

## Report by Allison Russell 2010 Churchill Fellow

**The Churchill Fellows' Association of South Australia Churchill Fellowship to study innovative museum outreach programs which respond to community needs**



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Allison Russell  
17 January, 2011

Royal Cornwall Museum 'Every Picture tells a story; Royal Cornwall Museum memory box: school days; Age Exchange; V&A Museum of Childhood:  
Living with Autism exhibition

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images l-r:  
craft area, Museum of Edinburgh; completed craft activity, Newarke Houses Museum, Leicester; display of artwork by prisoners, Imperial War Museum, Duxford

## Introduction



I have long believed that museums can and should be active agents of positive social change.

My fellowship enabled me to travel to the UK to meet museum professionals working in the area of community engagement, allowing me to investigate how the programs they deliver are devised, how they are planned and executed, and how they are evaluated. The programs I encountered responded directly to community need and many were able to demonstrate the impact they had on the lives of the people who participated.

I have returned to Australia with a renewed enthusiasm to find ways to engender meaningful engagement with diverse communities of people who may not consider museums are for 'them'.

Without exception, the people I met through my fellowship overwhelmed me with their generosity, sharing their time and ideas, and I thank them all deeply and sincerely. Their passion and enthusiasm are infectious, and I look forward to keeping in touch and sharing ideas and projects in coming years.

I am deeply grateful to the Winston Churchill Memorial Trust for all their support and advice, and especially to the Churchill Fellows Association of South Australia, who sponsored my fellowship.

My thanks, also, to my referees, Margaret Anderson, Chief Executive, History SA and Maggie Fletcher, Manager, Warmun Arts, for their time and support for my project, and to my Churchill Fellowship mentor, Sally Francis, who has been such an inspiration over the years.

I acknowledge, too, the support of my family, and especially my partner, Tom Skinner, who accompanied me on my travels. His presence and encouragement were invaluable.

images l-r:

touch area at the Imperial War Museum, Duxford; children's area at Newark Houses Museum, Leicester; results of a collaborative exhibition between museum studies students and the Coventry Transport Museum

## Executive Summary

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My fellowship was undertaken between 27 September and 17 November 2010, with the aim of gaining an understanding of how museums in the UK work with diverse community groups. In addition to the 34 meetings with professionals working in the area, I had the opportunity to participate in program activities in some museums, and also took the opportunity to visit as many museums as I could fit into my schedule – 40 in total. The incidental learning opportunities from being able to visit so many different museums in such a short time was immeasurable.

### Highlights

- Participating in programs – including one for intellectually disabled Muslim women at Leicester Museums Outreach Services – a relaxed atmosphere and well-planned program were of clear value to the participants, their carers and the museum; and one for gay men over-55 at the British Museum – eye-opening that such a large museum could offer tailored programs for local communities
- London Transport Museum – I work in a transport museum. LTM is an inspiring example of the ways in which a transport museum can engage diverse audiences
- Discovering directions of current research and evaluation of the benefits of community programs; for example meeting with Guy Noble and Linda Thomson from University College London about the research they are currently undertaking in relation to the measurable health benefits of museum object handling programs.

### Major lessons

- The importance of meaningful community partnerships – these are essential if projects are to be successful
- A sound evaluative framework is necessary for communicating the benefits of such programs and projects
- Developing community programs in museums needs to be a collaborative process, and the relationships formed need to be sustained – otherwise the museums can be seen as ‘using’ community groups to meet their own ends
- Community engagement can be built into all aspects of the museum’s work – including collection documentation, exhibition development and delivery, as well as public programming

### Summary of key recommendations

- That museums work proactively to form partnerships with community organizations to create programs with community outcomes
- That research into the well-being and community outcomes of such programs be undertaken, and that this be disseminated
- That consideration be given to the creation of a post/posts with responsibility for the development of such partnerships
- That mechanisms for sharing programming ideas and outcomes be established

### Implementation and dissemination

- Circulation of report in Australia
- Presentations at conferences and other public speaking opportunities
- Writing for professional and community journals and newsletters
- History SA website – blog about community engagement
- Running professional development sessions for History SA staff and Museums Australia members
- Creation of training information and fact-sheets about community projects
- Above all, my practice has changed forever – my approach will always consider possibilities for community engagement

## Fellowship Program and Itinerary



images l-r:

Community archaeology program, Museum of London; Outreach program at British Museum; Community wall, Churchill Cabinet Rooms; outcome of an art project at Museum of London

30 September – 2 October

**Great Yarmouth** Time and Tide Museum (meeting with James Steward, Eastern Area Manager, Norfolk Museums and Archaeology Service)  
Lydia Eva (Herring boat)  
Nelson Museum  
Elizabethan House Museum  
Old Toll House Museum

4 October

**Norwich** Norfolk Museums and Archaeology Service (meeting with Ruth Burwood, Senior Access Curator)  
Norwich Castle Museum

5- 9 October

**Cambridge** Cambridge County and Folk Museum (meeting with Tamsin Wimhurst, Education Officer)  
Imperial War Museum, Duxford  
‘Big Stuff’ conference (caring for large technology objects)

9-13 October

**Manchester** National Football Museum (meeting with Peter Evans, Head of Learning and Community)  
Kirklees Museums and Galleries (meeting with Kim Strickson, Community Access Projects Manager and Mashuda Sheikh)  
Urbis (meeting with Ivan McDoull, Head of Learning)  
People’s Museum

**Manchester** cont. Museum of Science and Technology  
Imperial War Museum North

14-16 October

**Liverpool** Liverpool Museums (meetings with Claire Benjamin, Head of Communities; Carol White, Education Manager; Cheryl Magowan, Community Development Coordinator; Helen MacBryde, Community Learning Manager; Jing Li, Community Worker)  
World Museum  
International Slavery Museum  
Walker Art Gallery

17-23 October

**Edinburgh** National Museum of Scotland (meetings with Christine McLean, Community Engagement Manager and Alistair Dodd, Senior Curator of Transport)  
National Gallery of Scotland (meeting with Richie Cumming, Outreach Officer)  
Museums Galleries Scotland (meeting with Loretta Mordi, Learning and Access Manager)  
Historic Scotland (meeting with Sue Mitchell, Head of Education)  
RCAHMS (meeting with Rebecca Bailey, Head of Education and Outreach)  
Fruit Market Gallery (meeting with Johnny Gailey, Learning and Young People's Program Coordinator)  
Museum of Childhood  
People's Story Museum  
Museum of Edinburgh  
Museum on the Mound  
Social Media Workshop

24-27 October

**Leicester** Leicester Museums Outreach (meeting with Linda Harding, Outreach Officer; program participation)  
New Walk Museum  
Newarke Houses Museum

**Leicester cont** Leicester University Museum Studies Department (meetings with Sheila Watson, Senior Lecturer and Viv Golding, Senior Lecturer)

28 October

**Coventry** Coventry Transport Museum (meetings with Christiaan van Schaadenburgh, Curator of Vehicles; Gary Hall, Director and Stephen Bagley, Senior Curator)

29 October – 10 November

**London** University College London (meeting with Guy Noble, Arts Curator and Linda Thomson, Researcher)

Museum of London (meeting with Kirsty Marsh Inclusion Officer; program participation)

Tate Modern (meeting with Liz Ellis, Curator, Family and Community Learning)

Design Museum

Churchill's London at War

Churchill's War Cabinet Rooms

Victoria and Albert Museum

British Museum (meetings with Laura Phillips, Harvinder Bahra, Community Programs Coordinator and Donna Shrestha, Community Programs; program participation)

National Motor Museum, Beaulieu

London Transport Museum (meeting with Sian Thurgood, Community Programs)

Greener Museums (meeting with Rachel Maden)

Age Exchange (meeting with Meg Hamilton, Administrator)

Cardiff Castle

11-13 November

**Cornwall** Royal Cornwall Museum (meeting with Louise McDermott, Community Engagement Officer)

National Maritime Museum, Falmouth

PISCES – community exhibition (Port Isaac)

## Key findings

### Introduction

The International Council of Museums defines a museum as:

a non-profit, permanent institution in the service of society and its development, open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits the tangible and intangible heritage of humanity and its environment for the purposes of education, study and enjoyment.

It is not implicit in this definition that a museum needs to provide onsite programs to men of Afro-Caribbean descent who are over-55 and suffering from mental illness. Yet the World Museum in Liverpool is doing just that. Or that programs for Muslim women with severe intellectual disabilities should be offered – but I sat in on such a program at the Newarke Houses Museum in Leicester. These sorts of programs are proliferating in the UK because museums are proving that they can provide environments and programs that can have measurable health and wellbeing outcomes.

From their inceptions, museums have had a philanthropic bent to them – albeit a patronising one, which assumed that people needed ‘improving’ by access to collections. The ‘new museology’ of the 1970s and 1980s presented us with alternative, more inclusive stories to tell. A different challenge to museums is how to make our work relevant and meaningful to those in our communities who may not traditionally have been museum visitors.

