

What Did We Learn This Time?

The Museums and
Galleries Lifelong
Learning Initiative
(MGLI) 2002-2003

clmg





clmg exists to encourage fresh thinking and innovation in museums and galleries: to enable them to fulfil their potential as centres of learning.

clmg believes:

- The 2,500 museums and galleries in the UK are a national learning infrastructure second only to schools.
- *The thing* museums can and should be for is learning.
- Museums and galleries should recognise that learning is one of their core functions and should structure and fund themselves accordingly.
- Objects are there for people. Collections exist to be used.
- Museum boundaries should be drawn around people, not buildings.
- The uniqueness of museum learning lies in the engagement of learners; using real artefacts to motivate their learning experience.
- Museum and gallery learning is as much about the moral, spiritual and democratic development, social cohesion and cultural norms that bind societies together, as it is about knowledge *per se*.
- Museums and galleries should be defined by what they do, as much as by what they hold.
- Museums and galleries change lives.

Acknowledgements

clmg is indebted most of all to the learners who made these projects what they are, but also to the people at the regional museums, libraries and archives councils, the staff at the participating museums and galleries, the partner organisations, the consultants and, of course, our funders, (the Department for Education and Skills). Without the hard work, commitment and dedication of them all we would have no Museums and Galleries Lifelong Learning Initiative and no story to tell.

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Introduction

What is the Museums and Galleries Lifelong Learning Initiative?

The Museums and Galleries Lifelong Learning Initiative (MGLI) is an experimental and developmental programme funded by the Department for Education and Skills (DfES). It's about learning about learning, designed to find out what works and what doesn't through new lifelong learning projects, with new groups, in museums and galleries.

Previously on MGLI.....

MGLI has been running for three years now. You might recall the previous 'What Did We Learn?' report which tells the story of the first two years of the programme (2000-2002).

MGLI began back in 2000 when the then Department for Education and Employment decided to fund some groundbreaking projects which would test new ways of working with new learners in museums and galleries. The projects were so successful that the DfES agreed to fund another four projects in 2001-2002, and then another four in 2002-2003. This publication tells the story of the last four projects, perhaps the most ambitious year of all.

We've learnt a lot during the programme and the projects prove just what can be achieved for learners in museums and galleries. They demonstrate that learning with museums and galleries does not have to begin and end with schools and that museums and galleries can be wonderfully inspiring places for people of all ages, cultures and backgrounds. Given the right motivation and environment, people who have been turned off by learning can rediscover it, learn new skills, stretch themselves and go on to things they never imagined.

As in the previous years, mistakes were made during the projects. This is inevitable (*and essential*) when embarking on innovative learning. Mistakes have enabled the staff involved to reflect on what works, to try new directions, and pick up some new skills. In short, to *learn* from experience.

Where Are They Now?

The MGLI projects have now finished, but the story doesn't quite end there. With the backing of the DfES, we'll be re-visiting *all* the projects to find out what's happened to the learners, what effect the programme has had on the museums and partners and whether it's made any difference to other museums and galleries across the country. We hope that this retrospective will help us tease out some important lessons for policy makers, managers and funders about sustaining lifelong learning in museums and galleries.





Prisoners and Ex-Offenders in East and West Sussex



Black Box

More people than ever before are currently serving prison sentences and the issue of education and learning in prisons has never been so important. So far, only a handful of museums and galleries have worked with offenders. South East Museums Libraries and Archives Council (SEMLAC) wanted to prove the contribution that museums and galleries in the region could make to breaking the cycle of re-offending. Through a series of workshops, including storytelling, poetry and creative writing, museums and galleries in East and West Sussex worked with prisoners from Ford Prison in Arundel and ex-offenders from a day care charity called Foundation, to create personal 'museums of the imagination'.

"The objects brought colour. Prison is a very colourless place."
Black Box project co-ordinator

What were the aims of Black Box?

- To establish links with male prison inmates, ex-offenders and vulnerable groups through a creative project involving a number of museums and galleries in East and West Sussex and Brighton and Hove.
- To enable prisoners and ex-offenders to gain skills in storytelling, creative writing and poetry by developing their own personal museums.
- To enable them to develop their self esteem, confidence, trust and self worth.
- To challenge preconceptions and change attitudes to learning and to prisoners and ex-offenders.
- To develop the skills and confidence of museum staff to work with prisoners and ex-offenders and enable them to act as mentors to other museums wishing to embark on similar projects in the future.
- To enable partner museums to establish productive, sustainable links with a non-traditional group (and the agencies that represent them).
- To build sustainable links with agencies and organisations working with prisoners and ex-offenders.
- To produce a travelling and web-based exhibition of participants' work.
- To produce a toolkit that will encourage and enable museums and galleries to develop work with prisoners and ex-offenders in the future.

Impact, Achievements and Sustainability

- Three prisoners and four ex-offenders produced personal museums.
- Participants developed artistic and creative writing skills as well as time management, confidence, trust, and self-esteem.
- Exhibitions of the participants' work were displayed at Horsham Museum and Brighton Museum and Art Gallery. Prisoners and ex-offenders attended both the launches.
- Strong links have been developed between Ford Prison, SEMLAC, the participating museums and a range of partners. There is now a strong desire to work together in future.
- A regional training day on the project was organised by SEMLAC for museums, libraries and archives staff and offender and ex-offender organisations. The day brokered at least three new relationships which will hopefully lead to new regional projects.
- A Black Box prison learning toolkit was produced as a guide for anyone wanting to try the same idea.
- A Black Box website has been produced (www.semlac.org.uk/blackbox) with a virtual exhibition of participants' work, details of the project and a copy of the Black Box toolkit.
- Museum staff and freelance artists have developed skills and confidence in working with new groups.
- One of the clients has pursued his creative writing further.

How and when?

June 2002

Bid submitted by SEMLAC

July 2002

Bid successful

July-August 2002

Project co-ordinator appointed
Consultation with museums and partners
Meeting with other MGLI managers to share skills and ideas

September 2002

Project group meeting
Project artists appointed

October 2002

Training for museum partners in working with prisoners and ex-offenders
Workshops planned

- Two prisoners were able to use artworks produced during the project as contributions to a distance learning art course they were following.
- SEMLAC has recently secured funding for a prison learning project in Sussex called 'Bridging the Gap', also funded by DfES, this time through Empowering the Learning Community. They'll be working with Ford Prison again, but this time they intend to link to the probation service, bridging the gap between prison and release, providing 'how to' guides for ex-offenders detailing the services that exist in museums and libraries to support them on the outside.

"One participant has already come into the museum and asked when the exhibition is on as they are bringing their family."
Brighton Museum partner



The Vital Statistics

Total cost of Black Box	£20,000
Total number of participants	13
Total number from Ford Prison	4
Total number from Foundation	9

Who were the participants and learners?

The participants were male inmates from Ford Prison in Arundel and clients from an organisation called Foundation, a day care programme for rough sleepers and substance misusers, many of whom are ex-offenders.

The learners from Ford Prison were all over the age of retirement and the education officer at the prison felt that it was important to provide these inmates with some form of structure to their day.

The clients from Foundation required support in developing their literacy skills, social skills, confidence and self-esteem. With the learners from Ford Prison the support needed was of a different kind; most of the men were fairly well educated but needed help to develop their research, creative and technical skills.

Who were the partners?

Number of partner organisations	12
Partner organisations	South East Museum, Library and Archive Council (SEMLAC) Ford Prison Foundation Horsham Museum Brighton Museum and Art Gallery Freelance artist Freelance poet Crime Reduction Initiative Sussex Probation Service Unit for the Arts and Offenders NACRO
Who project managed?	South East Museum, Library and Archive Council
Who managed day to day?	Freelance project co-ordinator
Who provided what?	
South East Museum, Library and Archive Council	Overall management plus reporting back to DfES and clmg
Project co-ordinator	Day to day management Experience with client group and working with Ford Prison Experience in working with 'hard to reach' groups and museums, libraries and archives

"I learnt to stick to something and see it through."

