow the young people to recognise the project as the same project they were doing in school.

We worked with the parents to help the school to engage them, where they had been unsuccessful in doing so before. At our first parents meeting in the school at the start of the project only one attended, but with the project sensitively planned and budgeted for to allow the photographers to work with the whole families, go into their homes and involve them in the work and for museum staff to regularly attend the classes in the school, we are proud to say that every parent attended the launch of the exhibition at the museum, despite none of them ever having visited before.

One of the participants usually finds it challenging to engage with activities and repeatedly tries to run away. During the photography sessions the young person thrived and you can see in his self-portraits he is standing still. No one is holding him, he is fully engaged in his work. His photography was exceptional and by far the

Funded by ACE with in kind support from The Garden School and Hackney Museum.

Re:present: Re:labelling the Archives (2012-2015)

In the lead up to the 2012 Olympic Games in London the museum worked with local people, organisations, schools, daycentres and community centres, heritage organisations and artists on a large scale, cross-borough project to capture the different experiences and feelings of local residents in the lead up to the games.

Through a sound installation project that was later displayed in the museum, the residents of a daycentre in Hackney worked with project staff and artists to record their journeys to and from the museum. Freelance staff working on the large scale project worked alongside Adult Social Care staff to devise and develop the project, which meant the range of voices of local people featured in the project was much more representative of Hackney's diverse communities. For the participants and the support staff, many reported that their confidence in accessing the museum grew as a result of the project.

A number of unexpected challenges arose towards the end of the project due to staff changes on both sides that meant the relationships developed between the different directorates during the project weren't sustained in the way the project had expected them to be because the core museum team weren't involved directly in the project, so when the freelance staff moved on the project dwindled.

To acknowledge the importance and potential of this cross-directorate way of working the council provided funding for 2 more years of activity to bring the project back into the core of the museum. This small pot of funding would allow us to work with local people to explore, test and improve the current provision. So, during the next phase of Re:present we didn't work on external, expensive and time limited projects, but instead we concentrated on manageable and sustainable projects that would help us to build and retain good relationships with people, groups and organisations beyond the two years. As a result we made real changes to the way events were organised and marketed to our users and designed and tested resource aids for people with disabilities to help them access museum and archive collections. We held networking events to share what we were learning and we redesigned our museum general information flyers with a group of adults with a range of learning and physical disabilities to ensure they were accessible for everyone. Instead of glitzy projects and exhibitions, we worked for two years to make what we already did more accessible for everyone.

Funded by HLF and Hackney Council.

3. Co-creating with individuals

Through our projects individuals come forward or emerge, maybe growing in confidence or responding to the project in an unexpected way that changes them and us. This used to happen organically, we now build this into our programmes, making room to accommodate

these unexpected outcomes and provide support for individuals and groups that might lead to a participant delivering a museum programme, or getting paid work in the museum.

Terry was one of 10 adults who participated in our Access All Areas project, exploring the experience and treatment of people with disabilities in the past. At the same time Terry learned of a museum project to collect, document and share LGBTQI+ histories in Hackney and asked if they could participate in the project, either as an interviewer or as an interviewee with a relevant story to tell. As a trans person living with a disability and learning difficulty in Hackney, Terry felt they had an extremely important story to tell and a responsibility to help us to collect this history so has joined the LGBTQI+ project and is now taking part in the project with the Museum Officer so has moved into a different area of the museum's work, but continues to have a relationship with Hackney Museum.

Creative Journeys was an exhibition developed with artists who are members of Core Arts, an organization that promotes the creative expression of Hackney people with lived experience of mental health. The work describes their individual journeys toward wellbeing. Some of the artists in the exhibition we supported to run workshops for families in Hackney on creativity, wellbeing and mindfulness for the whole family. The artists were given the freedom to use their artistic practice to shape the workshops and the museum supported them with the structure and delivery of the workshop.

Paul, Lee and Rufaro participated in the Access All Areas project and, during 2016, took a great interest in our upcoming Black History Month exhibition 'People Power: Black British Arts and Activism in Hackney'. I invited them to come and shadow a schools session in the museum and they ended up coming back each week to support children taking part in the museum session. They also supported museum staff and artists to deliver a workshop called Black Art Matters, supporting families to access the exhibition and helping them to come up with ideas for the slogans and artworks they were creating in the session. Repeated contact with the exhibition and familiar staff meant these individuals were given the chance to pursue their personal interest in the exhibition subject and deepen their understanding of the themes covered.

Stormont House Placement At the time, work experience placements were based around our Schools Learning Programme, facilitating class visits. It was determined that this was not appropriate to the young man with autism that was interested in volunteering with the museum. As a result we met with him and his teacher to discuss what aspects of museum work would interest him, and agreed that we would help us to digitise and catalogue our collections using MuseumIndex+, as he was interested in pursuing a career in IT.

The school identified the key aim of his work placement to be improving his socialisation skills. Over the weeks staff noted how increasingly conversational he became, and how he began to smile frequently throughout the day. Near the end of his placement, a teacher from the school came to visit him at the museum. The teacher later expressed their amazement to a staff member at how happy, confident and talkative the young man was, saying something along the lines of "I've known that boy for years and I have *never* seen

him like this.” The young man told museum staff how much he enjoyed his time at the museum. He would turn up earlier than he was required and when he completed the placement he asked if he could come back and work for some additional weeks. The museum staff were very impressed with how quickly the young man learned the various collections managements systems, and how he efficiently and accurately carried out vital collections work.

Summary

As with all of our work, we have limited core funding so we rely on networking, fundraising through partnerships, and working cross-departmentally to develop projects, programmes, exhibitions, collections and opportunities for local people to work with us in a range of ways.

We’re very resourceful and we pool resources and share skills to make things happen. By working this way we are able to be responsive and are therefore building a sustainable museum rooted in the community. We recognise that more often than not that in order to thrive and survive we need to continually work in and with our communities, so we invest meaningful time in people, and care about their wellbeing and experience with the museum. We continue to work hard to retain our reputation as a community museum.

We continuously learn from our partners about best practice and we make time in our roles to grow, change and adapt our working practices and methods to reflect what we are learning. We are not afraid to say we don’t have the answers but rather the partnership is an opportunity for us to learn as well as share the skills and knowledge we do have and because we work collaboratively, the whole team is engaged as people are at the heart of everyone’s role and this is clearly laid out in our job descriptions.

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