Many museums in the UK see the provision of services to all sections of the community as core business. I was introduced to programs for migrants, people with mental health issues, refugees, teenage parents, people in the prison system, youth at risk, patients with dementia, retired people, students with learning difficulties as well as those targeting people from particular areas and backgrounds. The common thread was a presumption that all people had a right to access to the museum’s resources, and that conversely museums had a responsibility to facilitate that access – by whatever means it takes.

These programs have grown significantly in recent years, with support and funding from the Labour Government, which had a strong agenda for social inclusion. Significant sums of money have been available to develop, present and evaluate these programs through Renaissance in the Regions and Heritage Lottery Funding. In some ways, the timing of my fellowship could not have been worse – the impact of the GFC in combination with a change in government meant that in the first two weeks of my fellowship the people I was meeting with were waiting on a funding review announcement, and in the remaining weeks they were trying to get their heads around what impact the announcement (essentially that major funding streams would cease) would have on their programs (and in many cases on their employment status). None-the-less, the obvious enthusiasm, passion and belief in what they were doing was still evident, as was the fact that although funding cuts would inevitably impact the scope of what would be on offer, the underlying philosophies and presumptions would continue to underpin the work of the museums I visited. In another sense, my timing was perfect – if I had delayed my travel, the number and scope of the programs and projects may have been diminished.

Many of the museums I visited were also funded by their local authority, and as such, they needed to ensure their programs contributed directly to Council priorities – whether that was to reduce crime, support teen parents or improve racial tolerance. Staff in a number of these museums reported that Council was very supportive of the idea of improving lives through culture.

Another factor that may impact on museums in the UK in the short-term is a change in the way that some social services are funded, with funding to day centres being reduced, while payments to users are increased, allowing people to choose for themselves which programs they patronise. Many of the museum programs, which have created strong partnerships with organisations who work with particular target groups are well placed to benefit from such a change.

### **Examples of projects**

Following are eight examples of projects which demonstrate the scope and reach of the types of projects I encountered. It is in no way exhaustive, but provides some opportunities for comparison, and demonstrates some of the similarities between programs. Further projects are discussed in the Appendix.

Target audience: people with mental health issues

Museum: Tate Modern

Program: Friday night talks and tours

Tate Modern runs a program once a month for a group of people who are all trying to operate outside the label ‘personality disorder’. The timeslot has been selected in consultation with members of the group, who indicated that Friday nights can be a difficult time – Monday to Friday during the day other services are available, but Friday nights are a time for socialising and being with friends, so having an activity scheduled for this time provides structure and support. The museum provides a staff member to help coordinate the activity, and sometimes to present a talk or activity. The organised sessions generally run for about 90 minutes, after which time the participants can explore other areas of the museum until closing time, or they can go out for dinner or for a drink.

The group began out of informal discussions between the museum’s Curator of Family and Community Learning and someone (now a key member of the group) who had approached her for mentoring. The group has grown in number, and will soon be in a position where group members will be able to manage their own programming, and so will not require the same amount of staff time as previously.

When they are at the museum, they don’t look any different to any other group, and they are not being labeled – instead they are learning new information and new skills, while developing friendships and interests.

Most other programs that I encountered which targeted users of mental health services worked in partnership with service providers to create programs that gave confidence and built skills for participants, but could be undertaken in non-clinical, neutral settings.

Target audience: General Public

Museum: Royal Cornwall Museum

Program: Art Exhibition: Every picture tells a story

This program helps to make the art collection accessible to people of all ages who visit by giving them some keys to help them create meaning from artwork.

The artwork has been deliberately selected because it has strong narrative content. One section of the gallery has large signs on it asking various questions (What do you think is happening?; What season is it?; What sounds might you hear?; Where are they going?; What are they saying? etc). For very young visitors, there are 'Colour hunt' buckets, which have coloured blocks in them and an instruction to find the colours in the pictures. For other visitors, there is a table in the middle of the room with paper and pencils. In addition to the museum label, there is a Perspex box where people can put their own responses. Looking through these boxes, people have responded in many ways – some with personal reflections, some with poems or drawings, some with critiques of the work – but clearly the space has been set up in a way that has invited response.

I encountered several similar projects – for example, a people's choice exhibition curated by community groups in Norwich. Both projects empowered people to speak about art (although the idea could be applied to other collection areas) by giving them tools to do so.

Target audience: Recent arrivals (including refugees and asylum seekers)

Museum: World Museum, Liverpool

Program: Conversation Club

This program was being revived in Liverpool when I visited. While managed by the Outreach Officer with responsibility for working with refugee and asylum seeker groups, the plan was that long term this program would be self-sustaining and require very little in the way of financial resources. Once a week on a Thursday morning museum volunteers are available to facilitate small group discussions for recent arrivals to practice their English.

They are provided with a cup of tea and a biscuit at the beginning to create a relaxed atmosphere, and then trained volunteers will help them explore the English language in a relaxed, friendly setting. These conversation classes provide opportunities for recent migrants to create new social networks and also to acquaint them with the museum and its facilities.

Several organisations I visited ran programs which provided opportunities for people learning English to use their programs and facilities to improve their language skills. Museums provide an ideal setting for learning English, since museum texts are generally created using simple language and sentence structures, but deal with real-world issues and vocabulary. Other museums worked in partnership with ESOL colleges to create learning resources based on the displays. For example, London Transport Museum is a popular destination for classes, since the teaching resources have been created already, and the vocabulary surrounding the theme (getting around London) is directly relevant. The National Museum of Scotland has taken this one step further, by using ESOL students to test their new exhibition text during front-end evaluation.

Target audience: School students – upper and lower primary school

Organisation: Historic Scotland

Program: Junior Guides

The scope of this program can change depending on the commitment of the schools involved. Essentially, though, upper primary students are trained to become tour guides at their local historic site. They then deliver tours for the younger students and community groups. The program has been so popular that many schools make a long-term commitment to the program over a number of years.

Not only do the upper primary students learn the history to be presented, they learn research skills, public speaking and presentation skills, writing, costuming and – if desired – they can also handle the marketing and booking side of things, as well.

Holding a launch event for the tour also provides an opportunity for families to be involved and to provide opportunities for students who may not relish the public speaking role – such as catering and group presentations.

The program is designed to meet many of the curriculum goals (including Expressive Arts, Art and Design, Literacy, Social Studies, Health and Well-being and ICT) ensuring that the program does not take up additional classroom time. It has also proved itself to be a good way of involving parents in the learning activities.

While the focus of my research was not curriculum-based education programs in museums, a number of programs involved school students in ways that moved beyond conventional class visit models. For example, Kirklees Museums and Gallery Services has invited home-schooled children to participate in object handling sessions and the Age Exchange is creating programs which bring older and younger people together in workshops and creative activities. London Transport Museum has created two posts for ‘Youth Consultants’ who work part-time with exhibition and programming teams to provide a youth perspective.

Target audience: Teenage Parents

Museum: National Museums, Liverpool

Program: Story-telling skills

Working in partnership with an organisation which supports teen parents, this program offered the teens a day a week out of school to learn some more practical skills relevant to their new role, but also supported their learning. The partner agency indicated that they were keen for the museum to offer a softer, more creative approach to learning, which would encourage indirect skills acquisition.

The museum responded by creating a program that provided a period of familiarisation with the museum – its collections, displays and facilities. A professional story-teller was then introduced to the mix, who taught the parents the art of story-telling (obviously a useful skill for parents to be able to share stories with their children.) Once confident with the skill, participants were asked to create a story trail around the museum, which could be used by other young families. Thus, the museum has gained a long-term resource that can be offered

to other families, while the participants have not only learned new skills, they have also developed a strong sense of pride in their achievement. They also feel comfortable in the museum environment, recognising it as a place they can bring their families.

Funding was obtained for this program for three years – other creative projects included working with a visual artist to create a tactile play mat for the Walker Art Gallery and a digital photography exhibition in the community gallery.

When funding for the collaboration ceased, the partner organisation found funding to continue the partnership, because it felt that the projects offered excellent outcomes to participants.

Similarly innovative and successful projects and programs for NEET youth (Not in Education or Employment or Training) have been undertaken at the National Museum of Scotland (a project to restore and display a motorcycle from the Museum's collection) and at Urbis Museum, where the RECLAIM project continues to work with 12-14 year olds helping them to shape their future goals and work with their communities to create the environments that will help them to reach their potential. This program is still going strong, despite the recent closure of the museum, and is still managed by the museum's community outreach staff.