Black Box participant from Foundation

October-December 2002

Workshops take place at Ford Prison and at museums and galleries

Participants at Ford Prison complete their personal museums

January-February 2003

Workshops take place with Foundation clients at museums and galleries

Foundation participants complete their personal museums
Training for museums staff

March 2003

Exhibition of personal museums by Ford Prison inmates opens at Horsham Museum

April 2003

Exhibition of personal museums by Foundation clients opens at Brighton Museum and Art Gallery
Black Box conference

What went wrong?

- Fewer inmates from Ford prison than anticipated joined the project as those below retirement age would have had to have taken time out of work to join in each workshop. The prison would have lost a day's income and the inmates would have lost a day's pay.
- Some museum partners had to withdraw from the project due to heavy workloads.
- One of the participants from Ford prison had to leave the project, despite his enthusiasm for it, because he was offered resettlement.
- Some of the participants from Foundation had to leave the project for rehabilitation. One member asked if he could delay rehab to complete the project and one requested that he carried on whilst in rehab. But several had to drop out before they completed their museums which was frustrating for them.
- The original intention was to work with the Crime Reduction Initiative. Although enthusiastic about the project, they should have been contacted months in advance to ensure the project fit with their schedules. On the plus side, a very successful working relationship with Foundation has been forged and all partners are discussing future work with the Crime Reduction Initiative.
- A trip for the offenders to an open air working museum at Amberley was planned but the inmates were allowed only one outside visit. Given the choice, they opted to attend the opening of their exhibition at Horsham Museum.
- It was hoped that participants would get involved in mounting the displays and creating leaflets and posters for the exhibitions. But they felt that they had done their bit and creating the exhibitions was the museums' job.
- A lack of facilities and restrictions on the use of the Internet at Ford prison meant including ICT in the project was difficult.
- The exhibition at Brighton Museum and Art Gallery had to fit into the busy schedules of a large museum service. With exhibitions and galleries booked months, or even years in advance, it was difficult to secure a prominent space to show the exhibition.

Ford Prison	Learners Expert advice and support Location for workshops with offenders
Foundation	Learners Expert advice and support
Sussex Probation Service	Publicised the project to ex-offenders
NACRO	Brokered relationship with Foundation
Crime Reduction Initiative Horsham Museum	Advice and support Staff to work alongside learners Collections to form the starting point for creative workshops at Ford Prison Space for and assistance in mounting exhibition of work by offenders from Ford Prison
Brighton Museum and Art Gallery	Staff to work alongside learners Space for and assistance in mounting exhibition of work by clients from Foundation Venues for workshops
Booth Museum of Natural History	Collections and displays of natural history specimens to act as a catalyst to learning for Foundation clients
Unit for the Arts and Offenders Prisoners' Learning and Skills Unit	Advice, support and training Advice, support and training

How they did it: Black Box

SEMLAC and the project partners had previously run creative projects with clients at Ford prison. This enabled them to build on existing links rather than attempting to forge partnerships from scratch in a short timescale.

The first step was to recruit a project co-ordinator which SEMLAC did right at the start of the project. He was able to bring his considerable experience with the client group to the shaping of the project from the very earliest stages – something that had a great impact on the overall success, and minimised delays at the start.

"Prison is boring. You're in a routine.....to get enthusiasts to come in from outside is great!"
Education Officer, HMP Ford

With the project co-ordinator on board, they contacted potential museum partners. Before the project began in earnest, all museum staff received a half-day training session on working with prisoners and ex-offenders, delivered by the project co-ordinator and the education officer from Ford Prison. For the museum staff this was essential – having never set foot in a prison before, the chance to hear someone talk about what life was like inside and the do's and don'ts for working with inmates put minds at rest and boosted confidence. The session was also a helpful stage in engaging partners to pool resources, and generating new ideas.

At Ford Prison they decided to work with older inmates. The education officer felt strongly that those past retirement age who couldn't work were often left with little focus to their day and so a creative project would be of enormous benefit to them. At first it was hard to sell the idea of the project to both prison inmates and the Prison Governor so the

project co-ordinator produced a basic flyer outlining some of the things that participants might get a chance to do. Four men joined the project and workshops began with an examination of collections from Horsham Museum. As a worker from Ford Prison put it, one of the highlights was seeing *“the excitement opening the new boxes generated each week”* as museum staff arrived with a new collection of artefacts to spark off memories and inspire creativity.

“At first we thought it was something we could imagine doing at school, a couple of us felt a bit silly – now I’m looking forward to it going on display.”

Black Box participant from Foundation

The participants from Foundation were harder to recruit as none of the partners had existing contacts with ex-offenders’ or rough sleepers’ charities. It required SEMLAC and the project manager to make numerous contacts with organisations that support prisoners and ex-offenders such as the Crime Reduction Initiative (CRI) and the Probation Service. Foundation is a CRI supported project which helps rough sleepers and substance misusers through rehabilitation. There is no obligation to turn up, so some of the participants dropped in and out of the workshops.

At the start of the workshops, most of the participants were understandably reluctant to reveal personal stories and memories for their personal museums. Some of the Foundation participants had quite negative views about museums and didn’t understand what the project was asking of them. But they worked with an experienced poet who sensitively handled their feelings. No one was asked to do anything they felt uncomfortable with and in that environment, the participants’ creative skills soon began to emerge and the personal museums took shape.

The personal museums reflected their creators interests and creativity. They ranged from ‘Requirements for the End Of The World’, to ‘The Museum of Fine Italian Art’ and ‘The Museum of Female Body Sculpture’. One participant from Ford Prison who was very interested in antiques even created a museum for children with a mouse curator named Algernon called ‘Algernon’s Den of Antiquities’.

The use of professional artists, poets and materials made an enormous difference to the success of the workshops as they were able to help the participants to produce something of quality that they could feel justly proud of in a relatively short space of time. Two of the inmates from Ford Prison were studying for a distance learning art course and were pleased at the opportunity to use quality materials and work alongside professional artists. It gave their work a real boost and they used it as evidence towards their course assessment.



What would we do differently?

- We didn’t allow enough time to consult with partners in detail. More discussion with partners at the start would have allowed them greater input into the design of the project, so it could have better met their clients needs.
- The idea of producing personal museums came from the project co-ordinator and museum staff rather than the learners. It was important to provide a framework for the learning, but next time we’d try to let the learners exercise more control over what they do.
- At times the project felt rushed. There was a lot to get through in a short space of time. Next time it would be better to run shorter workshops spread over a longer period, giving learners time to consolidate their work.
- Ford is a working prison. Opportunities to engage with inmates are limited because all offenders who can, have to work. Now we plan to focus on pre-release work and link to the probation service, rather than broad skills development for those inside.
- The participants weren’t able to research museum objects as thoroughly as they would have liked because we couldn’t use ICT in the prison. Next time we’d work with the prison library service to ensure participants can make the most of their resources.
- The personal museums sometimes stirred up difficult or painful memories. Providing extra support for this would have been good.
- Museum staff felt they were entering an entirely new and challenging world. Although they received training, most felt that a bit more time to find their way around some of issues at the start might have given them more confidence. Partners from prisoners and ex-offenders organisations felt that a bit more training in working with museum artefacts would have been useful too.

“It was good for the museum to be put in a situation where the group is not controllable, for example one of the participants lighting a cigarette in one of the galleries. The museum was stretched.”

Brighton museum worker



"Clients attend the programme for a maximum of 8 weeks. During that time it's difficult not to have the whole focus on offending, drugs etc. so Black Box was a really good opportunity to focus on different things, something positive. What it showed was that all clients had inherent abilities. It was a real boost to their self esteem."

