

Grassroots Partnership – Young Travellers Project

How working in partnership with other organisations can help you to develop learning projects.

Working in partnership is a really positive way to develop projects, it is not only an exciting, but also a very practical way for museums to reach out to new audiences. There are 3 main benefits that developing learning projects in partnership working hold for your museum:

These are: REACHING NEW AUDIENCES
 SKILLS SHARING
 and
 DEVELOPING SUSTAINABLE PROJECTS

REACHING NEW AUDIENCES

Working in partnership with someone who already has contact with your target group or audience has great benefits in terms of gaining the trust of your target group and also in helping you to develop projects that are best suited to the needs of that group.

In the case of the Travelling people's project working in partnership with Karen MacMaster, Gypsy/Traveller Development Officer, was key to the success of the project. The project involved working with a new audience and her help in identifying individuals to work with, in gaining the trust that led to the participation of young Travellers and her help in the development of a programme that was relevant to their needs and interest was invaluable.

Working with this group has not only allowed the participants contact with the museum and access to its collections, but through working with those who already knew the group it has been possible to make the collections more relevant to them. The young Travellers' project resulted in an exhibition, allowing the group to have a voice in the museum, and this in turn has resulted in new audiences coming to the museum to see the exhibitions.

Skills Sharing

As museum professionals you will have a number of very important skills and are keepers of important, interesting and inspiring collections. These collections can benefit those who have access to them, but widening access can be difficult and working with new groups can require skills that we don't have or lack confidence in.

Working in partnership with people already working with your target group and tapping into their skills and resources is an ideal situation. You will be able to contribute your skills as a museum professional and they will bring their expertise and knowledge of the group you are targeting. Working together with mutual interest or enthusiasm will not only give you the opportunity to share skills, but you will also be able to develop ideas together and this can lead to greater creativity and allow both parties to look at things in new ways.

In the young Travellers' project the skills we brought together were Karen's skills in working with this group of young people and being attuned to their needs, while, as a museum professional, I was able to introduce the group to parts of the museum collections. Other partners will bring other skills relevant to those you target, and together you can work towards making your collections as relevant as possible to the group.

Sustainability

The third benefit that has been apparent from working in partnership with other agencies / organisations is the opportunity to make sustainable projects or links.

By developing projects well suited to your new audiences and by giving them a voice in the museum, they will feel empowered and gain a sense of ownership over the museum and their heritage, which will encourage their continued involvement in the museum. There can also be many knock on effects and through working with even a very small group can end up allowing you to reach a wide pool of people.

Through the contacts that your initial partner brings projects can also grow and more support can become available.

In the case of the young Travellers' project, although the initial project concluded in February 2005 there has been continued contact and development with this group and more widely in the Travelling community in Highland:

- The exhibition led to visits from the group's families and friends, many of whom had never been to the museum before.
- Karen and I were able to use other contacts to allow the group to move on to another project. Community Learning and Enterprise Education took the group on to build a bow tent at the Highland Folk Museum, which has recently been completed.
- Through contact with Karen I was invited to take a display and information along to the Travellers' Annual Barbeque this summer, which allowed us to raise awareness of the projects done and to maintain links with the community.
- The contact with Community Learning is also now going to result in the setting up of a Travellers' Youth Group at the Inverness Travelling Peoples Site. This gives the museum a group who can be approached to let them know about what's going on at the museum, to consult them about future projects, and to involve them in an ongoing way.

Summary of benefits of partnership working to your museum.

- It can allow you to reach new audiences, to know their needs and gain their trust.
- It can allow you to combine your own skills, resources and funding opportunities with others to make a stronger pool of ideas, creativity.
- And through their contacts and the projects that are developed you can not just gain new audiences but also sustain them.