Target audience: Muslim women with multiple or severe intellectual disabilities

Museum: Leicester Museums Service

Project: ANSAAR project

I sat in on a morning session facilitated by Linda Harding of the Leicester Museums Service at Newarke Houses Museum, which was part of a program being presented for Muslim women with significant intellectual disabilities. The session – held in one of the museum's education areas – began (as I discovered most of these activities do!) with a cup of tea and a biscuit, to allow people to relax and feel comfortable. We then did some object handling with objects from the museum's education collection. We looked at telephones, radios and cameras from the past century. We then had a look at some of the museum displays, and found similar objects on display. We then went back to the education room where we did a craft activity relating to the display that we had seen. All up, the program took about 2.5 hours.

Later that day I sat in on another program for young people with learning difficulties, facilitated by two drama practitioners.

At the Imperial War Museum at Duxford, I also saw special displays created for blind and partially sighted visitors. This museum houses an aircraft collection, much of which is suspended from the ceiling, making touching the collection next to impossible. In consultation with vision impaired people, the museum has developed audio tours and tactile elements to ensure that those without sight are still able to appreciate the collections of the museum.

The Victoria and Albert Museum of Childhood at Bethnal Green also had an interesting display discussing autism and how it impacts on the way in which children with the condition see and experience the world.

Target audience: People in the prison system

Museum: National Gallery of Scotland

Project: Prisons program

The National Gallery of Scotland has worked on a number of projects in prisons. Richie Cummings told me about one where he and a community artist had worked with female prisoners exploring the artwork of American artist, Cindy Sherman, who creates photographs of herself in various guises.

In this project, they worked with ten women over five days (in a two week period) to explore the artist's work and what it meant. The women then worked together to decide what character they would like to adopt for the photographs, then how they could create that image, using magazines, images from the gallery and other materials for inspiration. They were given sketch books and encouraged to use the time between the workshops to formulate their ideas. As the participants' ideas came together, they advised what props they would require for the finished images, and these were sourced where possible. Finally, working with a makeup artist and photographer, the works were created and then displayed in a digital animation in the gallery.

Also on display at the Imperial War Museum in Duxford was a series of drawings created by people in the local prison. A program of visits to the prison taking objects from the collection has been undertaken for some time. Using the objects and stories as inspiration, the prisoners have created a number of drawings that were on display within the museum.

Outreach staff in the National Museum of Scotland have also undertaken programs in prisons. The transient nature of the prison population can make such programs difficult, but strong connections between the museum and the participants can also happen – I was told about one prisoner who was determined that on release he would work with young people to ensure that they did not end up in prison. Soon after his release he arrived at the museum with a group of young people to show them around and share some of what he had learned through the program, and phoned the outreach team to see if they could come down and meet the group. He introduced her with excitement, saying 'this is the one I was telling you about.'

Target audience: older people, including those in aged care facilities

Museum: Time and Tide, Great Yarmouth

Project: Visitor Stories and memories

Time and Tide Museum in Great Yarmouth has, from its inception, taken community involvement and consultation very seriously. As well as a group of 'Community Curators' who advise on programming and acquisitions, the museum is careful to ensure that the stories it presents relate to the local people and convey their experiences of life in Great Yarmouth.

When I was there, they were trying a new method of story gathering. They had noticed that many people, particularly older residents, often reminisced about their experiences of growing up and raising families in the area when they went into the old grocery shop onsite. In order to capture some of these stories, one of the museum's volunteers was in the shop

with a recorder. As James Steward, the museum's Director explained to me, the goal was to record the voices and stories of the people so that they could be used in the creation of new displays. In other words, where possible, the voices of the local people, rather than of the curators, should appear in the exhibitions.

A similar project at the Cambridge County and Folk Museum collected oral histories from people in spaces participants had identified as 'special' places. The project was designed to ensure that contemporary stories and objects were at least documented, if not collected.

The idea of using objects to spark memories and discussion is everywhere in the UK. Most museums that I visited had some kind of themed 'memory box' program. These consist of boxes of specially chosen objects, often accompanied by images, movies and music CDs, which are either lent to aged care facilities, or more commonly accompanied by a staff member who can facilitate a discussion about them. (Refer below for information about research into the benefits of touch in memory recall.) In some cases, these handling sessions can become the catalyst for larger projects which aim to record in some form the memories of people from a particular place or time. The Age Exchange in London is an organisation which specialises in training people to run reminiscence sessions and also undertakes projects with young and older participants, often with some kind of creative outcome.

A variation of this – a validation that everyone's experiences are worthy of display – was an exhibition of 'my favourite things' undertaken with pre-school children by Kirklees Museums and Galleries Service. Outreach staff worked with the children and their families to create the display, which proved very popular with the public.

### **Measuring the benefits**

A wide array of benefits (about as wide as the scope of the programs) has been demonstrated through various means, although in some cases it is difficult to quantify some of the outcomes.

#### **SOCIAL OUTCOMES**

*'When it comes to KPIs, how do you record that two people came along to the activity, but one of them said it changed his life?'*

*'My favourite project was a film project with five kids who weren't fitting in at school... When the project began Sienna wouldn't talk to anyone – her Mum said she had real communication problems. At the end of the project she stood up on stage and spoke in front of 500 people at the [film awards]. It was 5000 pounds and a lot of staff time – was it worth it? I think so.'*

The standard KPIs requested by government are often quantitative, with little scope for qualitative measures. Many of these programs necessarily have narrow target audiences and small participant numbers.

To assist with the evaluation and comparison of such programs, the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council has developed an evaluative structure called 'Inspiring Learning For All' ([www.inspiringlearningforall.co.uk](http://www.inspiringlearningforall.co.uk)) which is used by many of the programs I visited. This framework encourages an examination of Generic Learning Outcomes (GLOs) and Generic Social Outcomes (GSOs). There are five GLOs

- Knowledge and understanding
- Skills
- Attitudes and values
- Enjoyment, Inspiration and Creativity
- Activity, Behaviour and Progression

And three GSOs

- Stronger and safer communities
- Health and wellbeing
- Strengthening public life

This structured evaluation tool assists with the capture and dissemination of project outcomes that may otherwise be lost. For example, outreach staff with the Kirklees Museum and Gallery service showed me an exhibition that had been created following a request from a local community for assistance following a period of interracial tension. Engaging with their shared heritage, they believed, would provide opportunities for people to get to know one another and help to breakdown stereotypes.

Similarly, I was told about a series of poetry workshops for NEET (Not in Education or Employment or Training) Youth at the National Football Museum. In this instance, it was an outside organisation recording positive outcomes: police reported that during these workshops, the crime rate in the area fell. Harder to gauge, of course, is the longer-term effect of such projects on crime rates, as the museum program is only one of many factors at play.

#### RESEARCH INTO HEALTH AND WELLBEING

In the same way that doctors may recommend that someone overweight should visit a gym, some doctors are recommending that people with some forms of mental health disorder should get involved in community activities. This kind of ‘social prescribing’ includes the participation in some museum programs.<sup>1</sup>

On a larger scale, a major research project out of University College in London is in its final stages of examining the benefits to patients of handling museum objects, and I was fortunate enough to meet with Guy Noble and Linda Thomson to discuss their findings and their future plans.

Using standard tests to measure wellbeing and satisfaction before and after an object handling session, this research has shown that handling museum objects can improve patients’ sense of wellbeing and satisfaction. The object handling sessions generally run for about 30-45 minutes, and the objects are used to encourage the patients to talk about all

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<sup>1</sup> Anecdotally, the results have been remarkable. For example, a program coordinated by National Museums Liverpool in collaboration with Mary Seacole House (a multi-cultural mental health day care centre) was so popular with participants that during winter blizzards, when the transport system was severely impeded and streets impassable, every single participant turned up to the sessions – even when some staff were unable to get to work.

manner of things – many recall visits to museums with family, others focus on the tactile qualities of the objects, some have other recollections altogether: in other words, the museum objects are used to initiate a one on one conversation with patients.

So are the objects and the handling really part of this equation, or is it simply that patients feel better having spent 30-45 minutes talking to someone about something? The results of the study show that indeed the objects and opportunities for handling are integral – comparisons have been done where the same researchers simply go and chat to patients – however, the conversations surrounding the objects were far more natural and proved more beneficial to patients. Some patients were given photographs of the objects rather than the real objects, and again the results were less positive. Finally, the objects and information sheets were given to patients without the facilitator, and even then, without the human contact, there was still some benefit. The most beneficial combination was handling real objects with a facilitator to talk to.

And a longer term benefit was the fact that the patient had something to tell their visitors about. The positive effects of this have not been measured, but recorded anecdotally.

This research has also focused on the benefits to older people, including those with dementia. Research tells us that touch is one of the most powerful of the senses when it comes to memory recall. As we age, our eyes fail, so we may not be able to see photographs, our hearing can fail, so familiar sounds may be lost to us – but our sense of touch has been proven to be more robust – yet ironically, when people move into aged care facilities, touch is often withdrawn from them. Yet there are examples of patients with severe dementia who have participated in object handling sessions and opened up with clear, lucid sentences.