Project worker, Foundation

The work generated a lot of interest and many participants came to the private views of the exhibitions held at Horsham Museum and Brighton Museum and Art Gallery. One of the participants was so impressed with his museum that he wanted to send photographs of it to his son.

At the end of the project a regional seminar was held to share the lessons learnt from Black Box and encourage other museums and galleries to work in this field. A toolkit was also produced and distributed to all museum and gallery staff and is available online on the Black Box website (www.semlac.org.uk/blackbox). Staff from prisons, the probation service, the Crime Reduction Initiative and the Prisoners Learning and Skills Unit also attended the conference and several embryonic projects and partnerships emerged as a result.

All the partners involved in Black Box view the project very much as a pilot and are keen to build the lessons they've learnt from the experience into future collaborative work.

Some risks to keep an eye on

- Prisons are all very different so what works in one won't necessarily work in another. It's important to get to know the prison learning staff and the ethos of the prison first. Getting the prison Governor on side at the start will also help to smooth things along.
- Some prisons may not place learning as high up the agenda as others. Don't be discouraged. This is fairly new territory for the prison service too.
- As with any new audience, working with prisoners and ex-offenders can be extremely rewarding work for facilitators, but is not without its challenges. Make sure they have all the support they need and are thoroughly trained and briefed by those with experience. In workshops, keep the numbers down so no one feels 'out of their depth' with a large group.
- When working with a prison, your plans can be at the mercy of security. Things can be changed, altered or cancelled at a moments' notice. It's a good idea to make back up plans and not to rely on objects, resources or equipment – they may not make it past security checks (which is exactly what happened in this project).

Museums of the Imagination – What would you put in yours?

Black Box centred around participants creating their own 'museums of the imagination'. Imagine being given a blank canvas and being asked to create your own museum from thin air. It's rather like being asked to write 'a story'. How do you get the creative juices flowing? The project co-ordinator decided to produce a template which looked a bit like a 2D plan of the inside of a museum, divided into separate rooms. Each room could then represent something different – one being a special place where learners could put everything that was precious to them. Another was a sort of 'room 101' – a place to pile everything they hated. Everyone took part in this activity together (artists, museum staff, project workers and learners) which was an important step in making everyone feel comfortable and breaking down barriers. Funnily enough EVERYONE put at least one teacher in their 'room 101'.

"There are no people like us in museums."

Black Box participant

The best laid plans

At Ford prison they wanted to enable the participants to develop their photography skills during the workshops. Not surprisingly, you can't just walk into a prison with a camera and start taking photographs! But the partners were wise to this and went through the necessary bureaucracy, filling forms and ensuring they were signed, countersigned and issued in triplicate before eventually permission was granted by the Governor for photography inside the prison. But when the day of the workshop arrived, all the cameras were confiscated during a routine security check at the prison entrance. Even the 1930s cameras from the museum collections which had been taken along as inspiration didn't get past.

"I thought it [the prison] would be more threatening than it was."

Education worker, Horsham Museum

Adults with low levels of literacy in London



London's Museum Club

It's easy for adults who have low levels of literacy to feel excluded from the day to day activities that many people take for granted, including visiting museums and galleries. London Museums Archives and Libraries (LMAL) and a number of small and large museums throughout the capital tackled this by working in partnership with adult education tutors to create museum clubs. Here, adult learners could get hands on workshops using museum artefacts as an inspiration to learning and literacy development.



What were the aims of London's Museum Club?

- To enable learners from post-16 basic skills literacy groups to visit a number of museums throughout London, and their local London Underground station, for targeted learning workshops.
- To enable participants to develop basic literacy skills by using the resources of their local museums as a stimulus to learning.
- To demonstrate to policy makers and funders that London's museums have an important contribution to make in raising the levels of attainment with basic literacy skills.
- To enable a variety of London's museums to develop skills and experience in delivering high quality basic skills sessions at their institutions.
- To enable learners to produce exhibitions based on their experiences during the project.
- To develop sustainable partnerships with basic skills providers in London.
- To develop the capacity for London's museums to deliver the basic skills agenda.

Impact, Achievements and Sustainability

- Students developed their literacy skills, confidence, self-esteem and motivation to learn.
- For many participants, visiting different parts of London has broadened their horizons and opened their eyes to new opportunities. Some are now viewing a career with London Underground as well within their capabilities.
- Learners developed speaking and listening skills in familiar and unfamiliar contexts. Their writing skills improved with participants able to write more fluently and frame their writing more fully after the museum visits.
- The project has helped college tutors with their own professional development – one tutor used the project as a case study for a teaching qualification.
- The project has provided college tutors with plenty of inspiration and ideas for future teaching. Several have visited the museums with other groups since the project ended, and are planning more trips in future terms.
- Students have developed greater independence as learners and as travellers - they are more confident in using the London Underground and public transport independently.
- Many participants have been motivated to find out more about the history of the area in which they live.
- Learners have been inspired to visit museums independently.

"I've learnt because I've seen old things which is nice. I think it's helped my reading and writing."
London's Museum Club participant

How and When?

June 2002

Bid submitted by London Museums Agency

July 2002

*Bid successful
Project planning
Meeting with other MGLI managers to share skills and ideas*

September 2002

*All museums sign up to project
Freelance Project Manager appointed
Job specifications written for basic skills tutor/project co-ordinator and museum partners*

October 2002

*Basic skills tutor/project co-ordinator vacancy advertised.
One of the larger museums pulls out of project and is replaced by the Museum of London basic skills tutor
Project co-ordinator from City Lit appointed
Meeting with City Lit tutor to plan their role
Training sessions for museum staff planned*

"I have learnt a lot of things from the project. The writing about how we had been on the trip helped my literacy."

London's Museum Club participant

- Local basic skills tutors are now more aware of resources that exist to help them in museums and galleries. They're reviewing their schemes of work to make space for working with museums in future.
- Staff from seven London museums received training and gained experience in basic skills delivery, dispelling fears associated with the jargon. They now have far more confidence to work with basic skills providers in future.
- The project has recently received a £1000 award by NIACE (the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education) for innovative work in providing learning experiences for adult basic skills learners. London's Museum Club was one of 10 projects selected out of a total of 79 applicants.
- Training sessions have been held for other museum, library and archive professionals in London, equipping them with the skills and knowledge to embark on similar projects.
- The project gave the opportunity for small and national museums to work together – with the chance to share skills and learn from each other.
- New partnerships, networks and contacts were created between museums, colleges, libraries and the local community.
- Exhibitions of the students work were showcased at the museums and at the colleges.
- Some museum partners are reviewing their literature and text; re-writing it to make it appropriate for people with low literacy levels.
- London Museums Archives and Libraries (LMAL) has recently received £20,000 funding from Empowering the Learning Community to extend the project to local libraries. Called the Basic Skills Club, the project will work with a wider range of museums and colleges, in partnership with libraries.
- Staff at Acton College will be providing training for museum staff in working with refugees and asylum seekers with basic skills needs and Gunnersbury Park Museum is also considering offering work placement opportunities to students.

"I am going to send the leaflet to my dad in Africa."

London Museum's Club participant

November 2002

Training sessions for museum staff

December 2002

Project group progress meeting
Small museums make contact with local basic skills course tutors at local colleges

Ideas for workshops and visits developed by museum staff, City Lit and basic skills tutors.

January – February 2003

Workshops held at small and large museums and London Underground stations.

