

Engagement with Culture and Leisure - widening social participation in Portsmouth

The museum service has been working hard to utilise assets such as our venues and collections to increase and widen social participation in Portsmouth.

The museum programme across all our sites looks to make culture and heritage as accessible for Portsmouth residents as possible using the following methods:

1. **Formal school learning:** The Home Front sessions at D-Day brought in nearly 700 children in November, with another 700 already booked on for our March 2023 programme. The sessions are based around object handling- giving children direct access to real historic objects and engaging with their local heritage and the key role Portsmouth played in the Second World War. We look to expand the learning offer across our other sites covering topics such as Toys, Victorians, Art, and Natural History. We also help with specific modules at the University of Portsmouth such as the 'Working with Heritage' module in which second year students provide research for an organisation and make it into an output that is accessible for the public.

We have also developed two natural history school sessions 'Fossils and Rocks' and 'Insect Habitats' which we hope to roll out and have supported a variety of student projects from the University of Portsmouth. A recent project was an interactive about Farlington Marshes currently on display at Cumberland House.

2. **Outreach to other sites:** As part of the Silver City Exhibition programming, we have been engaging with people away from our traditional museum sites. We have run workshops with the Hilsea scout group, Chat over Chai, Nexus with Men in Mind, City of Sanctuary and more within the past year. We also worked with the Portsmouth Creatives to perform as silver statues at the Cosham Light Switch On and at the Hotwalls Market, as well as Red Sauce Theatre engaging people with the exhibition via their Bit on the Side Show fortune telling performance at the We Shine Festival in Fratton. We will be venturing out to schools for the Wild Escape project in which we will be sharing some of the natural history and art collections to teach children about biodiversity, habitats, and adaptation. Other natural history themed activity has included: Year plant hunts on Portsdown Hill and Milton Common; Wild in the Park (took activities to 4 parks in the Portsmouth area); attended a Bioblitz at Staunton County Park; talks to Friends of Portsdown Hill and Green Drinks, Stroke and Support Group; attended Criminal Justice Youth and Placement Fair at University of Portsmouth.
3. **Bringing groups into the museums:** We have been able to engage with groups such as the Red Cross to provide tours for refugee teens to help familiarise them with the local history of the area- we plan for a follow up visit to Cumberland House. We have also provided tours and workshops for ArtsWork so that young people in care could achieve their bronze arts award qualification. We have also enjoyed working with the Young Carers via D-Day Story (and more recently with PMAG with the upcoming writing workshop). South Downs College visit D-Day Story every year as part of the fashion course to use our collections as inspiration for their final piece- we provide tours and workshops to help get their creativity flowing.
4. **Providing free opportunities:** Due to a successful funding bid from NLHF, we have been able to provide free workshops hosted by professional artists so people can try their hand at a

new art form. Workshops have included zine making, lino printing, book binding, and paper marbling. We have also been providing free afternoon talks on Thursdays complete with teas and coffees free of charge to assist with the warm/welcoming spaces programme. Cumberland House and Portsmouth Museum and Art Gallery provide a range of free trails and activities over the school holidays to give families an affordable/free way to spend the day. There have been a wild variety of free activities at Cumberland House including: moth mornings, Dinosaur Isle, pond life, regular bug hunts, reptiles and amphibians, leaf rubbing, wildlife Wednesdays.

5. **HAF:** The museum service is a strong advocate for family engagement and championing positive physical and mental health through the arts and heritage. The HAF programme has therefore been of huge benefit in helping us to engage with lower income families and to give them a safe, friendly space to spend time together. Last year we fed and provided fun, cultural activities for nearly 400 people. Museum staff have supported HAF with workshops enabling participants to handle museum objects including: Food chains, Food timeline and a suite of activities for recent HAF event. A Woolly Mammoth workshop is planned for the next event which will include handling real mammoth specimens from the collections.

Social value and health benefits

Arts and culture have been proven to help people with their mental and physical wellbeing. The museum service had therefore been thinking outside the box at how we can use our collections and venues to benefit this.

Social Prescription: We provided the Walks for Wellbeing programme as part of the Thriving Communities project in which we hired creatives to deliver walks in which those referred by social prescription could enjoy a walk near our venues and learn a new skill such as photography, zine making, rubbings etc. Evaluation found that our programme helped some people to leave the house for the first time, help conquer social anxiety in a public setting, and enable self-expression through the activities provided. Some of these same people are now regulars to parts of our current programme- continuing to help them build confidence in a familiar and safe space.

Volunteering: Volunteering at a museum can provide a range of social and health benefits. We have a dedicated team of volunteers who assist in many ways, from providing tours, helping run events, to cataloguing the collections. This is an opportunity that many enjoy as it gives them immense satisfaction to help, communicate, and be part of a team contributing to their local heritage.

Reminiscence boxes: The museum service works with the library service to create, maintain, and develop reminiscence boxes. These boxes contain handling artefacts that can help older people to trigger memories of their youth and interests. These are often loaned out for free to local care homes. These are particularly useful tools for helping those with dementia to find some familiarity and comfort in the objects/music/imagery. We are currently looking to develop these boxes further to reach the 1980s. We also hope to make use of these boxes for a dementia café so that family carers can visit the museum and enjoy social interaction.

Workshops: We always try to work as many affordable/free art workshops/events into the programme as possible. Making art of any kind is known to have therapeutic benefits. Evaluation has shown that participants who took a chance on trying a new artform have then discovered

how much they have enjoyed it. Other evaluation from adult workshops have shown that they enjoyed the "excuse" to try more "childish" things such as leaf rubbing. The natural history events at Cumberland House have also achieved positive and therapeutic responses. The Bat Night for example was well received due to the outdoors nature of the activity and the one on one engagement with local wildlife. There have been a wide variety of family and adult workshops aimed at introducing participant to new skills or helping improve existing skills.

Adult workshops include: 'Introduction to garden insects', 'Bumblebees', Grasshoppers and Crickets', 'Ladybirds', 'Drawing and painting butterflies', 'Introduction to drawing mammals and birds'. A recent art activity 'Jewelled birds' took place by request following a family 'Jewelled birds' workshop. Other family workshops have included: 'Marvellous Moths', 'Nocturnal Animals', 'Crime Scene Insects' and 'Investigating owls and their pellets'

Physical Activity: HAF gave us the perfect opportunity to try physical activities at our sites. We have therefore enjoyed yoga, tai chi, dance, and drama with families. Some of these young people had never tried these activities before and were delighted to have the opportunity to try them out. Practitioners found our sites to be excellent sources of inspiration for their activities.

Writing: The museums service hosts an annual writing competition for teenagers called 500 Pompey Words. We encourage participants to write a creative writing piece inspired by an item in our collections. We support the Library service with Bookfest and try to champion reading and writing in as much of our activities as possible. Like art, writing is an excellent vehicle for self-expression and has significant links to enhancing wellbeing.

Relaxed openings: We have been hosting relaxed openings at D-Day Story. On the back of it's success, we are looking to roll this out across PMAG and Cumberland House. Over time we have been gathering equipment to assist with the openings such as soft mats and sensory toys. We are aware that museums have a particular draw for children and adults alike on the autism spectrum and so we look to enhance their wellbeing by providing spaces for them to take time, reflect, and engage with the collections.