During 2010 a similar project was undertaken at Flinders Medical Centre in Adelaide, facilitated by Sally Francis, Arts Coordinator at FMC and Christine Putland, independent researcher, in collaboration with History SA and the South Australian Museum. Although much smaller in scale, positive results were obtained.

One of the most important benefits of this kind of research is that it gives us a clear rationale for why museums might get involved in this kind of work – quantitative data that takes us beyond the ‘feel-good’. It gives us clear indications as to why museums may have some obligations to be doing more work outside their doors.

### **Issues for consideration**

- Resources

Obviously additional resources (both financial and human) are required for these projects in Australian museums if they are not currently part of the programming. In the majority of museums I visited, the communities/outreach teams were linked with education. More infrequently, they were part of curatorial teams.

Where permanent staff were responsible for the provision of such programs, it was possible to create programs that required relatively little financial contribution. For example, memory boxes, which can be borrowed by community groups and aged care facilities are available through most UK museums visited, regardless of the size of the museum. Sometimes these have been put together from the collection, but more commonly, objects have been sourced through appeals for donations and supplemented through shopping in

second-hand shops. At the other end of the scale, though, there were projects which required external staff (generally with community arts background) and sometimes equipment hire and production costs (for example, a number of people spoke about film projects which had been very popular and successful with young people.)

While the majority of funding for these programs has come through Renaissance or heritage Lotteries Funding, there has been considerable non-arts funding that has supported community partnerships.

The majority of people I spoke to said that they had been very successful with grants, but less so with sponsorship for such programs. Possibly the changing funding structures will necessitate more approaches to corporate partners.

- Programming

Timing for programs can be critical to their success. For example, Monday to Friday during work hours may not be appropriate for some of the target audience. Consultation is essential in determining both the timing and the focus of such programs. Staff at Norwich Museums and Archaeology Service found that a program for Chinese migrants worked well on a Monday, since so many worked in the food industry, and Monday was their day off. At Urbis Museum, they ensured that whenever the museum was open, there was someone from their education and outreach team on duty to answer questions about their programs.

- Integrity of programming

Some people spoke frankly about projects that had not been successful in meeting goals for the museum. These projects were, in general, those which did not link closely with museum core business – collection, research and interpretation – and were instead driven too strongly by the need to simply make connections with the target audience. In such cases, it proved difficult to create lasting relationships with the target audience and it was also harder to garner support for the programs within the museum.

- Collections care

Using the collection in different ways can also present some significant challenges to our concepts of collection management: for example, a hospital-based object handling project requires careful consideration. They have to be the right size and weight for people in hospital beds to hold easily. They have to be safe to hold, with no sharp edges. They have to be able to be wiped over with antiseptic wipes after each patient had handled them, and they have to be robust enough to handle this kind of handling over a sustained period. And, of course, they have to be interesting to a broad cross-section of people.

- Additional skills and training

One of the questions that intrigued me was the background and training of museums staff engaged in this kind of work. Many of the projects targeted people with complex social and mental health issues, with which museum training is hardly well equipped to deal. I spoke to one staff member who told me that during a project for young people with mental health issues, one participant died during the course of the program. I spoke to her about what support there was for her, and what support she was able to provide (and expected to provide) to other members of the group. She assured me that the partner organisation was well staffed with people who had counselling and social work qualifications, and at no point did she feel it was her responsibility to provide counselling. I did, however, meet one

museum staff member who also possessed counselling qualifications. She felt that the training meant that she was able to participate in the projects in a more complete way, but was again stressing the importance of the partner organisation – these are the people who know the group members.

The message that came through most clearly though, was that it is important that museum staff do not to become social workers, but instead provide resources and support for partners, whose core business is the wellbeing of those in the community who may be dealing with multiple and complex issues.

Making short training courses available to staff (for example, I learned of a one-day ‘working with the blind and visually impaired’ course that was offered to museum staff before a particular project) can provide museum staff with enough information.

- Creating meaningful partnerships

Obviously, then, it is paramount to the success of a project that there is a strong and productive relationship between the museum and staff of a partner organisation.

However, it is also important that the needs of the groups themselves are addressed. Several people noted during discussions that socially inclusive agendas often lead to particular groups and individuals having a number of organisations seeking to provide programs for them. As a result, some community leaders (for example, certain refugee groups) can be overwhelmed by the number of requests for their time to sit on committees or attend functions and programs. Open communication about the needs of particular groups is essential in ensuring that relationships are lasting and meaningful.

- National opportunities

The BBC has run a number of successful history-based series in recent years, such as ‘Who do you think you are?’, ‘The 1940s house’ and the current ‘High Street’. As part of these programs, the BBC encourages local museums to piggyback themes, creating space on their own websites for museums to post information about local projects. The BBC also produces education resources, which are available for use and adaption by museums. The smaller museums that I spoke to were particularly enthusiastic about participating in such programs, as it provided them with invaluable opportunities to promote their work in a low-cost way. Their biggest complaint was the short lead-times they had available. A similar collaborative approach was demonstrated by the British Library’s ‘Campaigns’ program, which provided focus and promotion for smaller museums to tailor programs to meet the requirements of local schools.

## **Conclusions**

There is no doubt that my Churchill Fellowship has changed my museum practice forever. While the curatorial outcomes may look similar before and after my Fellowship, the processes will never be the same – community will always be a part of the research, and a diversity of audiences will be a greater consideration.

The programs I encountered were inspiring not just because they demonstrated a caring attitude towards people in society who are marginalised or in need, but also because they confirmed my belief that the role of museums is ultimately about people and not just about

objects. Similarly, the professionals I met shared a passion for using the resources of the museum – the buildings and the collections for the benefit of all people.

While planning my itinerary, Kim from Kirklees Museums and Galleries Services told me she would be working on a new project when I arrived. She had been approached by community leaders in a village where there was a significant rift between two racial groups. They had asked her to work with them on a heritage project which would help to bring the groups together. At the time, I was surprised that a community group would think of turning to a museum for help in such circumstances. I'm no longer surprised. I'm a convert.

## Recommendations

To suggest that similar work is not already being done in Australia would be incorrect. However, in the UK it is far more deeply embedded in the museums. There are significant opportunities for comparable work to be done in Australia. For this to become a priority, though, some changes in the way that museums are funded and evaluated are necessary:

- funding be made available to pilot museum-based community programs, and that these programs be appropriately evaluated
- museums review position titles and job specifications with a view to creating greater focus on community opportunities
- museums work proactively to form partnerships with community organizations to create programs with community outcomes
- thought be given to appropriate KPIs for museum-based programs with social outcomes
- further research into the health and wellbeing benefits as well as the social benefits of community programs in museums be undertaken in Australia
- appropriate networks for the dissemination of information about community-based museum projects be established, and appropriate training resources be created for small/community based museums

## Appendix: Blog entries from Churchill Fellowship: Museums and Communities (akarusell.wordpress.com)

### Reminiscing

November 22, 2010

**The Age Exchange in London uses reminiscence as the basis for some wonderful work with older people.**

Apologies for the break in transmission - my computer broke last week just before I came back to Australia, so I wasn't able to post about my visit to the Age Exchange in Blackheath before I left.

Although only a small organisation, the Age Exchange <http://www.age-exchange.org.uk/> works with many organisations across the UK promoting reminiscence as a beneficial activity, especially for older people.

I met Meg Hamilton, Administrator and Events Coordinator, who explained to me the tremendous scope of the work they do. She spoke about the difference between reminiscence (essentially recalling personal stories) and nostalgia (recalling a generalised past) and explained that the Age Exchange is interested in using reminiscence in creative ways to benefit older people in particular and the community in general. The website gives details - but projects include theatre, writing and artistic outcomes.

Many museums have taken advantage of the Age Exchange's training opportunities, where people can learn about running effective reminiscence sessions. Research about touch and memory has demonstrated how important handling objects can be, so museums are a logical place for reminiscence work to take place. And while reminiscence and oral history are two quite separate activities, reminiscence can help identify opportunities for oral history research.

The Centre itself was buzzing with volunteers the day that I was there. The front part of the Centre is filled with bits and pieces to spark memories from older people who will recall shopping, cooking and keeping house in middle decades of last century. This area is the perfect spot for a cup of tea and a piece of cake from the cafe. In the back room is a gallery space where the results of various projects can be displayed.

There is also a small book shop (smaller now that I have been through it!) where visitors can buy books explaining the principles of reminiscence work and also publications relating to particular projects. I'm looking forward to trying out some of the ideas!

Now that I am back in Australia, I won't be posting as often, but I will still update now and again with interesting projects that I hear about. I will also be producing a report on my Fellowship experience, and will post a link when it is complete.