Training for museum staff in the use of appropriate language for people with low levels of literacy

March 2003

Project group evaluation meeting
Exhibitions set up at museums and at colleges and leaflets produced
Exhibitions open and students give presentations about their experiences



The Vital Statistics

Total project costs	£20,000
Total number of participants	59
Number of participants from Southwark College	15
Number of participants from West London College	30
Number of participants from Tower Hamlets College	14



Number of partners	15
Who were the project partners?	London Museums Achives and Libraries (LMAL) Southwark College Cuming Museum London's Transport Museum Science Museum London Underground Museum of London Ragged School Museum Tower Hamlets College Gunnersbury Park Museum West Ealing College National Portrait Gallery City Lit University of Westminster Freelance Project Manager
Who project managed	London Museums Achives and Libraries (LMAL) Freelance Project Manager
Who managed day to day?	Freelance Project Manager City Lit College
Who provided what?	
London Museums Achives and Libraries (LMAL)	Overall project management and reporting back to DfES and clmg
Freelance Project Manager	Project management
City Lit	Project co-ordinator Experience with basic skills curriculum Basic skills training for all museum staff One to one support for the small museums to help develop their basic skills programmes Support in evaluation of progress of clients against the basic skills curriculum.
Ragged School Museum, Cuming Museum, Gunnersbury Park Museum	Venue for workshops Experienced staff to provide hands on workshops for learners Collections to act as a motivator for learning Small community museum to act as a focus for the museum club
London's Transport Museum, Science Museum, Museum of London	Venues for visits and basic skills workshops
London Underground	Behind the scenes visits to London Underground stations to assist with planning trips across London

What went wrong?

- Fitting in with the busy schedules of the national museums at short notice was difficult. In many cases schedules are worked out years in advance. It meant that one museum had to pull out at an early stage in the project.
- Busy Underground stations can be noisy and so aren't the best places for guided tours and presentations. Some of the workshops at the stations were very long - up to five hours. Standing and concentrating for this length of time was physically and mentally exhausting for the students.
- Liaising with so many partners became a difficult and time-consuming process.
- A lack of facilities for students with disabilities at the some of the Underground stations caused problems.

"We went to the Cuming Museum on 23/1/03. It is about a man called Richard Cuming and his son Henry Syer Cuming. They collected over 100,000 objects all around the world. It is a interesting place. I like the R Whites bottle. And the ladies told us lots of interesting things about the objects. You got to look at the objects and hold them, you had to wear gloves to hold the old objects because they are delicate."

London's Museum Club participant

"It has given this group the idea that museums are somewhere they can go to be comfortable in."

Basic skills tutor from Southwark College

What would we do differently?

- The project suffered from delays at the start so contacts with college tutors were made in a hurry. With more time we could have involved college tutors in the planning process. We were lucky they were able to fit us into their schedules!
- Students were asked to take notes during presentations by actors at London's Transport Museum. In hindsight this was asking too much of the learners. More thorough discussions with the tutors beforehand would have helped to us pitch the session at the right level for the students.
- Follow up visits enabling students to do writing exercises based on the museums and collections would have added value to the experience.
- In future, we would investigate ways in which we could link to other areas of the basic skills curriculum such as reading, writing and spelling. Next time we'd involve the larger museums earlier so they would have an opportunity to develop relationships with the groups and build partnerships with the colleges.
- Linking the themes and topics covered by the larger and smaller museums would have given more continuity to the students' visits and their work.

West London College (Acton Site)	Experienced basic skills tutors to
Tower Hamlets College (Arbour Square Campus)	advise on the needs of learners
Southwark College	Learners
University of Westminster	Experienced language consultant to provide support to smaller museums in producing exhibitions with appropriate language

Who were the participants and learners?

All the learners were enrolled on basic skills literacy courses at three FE colleges. Most of the participants had never visited a museum before and none had travelled across London to visit the large national museums. The few who had visited museums or galleries had only done so with school and expressed quite negative views about museums at the start of the project.

The participants varied greatly in their levels of ability at the beginning of the project; some were unable to read at all. The speaking and listening skills of all the learners were better than reading and writing. The learners from West London College who worked with Gunnersbury Park Museum were all English as a Second Language (ESOL) students. The group consisted of a number of refugees and asylum seekers from countries such as Iran, Iraq, Somalia and Afghanistan.

Participants were recruited via local colleges whom staff from the smaller museums approached at the beginning of the project. None of the college tutors had previously worked with museums and galleries.

"I would like to talk about my day at the Cuming Museum. I saw a very old iron which reminded me of my parents when they used to use it. I enjoyed my visit to the museum. I would like to do it again. Thank you."

London's Museum Club participant

How they did it: London's Museum Club

London Museums Archives and Libraries (LMAL) was clear that museums and galleries had a lot to offer basic skills in the city and were determined to demonstrate this. They wanted to work with local colleges and communities and felt the key was in working with smaller, local museums that are rooted in their area. These museums created museum clubs with learners enrolled on basic skills courses at adult education colleges. Following workshops at their local museums, the clubs travelled across the city to visit larger museums, planning their trip on the London Underground with help from London Underground staff.

Although staff at the museums were very experienced in working with communities, none of them had previous experience with basic skills delivery and were mystified by some of the jargon involved. To solve this, LMAL and the project manager decided to employ a basic skills tutor who could advise and support the museums in developing their basic skills provision.

Appointing the basic skills tutor wasn't straightforward. They were recruiting at short notice in a market where there is a shortage of people so they had to tap into new and unfamiliar networks outside the museums sector to find people with the specific skills they required. Although this was time consuming it was a very worthwhile exercise and built many new contacts.

With City Lit, appointed to act as basic skills tutor/project co-ordinator, they began planning the training sessions for museum staff, and reviewing how the particular collections and venues of each museum could be used to deliver literacy workshops.

Armed with the knowledge of the basic skills curriculum and how they could help, staff from the smaller museums approached tutors from their local colleges to discuss their ideas. It was slightly later in the project than they would have liked so they were relying on the colleges' enthusiasm and availability if the project was to be a success. They certainly weren't prepared for the overwhelming response - in most cases the colleges nearly bit their hands off, recognising how the museums could help them bring literacy teaching to life.

The tutors and museums worked together to plan the workshops the learners would receive. In many cases, all that was required was a slight tweaking of the resources and workshops provided to Key Stage Two children in order to make them appropriate to adults' needs. At the Cuming Museum for instance, students handled objects hundreds of years old and were prompted to look for clues to discover how they were made and what they were used for. College tutors had received training from Cuming Museum staff in object handling techniques which they found a great help in engaging students in conversations about the collections. This helped to develop their speaking and listening skills as they searched for words to describe the shapes, textures and colours of the objects. The experience inspired participants to produce some wonderfully expressive writing after their visit.

Following visits to the smaller museums, trips to large museums in central London were planned. But first, the learners had a group tour of their local London Underground station to help them plan their trip across London. The visit covered things like buying tickets, safety notices and route planning. It looked at the range of literature available to help including leaflets, maps, signs and posters: the sort of stuff that many people take will take for granted but that can easily exclude those who have difficulties with literacy. They also discussed employment opportunities with London Underground and several participants had their eyes opened to potential future careers.

The students produced exhibitions of all their work at local colleges and libraries. This really helped to boost the confidence of the learners and the profile of the courses; they were proud of their work and proud of their association with the museums. 'Basic skills' can sometimes be seen as a negative badge but this was an opportunity to showcase their work to the other students and the local community in a positive manner. At a launch at Gunnersbury Park Museum, attended by representatives from



"I've been past the building so many times...I live in the area and I've walked past that building and had no idea what was inside it. Now I know and it's amazing. It's interesting finding out about the history of your area and what went on before."

Student from Tower Hamlets College talking about the Ragged School Museum

"They get so much out of it. It's amazing to look at and touch these objects and think they're so old."

Tutor from Tower Hamlets College



the Learning and Skills Council, students were on hand to give guided tours of the exhibition. Library staff were able to visitors to local basic skills courses and project partners are now reviewing how they can put systems in place for achieving this in future.

Some risks to keep an eye on

- Although the language level for basic skills students may be similar to that used for children at Key Stage Two, beware of using schools resources without adapting them first. Adults have different needs, abilities and interests and don't take kindly to being treated like kids.
- When embarking on a project with numerous partners spread over a wide geographical area, communication is the key. Never assume that a partner knows as much as you do about your area of work.
- Basic skills students are a diverse range of individuals with diverse needs. The only way to ensure you can get it right is to work closely with those who know the learners best – their tutors and the learners themselves.