Thank you to the people who have followed this blog and made comments along the way. It has been an inspirational journey for me, and I am looking forward to applying what I have learned in my own work. Sincere thanks, too, to all the people I have met on my travels who have been so generous with time and ideas.

### Pictures telling stories/visitors telling stories

November 15, 2010

**An exhibition at Royal Cornwall Museum uses its art collection to encourage visitor interactions and reflections.**

A wonderful exhibition in the art gallery space of the Royal Cornwall Museum is about story-telling. A variety of evocative paintings are displayed, and the introductory text explores how pictures tell their stories, but also points out that it is difficult in a single picture to sometimes tell the whole story. The idea is that visitors can fill in the gaps.

A number of questions on the walls - what can you hear?, what season is it?, what are they saying?, where are they going?, what colours can you see? - provide some inspiration for visitors; and a table and chairs in the centre of the gallery provide the space to create.

Visitors are invited to offer their own thoughts on the action taking place, and their responses are displayed in Perspex holders where other visitors can see the variety of stories. People of all ages have responded, and people have drawn pictures as well as written texts. Some have commented on the aesthetic nature of the paintings (sometimes quite critically), others on the recognised story (for example, the story of Pandora's box) while others have shared their thoughts about what might be happening. Looks like a great way of encouraging people to look at the art collection in a different way.

### From 1-3 its 2s-4s

November 15, 2010

**Royal Cornwall Museum is not nationally funded, but it still provides a great range of community programs.**

On Friday afternoon I visited the Royal Cornwall Museum in Truro and met Louise McDermott who introduced me to some of the great programs that are happening at the museum. Smaller than a number of museums that I have visited, they still manage to put together some inspiring and diverse programs for people of all ages. Louise talked to me about programs that involve young people (including a family sleep-over in the museum) and she explained to me how the museum's collection of memory boxes came together and how the program is actively engaged in outreach to older members of the community for whom a visit to the museum would be impossible.

At the end of my meeting, I also met Jo, who had just finished with a group of 2-4 year olds. Once a month on a Friday afternoon there are sessions for pre-schoolers. They handle some of the museum's collections, visit the galleries and spend some time doing a craft activity. When I was there, Jo had just finished exploring some of Cornwall's mining history, making some cardboard mining tools and miners' hats. A small charge is made to cover costs, but judging by the number of return visits (and younger siblings who have joined the program) it looks like a hit!

I also had a bit of time to explore the museum displays, which are put together in a very engaging and family friendly way (My next post will be about the art exhibition I saw while I was there).

### Sustainability: making a difference

November 11, 2010

**As organisations in the service of community, do museums have an obligation to be more sustainable?**



Recycling station at the British Museum staff canteen

Museums - with their climate control systems, their computer interactives and lighting - can be very energy hungry. But there are things that we can do to make a difference. For example, when I was at the British Museum last week, their staff canteen has a whole wall of recycling - and the staff take it very seriously. It takes a bit of extra effort, but surely it is worth it.

I caught up with Rachel Maden from Greener Museums today, and we talked a bit about the work that she has done with some museums in the UK. Rachel is an environmental consultant who has been working specifically with museums for about three years. To find out more about Rachel's business, have a look at her website - <http://www.greenermuseums.org/>.

I have been subscribing to Rachel's newsletter for about a year, and thought that it would be good to meet her while I was on my Fellowship, because I believe that being environmentally responsible and sharing that message with our visitors is one way that museums can serve their communities - no doubt there are opportunities for partnerships. Chatting to Rachel gave me some ideas about how we might share the sustainability message with our communities:

- obviously we can research the materials we use in our temporary exhibitions - are they recyclable, are they produced in environmentally friendly ways?
- we can also make sure that we tell visitors about what we are doing - let's not hide our lights!
- we can also think about whether we can make changes to the way we run our museums - Rachel gave me an example of a museum that has multiple sites, and staff used to use taxis to travel between sites to meetings - but now they are saving money (about 12,000 pounds a year!) as well as reducing their carbon footprint by making time to walk.

### Loving London Transport Museum

November 10, 2010

**So many people of so many ages were having so much fun and learning all sorts of things at the London Transport Museum today - and I was one of them.**



I started the day with a meeting with Sian from the Community Learning team - it is her job to go out and make connections with the local community and find out what they want from the Museum. I'm sure that the great energy inside the Museum is helped by this user-centred approach.

Sian told me about a raft of projects that the team is working on - including a series of youth projects in

the lead up to the 2012 London Olympics. You can have a look at the website for all the details - <http://www.ltmuseum.co.uk/learning/stories-of-the-world>. I was particularly taken with the idea of the 'Young Consultants' who have been employed by the Museum: 4 people aged 16-17 years who work two days/month to provide advice on exhibitions and programs. There is also a special program for young volunteers.

After talking to Sian, I spent a couple of hours exploring the Museum on my own. There is so much for families to do, and so many opportunities for people to explore in-depth the various historical themes presented in the Museum, with so much attention to detail - even the trip up to the top floor in the lift had a sound-scape, and rather than telling me what floor I was getting out, it told me what year it was!

One of the simple interactives that are dotted through the display - all with quirky and fun information

Did I mention that I loved it??

### Filling Friday Nights

November 10, 2010

**During business hours people are busy - they are at work or studying, or those who need them can access various community services. But Friday nights can be a bit bleak.**

This is the rationale for a program at one of the national museums, which happens monthly on Friday evenings. Members of the group are seeking to work outside the label 'personality disorder' and are keen to explore community resources that might be available to them. Museum staff plan the sessions with input from the group, and a variety of themes are explored. Sometimes museum staff deliver the sessions alone, sometimes in collaboration with members of the group. The group is growing in independence (and size) and will probably not require input from museum staff long-term. The organised sessions generally run for about 90 minutes, after which time the participants can explore other areas of the museum until closing time, or they can go out for dinner or for a drink.

When they are at the museum, they don't look any different to any other group, and they are not being labeled - instead they are learning new information and new skills, while developing friendships and interests.

### British Museum: international reputation - local connections

November 8, 2010

**It's not short on visitors - certainly not needing to boost its visitation! (couldn't believe how many school groups were there on Friday!), but it still matters to the British Museum to make connections with its local community.**

I was lucky enough to sit in on a session with some of the Community Team on Friday afternoon. Once a month there is a session, where local community groups can make some special connections with the collection. The sessions are not open to the general public - instead community groups can book in. That way some common themes or interests can be identified and sessions designed around these.



Donna describing some of the objects for handling

The sessions are facilitated by the Communities team, and begin with a cup of tea and a biscuit - just to make people feel at home. Next there is a chance for people to handle some selected objects from the education collections. Through the discussions that follow, the group decides which parts of the displays in the Museum they would like to see, and then there is a chance for a guided tour to visit particular objects on display.

I sat in with a group from an organisation called Opening Doors, for Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender people. Although the group was small, we had some lively discussions, led by Donna and Harvi from the Museum. We looked at various textiles, and discussed issues of gender roles and dress, before we set off into the galleries, exploring

Greek pottery and the busts of the Roman Emperor Hadrian and his lover, Antinous (which the Museum now displays together), and the Warren Cup. These objects were selected from the Museum's tour which explores same-sex relationships and gender issues. [http://www.britishmuseum.org/explore/themes/same-sex\\_desire\\_and\\_gender/introduction.aspx](http://www.britishmuseum.org/explore/themes/same-sex_desire_and_gender/introduction.aspx)

Despite how busy the British Museum is, it was great to sit on a program which connects with people at an individual level.

### I've been handling Roman pottery!

November 3, 2010

In a place where there is such a rich Roman history, this may not seem as exciting to Londoners as it does to an Australian, but everyone at the 'Hands on Archaeology' session at Museum of London seemed suitably impressed!

The archaeology collections are extensive, and in need of some rehousing, so the museum has a program where volunteers and members of the public are able to come and learn a little about the history of archaeology in London and get some hands on experience.

A short presentation about archaeological collections was followed by some information about what was required from us, then we got down to it with the artefacts! Adam was on hand to explain what we needed to do and what we were looking at and to answer questions about the task at hand as well as tell us about the material we were handling.



Session facilitator Adam explaining to me what I needed to do with the pieces of pottery I was rebagging

Although it was a small group today (all the better for me, so I could bombard Adam with questions about the program) but during school holidays, they had huge numbers of participants, and managed to get through a considerable amount of work. The volunteers that I was talking to found the process extremely rewarding and endlessly interesting.

I just couldn't get over the fact that I had Roman pottery in my hands!

### You can't handle the truth...but handling the real objects might improve wellbeing...

November 2, 2010



an example of the objects offered to patients for handling

**Research from University College London is showing that allowing patients in hospitals to handle museum objects can improve their wellbeing**

I met with Guy Noble and Linda Thomson today, who told me more about this research project. We have been working on a similar project at Flinders Medical Centre in Adelaide, so it was great to talk to people with so much knowledge and experience.