Role Playing for Adults

Two of the smaller museums decided to involve the learners in role playing activities. It was a bit of a gamble and something they'd only ever used with children before. Would the adult participants feel they were being patronised and refuse to take part? Not a bit. At the Ragged School Museum the education officer put the learners through their paces when she dressed as a Victorian school mistress in their Victorian schoolroom. It enabled the museum to build a real rapport with the group and they were still talking about it weeks later. At Gunnersbury Park the participants themselves were asked to dress up in costume and pretend they were applying for a position at the historic house. The education officer skilfully wove in comparisons with attributes needed for present day employment opportunities and how to go about applying for a job today to make it relevant to the participants' lives.

"As soon as she got the cane out we all just made sure we did whatever she said. It was brilliant! I didn't know it was going to be like that."

Client from Tower Hamlets College talking about a Victorian schoolroom role play session at the Ragged School Museum

Artefacts overcome nerves

During all the trips it was the chance to take part in hands on activities like handling real artefacts that really motivated the learners. Like at the Museum of London where students had the chance to handle objects dating back over 500 years. The excitement was infectious and, when students were asked to speak briefly at the end of the workshop about their objects, they all spontaneously came to the front of the class. Their tutor was convinced that if they had been asked to deliver a 'presentation' in class they would have been terrified. But the excitement of handling the artefacts almost made them forget their nerves.

"One student went to work on the tube which she hadn't done before. One student took another student to the London Transport Museum after the class trip because he wanted to show him everything. I think the whole experience gave added value to the course."

Basic skills tutor



Black and Asian Women Learners in Birmingham



Invisible Women

Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery was aware that it wasn't attracting visitors from Black and Asian backgrounds so decided to tackle this head on by designing an innovative bespoke course for Black and Asian women. In partnership with South Birmingham College they hoped to attract local women to learn more about themselves, their heritage and their city whilst developing skills in new media, with the added option of gaining accreditation for their learning.



What were the aims of Invisible Women?

- To enable Black and Asian women to see Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery (BM&AG) as a place relevant to them.
- To give local Black and Asian women the opportunity to pursue learning in a museum environment.
- To design an accredited, tailor-made course for local Black and Asian women and help them to uncover more about heritage.
- To enable each participant to gain an accredited qualification in new media skills.
- To make innovative links with other learning providers
- To develop a website which could act as a professional online learning resource for other learners.
- To trial a new project on behalf of the whole West Midlands region and to provide a model for other museums and galleries to follow.

Impact, Achievements and Sustainability

- A website has been created which brings together the work of the women during the course – www.invisiblewomen.org.uk
- Nine women participated in the course, three received accreditation
- The participants have developed new skills in media design and production.
- The project has awakened an interest in the city's heritage and their own history and a thirst to find out more – one participant is now considering pursuing a career in museums.
- Participants have brought their children to events at the museum. One is teaching her kids about Birmingham's part in the slave trade.
- The participants have developed confidence in their own ability. One member was paid to deliver a talk about the project to the West Midlands Cultural Diversity Network.
- A strong partnership has been formed between BM&AG and South Birmingham College; the basis for future collaborative work.
- South Birmingham College provided funding for the course to continue until the end of the academic year.
- Three participants visited South Africa as part of the course, with funding provided by South Birmingham College.
- BM&AG has uncovered stories behind many objects relating to Black and Asian history which will enable them to make their displays and their collections more relevant to the audiences they serve.
- Staff at BM&AG have gained skills and confidence to tackle similar projects in future.
- The project has received widespread media attention including being featured on BBCi on International Women's Day.
- BM&AG has now designated part of their exhibition space for permanent community use as a result of the project. An exhibition of work and photographs by the women will be on display from Autumn 2003.

How and when?

June 2002

Bid submitted by WMRMC

July 2002

Bid successful

*Meeting with other MGLI managers to share skills and ideas
Project partners meet to agree aims and design course*

September 2002

Invisible Women launch day at Aston Hall

Invisible Women promoted through flyers and community radio

Nine women sign up for the course

*First museum-held workshop
Participants' learning needs assessed by South Birmingham College*

Workshops at South Birmingham College and the mobile media unit begin

October 2002

Course continues 3 days per week

November 2002

Course continues

Participants carry out critique of Black History Month trail at BM&AG

Learners make video shorts at South Birmingham College.



- A member of BM&AG staff engaged on the positive action traineeship has used the project as the practical underpinning of her MA in Museum Studies.
- One of the BM&AG branch museums has been inspired to seek funding for a Community Learning Officer post as a result of the project.
- The project has demonstrated the power of objects and museums in engaging people.
- A genealogy worksheet was produced as part of the project and is now available as a guide to Black and Asian residents wishing to research their past.
- The project received a merit award from the Gender Equalities Division of Birmingham City Council and recognition from Jane Euanitsida-Smith, Minister for the National Women’s Commission.
- A Community Learning Officer will shortly be appointed at BM&AG who will continue with the work of Invisible Women.

Who were the participants and learners?

The participants were Black and Asian women from Birmingham. Some had visited the museum previously but none of the participants were regular museum-goers. One participant had been involved in learning recently, but the remainder were returning to learning after having worked or had children.

The learners were recruited in a number of ways. Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery organised a launch day for women at Aston Hall Museum: located in the area of Birmingham that they wanted to target. On hand during the day were people from the college and the museum to answer questions and demonstrate media equipment.

During the launch day, thirteen women expressed interest in the course and left their contact details. They also designed a flyer which they left in hairdressers and shops and advertised on a local community radio station, ‘New Style Radio’.

December 2002

Visit to the Transatlantic Slavery Gallery at the National Maritime Museum, Liverpool.
 Group tour of Galaxy FM studios, a local independent radio station.
 One to one reviews with learners
 Invisible Women project manager at BM&AG moves jobs
 Website development is put on hold.
 Project manager at West Midlands Regional Museums Council leaves.

January 2003

Course continues
 Staff sickness at college leads to problems transporting mobile media unit to the museum
 Learners begin work on the Invisible Women website
 Some learners experience difficulties with the demands of the college course

February 2003

IT co-ordinator joins BM&AG and assumes responsibility for development of website and one to one tuition of learners
 Visit to Wolverhampton Art Gallery

The Vital Statistics

Total project cost	£20,000
Total number of participants	9

Who were the project partners?

Number of project partners	3
Project partners	West Midlands Regional Museums Council (now MLA – West Midlands) Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery South Birmingham College
Who project managed?	Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery
Who managed day to day?	Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery and South Birmingham College
Who provided what?	Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery Collections to act as the inspiration for learning and discussion Experienced staff with knowledge of collections Inspiration for the course Venues for workshops



Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery cont..	One to one tutoring on using the web Website development
South Birmingham College	Media tuition at South Birmingham College Project co-ordinator Mobile media unit Staff with technical expertise and experience in teaching new media Course administration including accreditation
Xpress Design	Website development
West Midlands Regional Museums Council (WMRMC)	Initial project management and development

"I thought we'd need something to pull them in and that was what the media wagon was all about but they were more interested in the history and heritage aspects of it."

Project Manager, Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery

How they did it: Invisible Women

The basis for the Invisible Women project was consultation carried out during a women-only event held at Aston Hall Museum, on International Women's Day in March 2002. Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery wanted to discover why Black and Asian women were underrepresented amongst museum visitors and find creative ways of involving them in learning in the future. Comments called for art workshops or lectures, education, and basic learning with progression.

Armed with this knowledge, Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery and West Midlands Regional Museums Council decided to design a unique learning experience that would combine the flexibility of informal learning with accreditation, for local Black and Asian women. BM&AG had recently recruited two positive action trainee curators from Black and Asian backgrounds. They were busily researching the hidden histories and collections relating to Black and Asian people. Combining their research interests with the results of the consultation day would, it was felt, enable the museum to reach Black and Asian women in a way they had never done before.