Patients in the study are invited to handle one or more objects from a selection from the UCLH collection, including natural history specimens, prints and Egyptian objects. Before and after the sessions, they are asked to complete two short questionnaires, which are used to measure changes in their sense of

wellbeing.

We all know intuitively that patients in hospital are likely to be experiencing boredom and apprehension - as Linda described it, the box of objects becomes their world for 30 minutes, and they are able to focus on something else. Especially if they are already museum visitors, interaction with the objects can mentally take them away from the hospital to a different time and place, recalling museum visits.

Control studies have been done comparing results of actually handling objects vs looking at pictures of the same objects, and it would appear that handling the objects has more significant benefits. There is also evidence that through dementia, people may lose visual capacity and memory, but that sense of touch can remain robust.

This three year study is close to being finished.

Find out more at <http://www.mhm.ucl.ac.uk/mhm-research/chatterjee.php>

### The end of an era?

October 29, 2010



Introductory panel to the exhibition Ghost Town at Coventry Transport Museum

An exhibition at the Coventry Transport Museum documenting the demise of the vehicle building industry in Coventry was created with input from university students.

Coventry used to be a centre for bicycle manufacture and was later the heart of the British motor industry - home to Jaguar, Rover and Rootes among others - but now vehicle manufacture is all but gone from the city. The Coventry Transport Museum documents the history of this industry.

An exhibition called 'Ghost Town?' documents the period from 1980-2010 when all the large car factories in the area closed down. The exhibition challenges visitors to explore the reasons why this happened. Primary source material in the form of press coverage is all around the exhibition - blown up big on the walls and floor; there are videos featuring people talking about their years of working in the industry and listening posts to explore more of the story; and there are places where people can share their own responses - including a giant magnetic poetry wall.

I loved the way this exhibition invited its audience to look beyond the cars and the industry to the stories of the people.



An interesting way for visitors to share their thoughts



A really inviting listening post on a wall at the Coventry Transport Museum



The back and white newspapers on the wall combined with the red used in the exhibition infrastructure and design is striking.

A safe place to visit

October 26, 2010

**Consultation with groups of people with intellectual disabilities revealed that ‘feeling safe’ in a museum environment is key to successful visits.**

Today I was lucky enough to attend two programs run by the Leicester Arts and Museums Outreach programs, and had a chat to Linda Harding, who coordinates the programs. A current priority is to create opportunities for people with intellectual disabilities to access to the museum collections and buildings. Linda explained that during the consultation phase, they learned that coming into the museum when it is too busy and bustling can be an impediment to people with intellectual disabilities - they can be made to feel uncomfortable with people staring. So Linda’s programs are arranged to ensure that people feel safe and confident in the museum spaces.



New Walk Museum in Leicester

This morning I sat in on a session with a group of Muslim women from Ansaar. Linda showed us various objects from the collection - telephones, radios and cameras, and we discussed how they had changed over time. We had a look around the galleries, and we did a craft activity. We even managed to fit in a cup of tea before lunch!

Then this afternoon, I sat in on a workshop with some young people with learning difficulties. Over the past few weeks they have been exploring the New Walk Museum’s Ancient Egyptian collections, and today they worked with drama and dance practitioners to explore the ideas in more detail.

Consultation is a key part in all the Outreach work - the young people chose the theme they wanted to explore and also the medium in which they wanted to explore it. Linda also told me that over the past five years they have hosted community forums about many aspects of the museum - collection development, customer service, interpretation etc - to which community groups are invited to send representatives. Held three times a year, the forums run for about two hours, and provide a chance for people to share their views about the work of the museums.

### Make it epic!

October 25, 2010

**People want to be involved in social media with impact - make it *epic* was the advice we were given at a workshop in Edinburgh.**

Most of the people to whom I have been talking while I have been in the UK agree that there is enormous potential to engage new audiences for museums using social media, but few have yet developed the strategies and projects that will capitalise on it. I was lucky enough to attend a workshop last week with people from the cultural sector from across Scotland where the issues were explored.

Ewan McIntosh of No Tosh presented the first keynote address, which issued the ‘epic’ challenge to us. He urged us to

- design our social media activities around our ‘customers’
- don’t assume that people know why we do what we do - make sure we are ready with a pitch
- go where our audience is (don’t guess - ask!)
- develop an understanding of who they are and what we bring to them
- DON’T THINK - TRY!

The day included some short presentations from the Scottish national institutions about their social media activities and four longer, thought-provoking papers. The final presentation of the day was given by Gail Durbin from the V&A. I know my colleagues at History SA are familiar with the V&A beaches project [http://www.vam.ac.uk/collections/textiles/lawty/world\\_beach/map\\_gallery/index.php](http://www.vam.ac.uk/collections/textiles/lawty/world_beach/map_gallery/index.php), but there was another one about knitting that took my fancy!

<http://www.vam.ac.uk/collections/fashion/features/knitting/share/index.php>. People are invited to add their own (non-garment) knitting to the V&A’s database. Gail also spoke about a project to document hairstyles by inviting people to submit photographs - thus allowing the museum to document the ephemeral. Similarly, people were invited to submit photographs and memories of 60s fashion, and to share with others the impact that Kylie Minogue’s style has had on them - and you can even print out and dress your very own Kylie doll! [http://www.vam.ac.uk/collections/fashion/exhibs\\_displays/kylie/kylie\\_paper\\_doll/index.html](http://www.vam.ac.uk/collections/fashion/exhibs_displays/kylie/kylie_paper_doll/index.html). Be epic, indeed!

### Is museum training enough?

October 21, 2010

I've already written about some projects with prisons, and since then I've seen some other examples which have had remarkable results, but it's left me wondering whether museum professionals are really qualified to do this work.

We know that many prisoners - sadly - have complex mental health conditions. Many of the other projects I have seen are created for people with mental illness. Others engage people who may have had traumatic experiences, such as refugees. Museum training doesn't necessarily give us the skills to provide what these people need.

I've talked to a some of the museum outreach people about this, and there are a number of approaches.

- some staff do have counseling qualifications.
- others have specific training sessions about what to expect when working with certain groups - this is built into the project plan. This training also ensures the museum staff know where to refer people for assistance if necessary.
- most projects are run in collaboration with partner organisations, who generally have expertise in this field.

This means that projects - like an art-making project run by the National Gallery of Scotland at a women's prison - can happen without significant risk. This project is based on the work of US artist Cindy Sherman, who creates photographs of herself in different characters. A practicing artist also worked on the project, explaining the work of Sherman to the women, and encouraging them to think about how they could represent themselves. In five sessions over two weeks, the women came up with the concepts, worked with a makeup artist to create the characters and worked with the artist to create the images. The results will be on display later in the year.

### In their own words

October 21, 2010

I've been on some fairly tedious guided tours of historic sites over the years, but I love the idea of a tour led by primary school students.



Longmore House, the home of Historic Scotland. The site used to be a hospital, but is now home to the offices of Historic Scotland.

A program run by Historic Scotland trains primary school students to be tour guides for other school groups at some of the nation's historic sites. Sue Mitchell, Education Manager at Historic Scotland, outlined the 'Junior Tour Guide' program for me. Schools can decide the scope of the project and how much time it will be given to it. Crossing curriculum boundaries, this program can teach students the essential elements of public speaking and presentation; history of the site; customer care; marketing and bookings management. Historic Scotland can provide costumes for the students to wear and works with the teachers and students to develop the tour and infrastructure. Friends and families are invited to a launch, and students who may not be involved in the tour guiding can take other roles - Sue told me about a recent launch where some students arranged the catering, others were in a choir which sang Celtic songs while others had worked on the marketing materials. Once developed, the students present the

tours to other school groups throughout the year.

The program is very popular, with some schools participating every year.

Indeed, it has been so successful that there is now a Summer Guides program, which students who have finished primary school (and so are no longer part of the junior guides through their school program) can still present guided tours during the summer break. There is such high demand that students have to audition to be a part of it.

### 'More than just a project'

October 19, 2010



National Museums of Scotland do some great outreach projects with all kinds of audiences. But they are trying to integrate their outreach more closely with the other activities in the Museum, with some interesting some unexpected results.

For example, a film project called 'One Nation - Five Million Voices' interviewed a wide variety of people in a fairly light-hearted way about what being Scottish means to them. This film is now in integral part of the display 'Scotland: A changing nation'. Using the words of people who call Scotland home, themes such as the best and worst

things about the country (the weather featured quite a bit in the worst!) and particular Scottish words (from now on I'm adding *fankle* (tangled up or confused) to my vocabulary) are explored. What the museum staff had not anticipated, though, was that an English as a Second Language provider would develop a whole set of resources around this film, because it so perfectly met their need to introduce colloquial language.

Indeed, a number of museums I have visited have specific programs for adults learning English - from regular conversation classes to specific projects to work with recent migrants. Hardly a surprise, given that museum texts should be written in simple language, making them an ideal resource. At NMS, they are also using some of these contacts to help them review their texts and to provide some feedback on prototype interactives. What better audience to help them ascertain whether the language is clear and unambiguous?

NMS has a number of 'Discovery' spaces, where families can explore some of the ideas presented in the Museum

Outreach staff are also working with the Volunteer Coordinator to see if there are ways that people who have come into contact with the Museum through the outreach programs can play an ongoing role - for example, can young people's tours be developed with young people as guides? Similarly, people from different cultural backgrounds have particular connections with certain objects - which could form the basis of guided tours. In this way, the 'tour guides' can learn new skills, and the Museum can broaden its public program offerings.

### Walking the talk

October 17, 2010



I've spent two days at National Museums Liverpool with the community outreach team talking about all the great work that they do with various communities within Liverpool - and their programs are truly inspirational. And in between meetings I spent time in the coffee shop and gift shop. In the coffee shop I noticed that there was a sign saying that the coffee was Fair Trade Coffee, and in the gift shop there was a sign that told me that every purchase supported the Museum. So I did my bit, and purchased a block of Fair Trade chocolate (I'm a giver at heart!). It got me thinking about our shops in Museums...

It's not really a surprise that this museum would be serving Fair Trade coffee and stocking Fair Trade stock. After all, they are responsible for the International Slavery Museum at Albert Dock. This museum documents the history of slavery, and its connection to Liverpool, which was a major slaving port in the 18th century, contributing considerable wealth to the city. The Museum also highlights contemporary slavery and has a new community space called Campaign Zone that aims to shed light on the legacies of transatlantic slavery and to raise awareness of the modern forms of slavery existing in the world today.

But it got me thinking about shops in museums. If we are serious about our mandate to serve communities and provide access to all, should more of us be following the Fair Trade route?

### Working with teenage mums

October 16, 2010

**A three-year project at National Museums Liverpool has given teenage mums a chance to learn new skills and has provided the Museums with some great products for family visitors.**

As part of a program that releases teenage parents from school one day per week to assist them with their additional responsibilities as parents, Museum staff worked with several local agencies that already had links with teenage parents to provide a program that gave these teenagers confidence, new skills and further insight into their new role as parents.



In the first year, the participants in the project worked with an artist and staff from the Walker Art Gallery to create a tactile alphabet play mat that the Gallery still uses for a weekly toddlers session. They spent time getting to know the Gallery, had talks from curators and other staff, and learnt skills from the artist as they created the mat. In the second year, two projects were run. One taught digital photography skills and the other created a children's trail through the Bugs and Insects galleries of the World Museum. In the third year, the group created textile panels that will form a story-telling tent at the soon-to-be opened Museum of Liverpool.

And that should be the end of the story - but it isn't. Because even though the funding has run out, one of the project partners - a teenage pregnancy support group - saw so much benefit in the program that they have extended the partnership, asking the Museum to create a unit of learning that they could offer their clients. So the next project will be based around story-

telling - helping the new parents to understand different story-telling techniques and how they can be applied. So no questions about whether this project met its goals!

### Return of the family at World Museum, Liverpool

October 15, 2010



World Museum's Junior Archaeologist pack. The prizes for participants are simple and not expensive - such as a sticker, a poster or a laminated bookmark

**Repeat visitors are something that museums love! At the World Museum, a simple activity passport with incentives is helping to bring families back to explore different sections of the museum.**

The Museum as a whole is more than a day's activity. Indeed the Egyptian Collection alone is extensive, and it is this collection that is the focus on a simple family activity. The 'Pocket guide to becoming a junior Egyptologist' needs to be completed over three visits, with three different prizes for correct answers. First up, participants are invited to write their name in hieroglyphs! Then Professor Garstang (who worked for the University of Liverpool around

100 years ago and whose collection is on display at the museum) introduces himself and asks a question about the Ancient Egypt.

When the participant has the answer, they return to the desk for their reward (there is a different reward for each problem. The next part needs to be completed at the next visit - a total of three visits in all. A great incentive for locals to make multiple visits, but of course difficult for people who are from out of town. But no-one misses out: if you let them know that you don't live locally, you can complete the whole activity in one visit. The museum is free to visit, so there is no additional cost for the multiple visits, and because the activities are relatively short, there is the opportunity to explore the other areas of the museum - like the tarantula - but I decided not to get too close to that one...

World Museum has a budget that many museums would envy, but this is a low-cost activity that any museum could try.

### Both ends of the spectrum, and everything in between

October 13, 2010

**From an exhibition of treasures selected by four year olds to the survival stories the Holocaust, the outreach team at Kirklees runs programs which have meaning for the community.**

I had a great meeting with Kim and Mashuda in Dewsbury. This town has done it rough over the last few years with all kinds of publicity around tragic and horrifying events. The new exhibition at the Dewsbury Museum, though, aims to show people that there is more to this town. Inviting locals to share their 'special places', the exhibition is a series of lively portrait photographs with an explanation of why the subject has chosen the place. Some interpretive text gives context and weaves the series together. The exhibition opened in August, and in that month 6000 people visited. In a town of only about 55,000 that is quite an achievement!

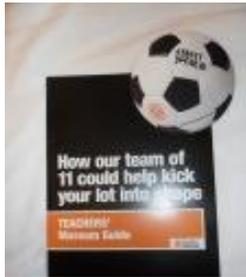
The team has worked with all kinds of people on a wide variety of projects - including an exhibition with pre-schoolers, who were asked to bring along 'treasures'. All manner of objects showed up, including a pair of black plastic party shoes with blue glitter, and a BMW camper van. The participants shared their stories about why these were such treasured objects, and the labels were created from these narratives. And public interest was stirred by the exhibition.



An annual event is Holocaust Remembrance Day, when the team prepares a different activity each year. Last year six informal meals were hosted in the community. At each, one Holocaust survivor and one community member who had faced more recent persecution shared their experiences. The food had been selected to relate to the stories in some way. For example a cake with silver candles was served at one meal, where a Holocaust survivor described her 18th birthday in Auschwitz, when her cake - lovingly prepared by friends - was no more than two pieces of stale bread with some aluminium shards for candles. As part of the process the guests at the dinner were all invited to share what they were going to do in their lives to ensure that such persecution is avoided in the future. The meals were all filmed, and there is now a DVD and a recipe book (which includes some of the stories and responses from participants) which document the event - very, very moving.

## Can a football museum lower crime and improve literacy?

October 12, 2010



This is the teacher's information pack from the NFM - it explains that programs can be offered which relate directly to National Curriculum in History, Citizenship, Science, Literacy, Design and Technology and Physical Education

Police statistics prove that when a group of NEET (Not in Employment, Education or Training) youth are in a poetry workshop run by the National Football Museum, crime rates have fallen.

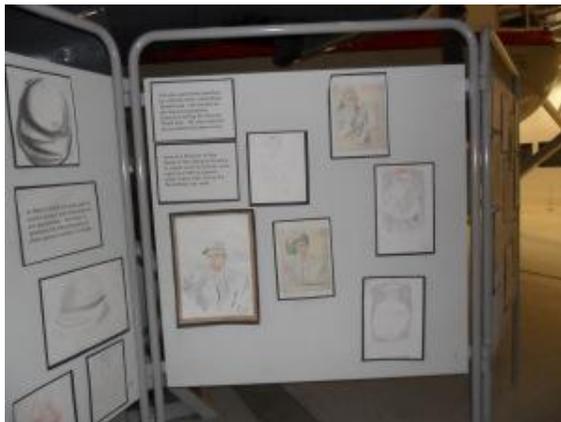
Peter Evans, Head of Learning at the National Football Museum explained that *Street Speak*, a project funded by the Football Foundation and the Arts Council, brings together groups of young people with professional poets to harness their interest in football to help raise literacy, self-esteem and aspirations. As well as learning about different styles of poetry and having a shot at writing and performing their own, the participants also have a chance to hone their football skills.

The Museum (scheduled to open in a new location in Manchester in 2011) also hosts education programs across a wide variety of subject areas, including literacy, science, maths, inclusion and citizenship (with some amazing stories about how popular women's football used to be, and how it was shut down by the football powers of the day). There is even a program tied into the Religious Education curriculum. As Peter explained it to me, just as a household can be divided in their loyalty to football teams but can still get along and live happily together, there are lessons about tolerance and prejudice that we can take from football and apply in a broader context.

## Engaging prisoners

October 11, 2010

It might be hard to get prisoners to visit museums, but that hasn't stopped two museums from involving them in their programs.



At the Imperial War Museum in Duxford there is an exhibition of drawings by prisoners from HMP Edmunds Hill on display in the main pavilion. There is a text panel that explains that for the past three years the Museum has been working with the literacy tutors at the prison. Every month the Learning Department makes available objects from the handling collections to provide inspiration for reading and writing activities.