They approached the tutors of a new media course at South Birmingham College as partners, believing that the opportunity to get to groups with cutting edge technology would prove the perfect 'draw' and counteract the potentially stuffy image of museums. The college also had a proven track record of widening participation in the city. They assembled a working group and began designing the structure of the course and planning how they would recruit students.

September saw the first attempts to recruit learners via a launch day at Aston Hall Museum, and an eye catching leaflet delivered house to house in the Aston area. Museum staff contacted all the women who'd expressed an interest to discuss the course further. By the end of September, nine participants were signed up to the course and ready to begin.

"It's the opportunity to be stretched and see things in the museum outside the glass cases that I like the most."

Invisible Women participant

March 2003

Visit to the British Empire and Commonwealth Museum, Bristol
Planning begins for trip to South Africa with talks by visiting speakers, reviewing African collections at BM&AG and visits to the British Museum's South Africa collections the Danforth Collection and the Centre for West African Studies, Birmingham University
Invisible Women website goes live
Invisible Women nominated for a Gold Award by the Gender Equalities Division of Birmingham City Council.

Participants attend a study day at the National Portrait Gallery about representation of black people in art in British museums.

April 2003

Course continues, funded by South Birmingham College

May 2003

Learners visit South Africa

June 2003

Course ends
3 learners receive accreditation



The course was set to run three days per week from the end of September 2002 until March 2003. However, very early on in the project, South Birmingham College came up with additional funding to allow the course to continue for a full academic year, ending in a trip to South Africa in June 2003.

Mondays were spent at the museum helping curators uncover hidden histories and collections relating to Black and Asian women and piecing together the evidence of Birmingham's role in the transatlantic slave trade. These sessions sparked some interesting debates and the women commented that they enjoyed being interlectually stretched by the issues the collections raised.

On Tuesdays the learning shifted to the 524 Media Centre at South Birmingham College where the participants were introduced to a host of media production skills such as video production techniques and website development.

On Wednesdays, they had the chance to put the theory into practice in a new media unit parked right outside Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery. From here the women were able to combine the museum and college parts of the course, conduct vox-pops interviews in the street and edit video and radio pieces. The idea was at the end of the course the women would do a live radio broadcast about the project from the media unit.

What went wrong?

- In order to gain accreditation the women were expected to do a lot of independent study and coursework. This didn't sit well with the flexible, informal structure the museum partners hoped for.
- The Invisible Women group was mixed with a mainstream media group at South Birmingham College. Some of the participants felt they weren't getting as much from the sessions as they had hoped.
- Three of the original nine participants left quite early on. It was a demanding course and work and family commitments made it impossible for them to continue.
- The course lost a bit of momentum over the Christmas break and things got off to a rocky start in the New Year with bouts of staff sickness preventing the college using the mobile media unit for a few weeks.
- Several changes in personnel at Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery and West Midlands Regional Museums Council slowed the project down.
- A broadcasting licence couldn't be obtained for the mobile media unit so the live radio broadcast from outside BM&AG never went ahead.

After the Christmas break participants began to express some dissatisfaction with the Tuesday sessions at South Birmingham College. College regulations stated that groups of less than 15 had to be combined with other classes. So, they'd been put into an existing class with other learners, who the women felt were younger and less eager to learn than themselves. It also meant that there was no continuity between the Monday and Tuesday sessions and the individual tutoring of the women in website design wasn't happening as planned.

The partners decided that to regain the flexible and informal nature of the project, the museum should assume more responsibility for tutoring the women in website design. From January onwards an IT co-ordinator at the museum devoted much of his time to working on a one to one basis with the participants.



In early 2003, the learners visited other museums and galleries including Soho House Museum, Wolverhampton Art Gallery and the British Empire and Commonwealth Museum in Bristol as they began preparing for their visit to South Africa.

In June three women visited South Africa with staff from South Birmingham College. A display about their experiences which will be exhibited at BM&AG from Autumn 2003.

BM&AG is now considering how to use the lessons they have learnt from Invisible Women in future projects and would like participants from this course to act as tutors in the future.

“As part of this project we get to look at Black history, at things relating to our culture. That’s when things really became interesting for me.”

Invisible Women participant

Objects speak louder than IT

Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery felt that they needed a ‘hook’ to draw people in to Invisible Women. That’s why the course enabled the women to gain accreditation in new media. After all, most people would think cutting edge technology was more interesting than ‘stuffy’ museum collections, right? Wrong. It was the museum part of the course that really inspired the learners and the opportunity to handle collections connected to the transatlantic slave trade that really sparked off the debates. So much so that at the end of the first workshop the participants requested notes on the objects from the curator. Handouts? They’re for school and formal learning, just what the curator was trying to get away from. But, she took her cue from the learners and provided notes after each session which they used as a basis for their independent study.

Getting the publicity right

Invisible Women faced that quandary encountered by many projects attempting to reach new or unfamiliar audiences. If the participants don’t come to the museum already, how do you tell them about the project and recruit learners? Clearly the existing ‘publicity’ methods weren’t working. The project partners decided to produce a flyer to publicise Invisible Women but this was no ordinary museum leaflet. The designers, more at home producing nightclub flyers than museum publicity, produced an interesting and enticing design, omitting all the usual council, corporate and sponsor logos that are so often equated with off-putting authority. Flyers were dropped at hairdressers, shops and doctors surgeries and the partners used word of mouth contacts to spread the news about the project. But most importantly they actually went out into the community and chatted to people about their plans. The right mix of publicity ensured a considerable interest was generated in the project very quickly and they had no problems or delays recruiting participants.

What would we do differently?

- We wanted to run twilight sessions for those women who were interested but were unable to commit 15 hours per week to the course. Staff workloads and problems locating an accessible and safe evening city centre venue prevented this from happening. Next time we’d investigate running shorter informal sessions in spring and summer evenings when it’s safer for women to come into the city alone.
- Paying for the media unit swallowed up a large part of the budget and didn’t prove to be as big a hit with the learners as the collections and the museums. We’d re-think the balance next time.
- South Birmingham College were keen that as many participants as possible should gain accreditation. This may have weighted the course too heavily towards formal learning.
- A few women felt the name of the group was disempowering. We should have asked them choose their own name.
- We had a lot of interest from working women who wanted to participate but couldn’t spare the time. 15 hours per week was a requirement for accreditation by South Birmingham College and the Open College Network West Midlands. Next time we’d be sure to devise informal taster sessions at times to suit working women.
- When running a project for women, childcare is a must! In future we’d spend less money on IT and more on childcare to enable more women to take part.

Some risks to keep an eye on

- Balancing the agendas of a formal learning provider with informal museum-style learning can be tricky. Make sure following an accredited course is the right choice for you and your learners.
- Don’t always assume that you’ll need a hook to drag people in. Just because a person’s been out of learning for a while, it doesn’t necessarily follow that they won’t relish the chance to think about and debate complex ideas. Most people thrive on being stretched, you just need to get the motivation right.



Asian Women Learners in the North West



Sangam

Sangam (meaning come together) brought together three museums and galleries in the North West in a creative project aimed at enabling Asian women to develop their artistic skills. 5% of the population of the North West is from minority ethnic populations, with the majority of those being of Pakistani or Bangladeshi descent. Yet despite this, Asian women are underrepresented in the region's museums and galleries. North West Museums Libraries and Archives Council (NWMLAC), the three Museum partners (Bolton Museum Art Gallery and Aquarium, Rochdale Museum and Art Gallery, and Urbis) and SHISHA: The International Agency for Contemporary South Asian Craft and Visual Arts worked together to try to tackle this.

What were the aims of Sangam?

- To develop an innovative programme of learning linked to a major exhibition of art and crafts from the city of Mumbai at Urbis in Manchester.
- To run a number of artist-led creative workshops for Asian women.
- To enable Asian women to develop creative and artistic skills.
- To develop the skills of women artists of South Asian descent in the region by enabling them to deliver craft based workshops to other women.
- To offer personal development opportunities to women artists of South Asian descent in the North West region.
- To build sustainable links between Asian women's groups and the three museum partners.
- To provide a case study and lessons for museums and galleries in the North West wishing to tackle similar work.
- To produce collections relevant to Asian women for the museum partners.
- To produce an education pack which could be used in activities with Asian groups.

Impact, Achievements and Sustainability

- Artwork produced by the women was exhibited alongside arts and crafts by established artists in an exhibition at Urbis.
- The women's work now forms a permanent part of the museum collections at Bolton Museum.
- A Sangam festival day took place at Urbis which attracted over 500 visitors including the women who participated in the project and their families.
- The participants developed art and craft skills as well as interpersonal and communication skills.
- All three museums now have sizeable handling collections of material from South Asia, and an education pack which can be used in future formal and informal learning projects.
- Some of the groups brought women from different backgrounds, religions and cultures together for the first time – this was the only opportunity they had to mix, learn about each other and work together as a team.
- One of the group is now advising Rochdale Museum on how to use their handling collections with young children.
- The artwork produced by the women from Bolton was displayed in an exhibition at Bolton Museum and Art Gallery on the relationship between India and the British cotton industry. The artist from the



Sangam project led craft workshops which many of the original participants attended.

- The project influenced the North West Cultural Diversity Festival in Autumn 2003. Two of the artists who worked on Sangam are participating in the North West Diversity Festival with part funding from North West Museums Libraries and Archives Council (NWMLAC)
- The three museum partners and SHISHA have developed a good working relationship and are keen to work together again.
- The three artists who delivered the workshops have developed their skills, experience and confidence. They are now being mentored by SHISHA and are keen to continue to work with museums in the region.
- The project has had an impact on the collecting policies and the collections at the museums. They are now reviewing policies to see how they can make collections and exhibitions more representative.

"This project has opened many doors for me. It has given me an excellent opportunity to work with the Museum and Gallery."

Project artist, Bolton

The Vital Statistics

Total project costs	£22,210
Total number of participants	36
Number of participants from Bolton group	12
Number of participants from Rochdale group	12
Number of participants at Urbis	12

Who were the project partners?

Number of project partners	13
Project partners	North West Museums Libraries and Archives Council (NWMLAC) Bolton Museum and Art Gallery Rochdale Museum and Art Gallery Urbis SHISHA: The International Agency for Contemporary South Asian Craft and Visual Arts Freelance Education consultant Freelance artists Bangladeshi Women's Group (Rochdale) Sparrow Hill Women's Group (Rochdale) Cheetham Hill Women's Group (Manchester) Al Zarha Community Centre (Bolton) Freelance Evaluation Consultant
Who project managed?	NWMLAC Planning and Delivery Group consisting of representatives from all main partners
Who managed day to day?	SHISHA
Who provided what?	
SHISHA	Project management, framework, ideas, advice and expertise, curation of Sangam at Urbis
NWMLAC	Overall project management and reporting to clmg and DfES

December 2002

Brief for artists developed
Artists appointed
Education consultant works with museums and artists to develop workshops.

January 2003

Evaluation consultant appointed
New project manager from NWMLAC appointed
Assistant Director of SHISHA visits India to buy items for exhibition and for handling collections
Participating women's groups confirmed

February 2003

Workshops take place

March 2003

Sangam exhibition opens at Urbis
Handling collections delivered to museum partners

April 2003

Further workshops held with Bangladeshi women's group at Rochdale Museum and Art Gallery
Sparrow Hill Group advise on use of handling collection at Rochdale Museum and Art Gallery

May 2003

Sangam Festival day at Urbis

What went wrong?

- At Rochdale the plan was to work with a local Surestart group, but they had to pull out at the last minute, leaving very little time to find alternative participants.
- Engaging with audiences from scratch and building relationships with them took much longer than anticipated. There wasn't enough time to get to know the groups and find out what they wanted to do.
- Recruiting the artists took longer than expected and delayed the planning of the workshops.
- Many women from the Bangladeshi Group at Rochdale had health problems and some had difficulties with the workshops commenting "We're old, our hands shake". Because the workshops were devised without much input from learners, some felt the work was "like being at school".
- The delays in recruiting artists and the consultant meant that the education pack and handling collections weren't ready until after the workshops had finished. The museum partners also didn't have as much input as they should have done.
- Half term and Eid fell right in the middle of the workshops, making it difficult for many of the women to attend all of the sessions.
- Some of the workshops were only about an hour long. This wasn't really long enough to get to know the participants before launching into the activity.
- Although all the women were very proud of their work and attended the opening of the Sangam exhibition with family and friends, few thought they would make a return visit as they believed they would have to pay. (There is a popular misconception that you have to pay to get into the whole of Urbis when entry to the ground floor is free).

Rochdale Museum and Art Gallery	Venues for workshops Experience of working with audiences Project development and management
Bolton Museum and Art Gallery	Collections to act as inspiration for artwork Venues for workshops Project development and management
Urbis	Venue for Sangam exhibition and Sangam Festival Day Project development and management
Education consultant	Overall management of workshops Recruitment of participants Development of education pack Selection of handling collections Contacts with local Asian women's groups
Workshop artists	Development and delivery of craft workshops to Asian women's groups Contacts with local Asian women
Bangladeshi Women's Group	Learners to participate in project in Rochdale Venue for workshops
Sparrow Hill Group	Learners to participate in project in Rochdale Venue for workshops
Cheetham Hill Women's Group	Learners to participate in project in Manchester Venue for workshops
Al Zarha Community Centre	Learners to participate in project in Bolton Venue for workshops



Who were the participants and learners?

The participants were all Asian women or women of Asian descent from Bolton, Rochdale and Manchester. The majority had never visited museums and galleries in the North West before.

The women came from a variety of groups and varied in age, background and interests. They were recruited by the education consultant, who is Asian herself and has existing networks, particularly in the Bolton area close to her home.

Rochdale Museum and Art Gallery worked with two women's groups. The Bangladeshi Women's Groups consisting of women over 60, many of whom had health problems and a young mother's group called the Sparrow Hill Group.

Women from a wide range of ethnic and cultural backgrounds such as Pakistan, Libya, Afghanistan, East Africa, Indonesia and the UK formed the participants from the Cheetham Hill Mother and Toddler Group in Manchester.

How they did it: Sangam

The inspiration for Sangam was an exhibition, due to be held at Urbis in Spring 2003, of art and craft from the city of Mumbai. The project partners decided to develop a programme of artistic workshops linked to the exhibition which would enable local Asian women to develop their creative skills. The project planned to use artists engaged in the North West Arts Board's Setting Up Scheme, to develop the skills and opportunities of young Asian women artists at the same time as the participants.

The first step was to form a Planning and Delivery Group consisting of representatives from all the main players: NWMLAC, the three museum partners (Bolton, Rochdale and Urbis) and SHISHA, the International Agency for Contemporary South Asian Craft. SHISHA were also working closely with Urbis on the development of the Sangam exhibition, on which the project was based, so the two roles dovetailed.

With so many partners on board, communication was vital and the partners spent the first few months holding regular meetings and exchanging hundreds of emails and phonecalls as plans took shape. Crucial in the planning phase was the formulation of the job specification and brief for the all important education consultant – the person who would be the mainstay of the project and do the 'on the ground' liaising with the women's groups. They decided that it was important that this person was a woman and Asian as they would have empathy with the groups and (it was hoped) would have some relevant cultural and language skills.

The education consultant was appointed in October and began work trying to recruit participants in November. This wasn't easy and took a considerable amount of time, particularly as she had to spread her efforts over three cities. She found forging links far easier in her home town of Bolton where she had existing contacts.