They have also done some work with the prison's art program, lending sketches by artist Brian Stonehouse, who served in the Second World War. He was taken Prisoner of War by the Nazis, and some of the sketches he made in Dachau were used as evidence during the Nuremberg Trials. You have to assume that the prisoners looking at the sketches today might

relate to the artist's work, even if the circumstances are different.

In Norwich, prisoners have also been part of a 'people's choice' exhibition project. 60 individuals and groups were invited to select a work from the Museum's art collection - including a group from a prison art program. With the assistance of a kit prepared by the museum's Learning Department about 'how to respond to art' each group was invited to create a label of up to 100 words. Participants were also allowed to respond creatively in a medium most suited to them. Some chose to express their thoughts in poems, a deaf group signed their label (which was shown on a video screen beside the work). There was even a group from a child care centre who chose an artwork based on taste! (They chose between a few still life paintings, and sampled the food depicted to make their decision.) Apparently visitors spent ages in the gallery reading the labels! The artwork that the prisoners chose was a seascape, and their label spoke movingly about the sea knowing no barriers.

## How do the blind and partially sighted access the aircraft collections at the Imperial War Museum?

October 8, 2010

Aircraft are big objects, and it is not always possible for people to explore such objects through touch. IWM Duxford has won prizes for their programs for visually impaired visitors.

Tomorrow is the final day of a three-day conference about managing large technology objects in museums, held at IWM Duxford. Today we heard a very interesting paper by Carl Warner about how the museum has worked with the vision-impaired community.

Carl made the point that through engagement with the community (rather than simply relying on the services of an access consultant) the museum was able to devise some new ways for people with vision impairment to explore the museum and its collections. He reminded us, too, that many vision impaired people do have some sight, so it is important to think about colour contrasts etc which can be easier for partially-sighted people to distinguish. He told us that one message that came out clearly from the consultation process was the vision impaired people wanted to have choices in how they learned about the collections - a one-size fits all tour, where the visitor has no choices or power is not the ideal.



A touch panel at the IWM - visitors are able to feel examples of various materials related to the collection.

Another idea the museum has used is to create some models of aircraft that people can feel to get a sense of the shape of the aircraft. A scale model human is also included to help people understand the relative sizes of the aircraft being discussed.

There is one display - a cockpit of a small aircraft - that people can touch, and the audio tour compares the sizes and shapes of other aircraft with the one that people have been able to touch, allowing them to get more of an understanding about aircraft they can't touch through this process.

Carl told us, too, that when the museum makes films as part of their interpretation, they ensure that the words make sense without the pictures. The films also feature sign language translations for those with hearing impairment.

While not every museum has the resources to create new programs and interpretation for vision impaired people, Carl made the point that any small step forward make it worthwhile. His key message was talk to people and find out what they would like from their museum experience. Doesn't sound too hard, does it?

### Few resources, but innovative programs

October 7, 2010

**It is comparatively easy to run programs for communities if you have budgets and staff, but it is still possible to do some great projects on a shoe-string.**

Today I caught up with Tamsin Wimhurst who is a part-time education officer at the Cambridge County and Folk Museum. This is an independent museum - in other words, they need to survive on what they bring in through admissions.

I discovered that they reach about 4000 students a year. Over half of those actually visit the site, while the others interact with the museum's loan boxes. A small number are introduced to the museum through outreach programs, where museum staff visit schools directly. Tamsin told me about a recent project of this nature relating to a history week at a local school. When the coronation of Queen Victoria took place, there was a celebratory sit down dinner hosted in one of the parks in Cambridge for 15,000 of the town's poor. Tamsin

Audio tours are an obvious opportunity, and Carl played us a short excerpt of a tour of the main pavilion. The language and descriptions were beautifully evocative, describing size, colour, shape, detail and history of some of the aircraft on display. There is a section of the museum where visitors (not just the vision impaired) can touch some of the materials used in the construction of aircraft. This is immensely popular with sighted people, too.



The panel at the bottom is a model of the plane that is described in the text around it. Vision impaired people can get a sense of the shape and size of the object by touching the model.

went to the school and introduced them to the event. They went on to explore the way the tables were laid, the types of food that were served and the games and sports that were played at the event. They made plasticine table settings and food, and played the games themselves (although they didn't try the eel catching game!)

Tamsin also told me about a program they are planning relating to a new BBC's series (similar the popular 'Who do you think you are?' and '1940s House' programs.) The next series will focus on the concept of the High Street, and she is planning displays and programs that will have this focus in order to capitalise on the public interest that will be generated by the series. It also extends their opportunity to promote their programs, as the BBC has a website detailing allied projects around the country.

### Reminiscence boxes in Norwich

October 5, 2010

**Reminiscence boxes are not a new idea, but the Norfolk Museum and Archaeology service lend theirs out through the public library.**

I spent a lovely afternoon yesterday at the Norwich Castle Museum and Gallery. I had a quick look around the exhibitions and then spent a couple of hours talking to Ruth Burwood, Senior Access Curator. Ruth told me about a number of projects they have worked on, all responding to the needs of particular groups within the community.

In an effort to provide support for carers of people with dementia, the museum established a number of themed memory boxes. The boxes include objects for handling, as well as photographs and some audio recordings or a DVD - all of which relate to the same theme. She explained to me that since the Museum lacked any facility for lending these out to community members on an ongoing basis, a partnership with the local library was the solution. Apparently they have been very successful. Not all of the objects have come from the collections - some have been sourced from second-hand shops to ensure that there are appropriate objects for handling.

Ruth explained that these types of projects are devised in response to the priorities of local government, who provide about a third of the museum's funding.

### Loving the low-tech interactives!

October 3, 2010

**How often do we see computer-based interactives in museums with 'out of order' signs on them? The museums I've visited in Great Yarmouth don't necessarily have huge budgets, but they've made an effort to provide interactives for all the family that won't break down.**

When thinking about visitor experience, it is important to think about different learning styles and means of interpretation. Interactive elements in displays provide visitors with a break from reading and a chance to interact with each other as well as the display. Museums in Great Yarmouth provide examples of relatively low-cost and low technology ways of helping people to engage in all sorts of ways with the stories that the museums are sharing.



At Time and Tide, six of the museum's artworks have been printed onto the blocks and visitors are invited to complete the jigsaw puzzles



Adults and kids alike can take some time out from the serious stories being told in the Tollhouse Museum and enjoy the game.



Elizabethan House Museum: in a display about Elizabethan food preparation, there were bags of spices to touch and smell.

The Nelson Museum has a whole section about Nelson's leadership and strategy. Visitors can try out their own strategy playing the giant game at the back of the Museum



In the section about leadership, visitors are invited to test their own leadership decisions with real situations and see how they compare with those made at the time. Some interesting results! Public humiliation not so acceptable nowadays!

### Time and Tide - community consultation leads the way

October 2, 2010

Time and Tide Museum in Great Yarmouth was established through a process of community consultation about six years ago and the community is still involved in setting the agenda for the museum.

I had a tour of the museum with James Steward. He explained to me that the idea for the museum - which explores the history of the town with a special focus on the herring industry - came from the local community, and that their input was sought through the entire process, including themes for displays as well as the ways in which the stories are told.

The consultation process revealed that people were most interested in seeing the town's recent past documented, so the focus is on the period after the Second World War. The Museum is located in an old herring curing factory, and interpretation of the site and the industry is the primary theme of the museum (although you can also learn about everything from ancient times to the local circus).

James explained that the consultation process continues with a team of 'Community Curators' which meets regularly to discuss the public programs and proposed acquisitions.



The day I visited was a day where museums nationally were presenting activities for older people, and James introduced me to museum volunteer Jackie, who was looking after the local shop, and collecting stories from visitors about their recollections of local shops and produce. These stories then become part of the museum's collection and can be used later to help interpret collection objects. This is another way in which the voices of the community - rather than that of the curator - can be presented in the museum.

#### UK museums - here I come!

September 15, 2010



#### How do museums make meaningful connections with their communities, and what benefits can these connections have for both the museum and the wider community?

These are some of the questions I hope to explore over the next couple of months. I am an Australian museum professional (working for History SA in South Australia) who has been lucky enough to be awarded a Churchill Fellowship to travel to the UK to research museum outreach programs that respond to community need.

I am going to be in the UK for almost 8 weeks, leaving at the end of September 2010, and will be posting updates about the programs and projects that I discover on my travels.

I'll be visiting museums in Great Yarmouth, Norwich, Cambridge, Manchester, Liverpool, Edinburgh, Leicester, London and Truro, hoping to get a handle on how they put museums at the heart of their communities: what kinds of programs are on offer, how are they funded, how are they planned and evaluated and who uses them. Hopefully I can pinch some good ideas to apply when I come home!