The project partners and the education consultant also recruited three Asian women artists. The education consultant worked with them and the museums to link the themes of the Sangam exhibition at Urbis to the individual museum collections and devise a series of creative workshops for the women's groups. The plan was to use an education pack and collection of Asian artefacts to spark ideas during the workshops.



What would we do differently?

- Planning was carried out by the museum staff yet these were the partners who had the least contact with the participants. In future we'd involve the consultant and artists far more in the development of the project. In addition to their expertise they have useful contacts which we found out too late might have helped in recruiting participants.
- The artists and consultants were all freelance workers. Other commitments and financial implications made attending meetings during working hours impossible. In future we'd write attending planning meetings into contracts and arrange to pay expenses to ensure their expertise can be built into the project planning.
- We should have been clearer about our aims and objectives to start with and made sure we communicated them throughout the project to all the partners. Flexibility is important but you need to know where you want to go. We tended to plan as we went along.
- We relied too heavily on the education consultant to build links with community groups. Next time we'd ensure the museum partners are more closely involved to ensure they build their own links that are sustainable beyond the life of the project.
- If we ran the project again, we'd ensure the young mother's groups had childcare on hand.
- Building good relationships between museum partners at the outset was useful but we may have spent too long planning our approach. Sometimes you have to take a leap of faith and 'just do it'.



"It became my weekend family. I looked forward to it."
Bolton participant

What would we do differently?

- Building links with new communities is difficult and time consuming. Calling on agencies with experience like social and health services would have saved time (and a few headaches)!
- The choice of the objects for the handling collections was decided by SHISHA. Next time we'd ask the participants to help draw up a shopping list, based on their reminiscences and culture.
- Involving the learners in putting the exhibition together as well as displaying their work would have been an extra learning outcome and would have developed a sense of ownership of the exhibition.
- Working with three venues and four groups in different locations meant the education consultant had to spread herself thinly. Next time we'd consider working with just one group and one venue.

"It's good to get out away from the family. Not much else to do around here."
Bolton women's group participant

Bolton Museum and Art Gallery

The workshops with the Bolton women's group were kick started by a visit to Bolton Museum and Art Gallery to look at their collections of 19th Century costume. These were then used as inspiration for the group's own miniature dresses which were displayed on child-sized dolls made by the artist. The costumes were a mix of modern and traditional Indian styles and enabled the women to gain skills in embroidery, beadwork and appliqué as they worked together to produce the final result. The group very quickly became a cohesive social group with the women commenting that they looked forward to attending the weekly workshops which were held both at the community centre and in the Museum and Art Gallery.

Rochdale Museum and Art Gallery

At Rochdale the initial intention was to work with a local Surestart group. However, the group was forced to pull out at the last minute due to other commitments so the artist and education consultant had to find some willing participants at short notice. With less than two weeks before the workshops were scheduled to take place, they found two community centres which hosted Asian women's groups who were keen to take part: one a young mothers group and one for older women aged over 60. The artist turned up to their regular meetings and invited them to take part by chatting to them and leaving leaflets about the workshops around the centre. It was an important step in building trust and developing a good rapport with the women.

"I enjoyed working with people from my own community."
Bolton workshop artist

The workshops centred around decorating a giant jigsaw, learning painting, collage and batik techniques as they did so. The work was split into four pieces - each one representing the countries at the heart of the Sangam exhibition - India, Sri Lanka, Pakistan and Bangladesh. As the Sparrow Hill Group consisted of women with young children they used images from nursery rhymes and toys to decorate their pieces and added words in English and Urdu to the designs.

The majority of the workshops were held at the community centres but they made a group visit to Rochdale Museum and Art Gallery - for all the women it was their first time in a museum or gallery.

Urbis in Manchester

In Manchester the artist worked with a young Asian women's group based at Woodville Community Centre in Cheetham Hill. During a series of ten workshops they produced three-dimensional sculptural mobiles based on an ancient Hindu folk tale called Manu and the Fish.

The culmination of the work in all three venues was the Sangam exhibition at Urbis which displayed the work by the women alongside established South Asian artists and craftspeople. Many of the women attended the launch and brought their friends and family along to see their hard work on display.

Invited to the Museum – But Nobody Came

As well as carrying out the craft workshops, the project partners wanted the participants to begin to feel a sense of ownership of their local museums and galleries. So they planned to hold a number of the workshops at the museums themselves. However, when the first session was organised, no one turned up. When they tried to find out why, they discovered that none of the women had visited the museum before and they all felt too intimidated to visit alone. The remaining workshops were quickly scheduled at community centres where the women said they felt more comfortable and visits to the museums were carried out 'en masse' with transport laid on.



"I'm a typical Asian – sewing!"

The workshop activities at all of the venues were largely devised by the artists and based on what they thought the women would be interested in. Although most of the women seemed to enjoy the activities and learnt new skills, it became clear during conversations that they might have preferred to do something different. The group at Bolton reckoned that anything to do with Asian women always involved sewing and they'd love the chance to try something different – like sculpture. Fortunately, Bolton Museum and Art Gallery has a large sculpture collection so they're planning to use this as a starting point for future work with the women. At Rochdale, the Bangladeshi women's group said they would have preferred to do sewing. The biggest lesson from the Sangam project is: never make assumptions.

"The individual groups have different needs and talking to them beforehand would have helped. We've discovered for instance that the women would like to work with sculpture and we have strong sculpture collections at Bolton."

Bolton Museum partner

Some risks to keep an eye on

- Saying you're going to work with Asian women is a bit like saying you're going to work with European women. There is no 'one size fits all' approach so it's sometimes better to define who you want to work with a bit more closely – say by age, ethnicity, health, geographical location etc. But remember once you've done this you also need to get to know the learners and devise something that meets their needs.
- Women who attend mother and toddler groups tend to do so for the child first, themselves second. It's vital then that childcare or joint activities are provided if the women are to feel comfortable enough to participate in learning.
- Don't assume that by working with a consultant or artist of Asian descent they can be an ambassador for all Asian women. Their background may be very different to the participants' and you should never assume that someone will have cultural or language skills just because they happen to be from one ethnic group.



"I should have done this a long time ago."

Bolton participant



Top 10 Lifelong Learning Tips

1. Don't make assumptions

Assume nothing, question everything. Almost everything that went awry for us was because we'd made assumptions (conscious and subconscious). Ask your learners to *create* the project with you, not just consume it.

2. Time x 2

Give yourself twice as much time as you think you'll need. Developing new audiences takes time but is worth it in the end. A day spent getting to know people in a community centre can save weeks of phonecalls, emails and meetings.

3. Flexibility

Know where you want to go with your project, but not necessarily how you're going to get there. Rigid planning will kill exploration and innovation.

4. Take some risks

Don't play safe: try things; get things wrong; learn from your mistakes. Learn as much from your project as your learners do.

5. Get the people right

More than money, more than time, more than dazzling artefacts, it's the people who lead your projects that will make them sink or swim. A good vacancy beats a bad appointment every time.

6. Do it for the right reasons

Pick a project because you believe in it, not because it's fashionable, or politically correct, or it happens to be where the money is that week.

7. Do as you say, not as you do

Apply everything you know about learning to yourselves: listen more than you talk; network; communicate; suppress your ego; stifle your prejudices; stop 'doing' long enough to start thinking; open your mind.

8. Look outside your world

Talk to people outside the museums' sector, especially if you're working with a new audience or in a new way. Someone outside museums will have been there, done that. Find them and find out what happened.

9. Own your project

It takes longer to agree things in a proper partnership, but when you do everyone is on the same side: it's worth the extra effort. Partnership describes the *quality* of your relationship with others, not how long the list is or where the money is coming from.

10. Find a happy ending

Put as much effort into ending the project as you did into starting it. Where will your learners go next? What happens to your new found relationships with partners? What does your project have to teach your organisation? What will you do next? You need to know.

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