

Case studies: How can the arts and creativity support people who are shielding or vulnerable during Covid-19?

Project: Museum from Home

Organisation: Colchester & Ipswich Museums

Region: East of England

‘we have had some amazing feedback from our vulnerable families... They loved the games and activity books.’

Introduction

The ‘Museum from Home’ activity packs began as an in-house initiative filled with materials stripped from our craft cupboards. Unprecedented demand and positive partnerships saw the idea snowball.



Staff were concerned about the abundance of online activities and the expectation on families i.e. that they could print worksheets, had unlimited data to stream videos, had craft supplies or knew to visit a cultural website for activities. We wanted to meet the most vulnerable where they were, via organisations they knew and trusted. If we could provide the means, all families needed was imagination.

Staff asked existing community partners if resources would be helpful for their clients and received a cacophony of ‘Yeses!’. Families were already in crisis and fast action was vital.

The speed at which we consulted and involved community partners in getting the packs to those in need is thanks to several years working

together and building trust. Through those partnerships we are building pathways to engage new audiences. We hope the packs will introduce non-visitors to Ipswich Museums, enabling them to engage with our collections and feel encouraged to visit in the future.

Image: Mike, ‘Museum from Home’ activity pack volunteer, holding a crate of packs ready to be delivered.

Funders

CIMS, made possible by our National Portfolio Organisations funding from Arts Council England

Norfolk and Norwich Festival Bridge

Association for Suffolk Museums

Who is it for?

We hoped to reach as many of Ipswich families in need as we could, including those who may be experiencing digital and/or food poverty, children with SEN, ESOL learners, children receiving free school meals, young people who are mental health service users and young people who have experienced care and/or temporary accommodation.

What outcomes were/are you aiming for?

We hoped to provide children and young people in Ipswich with creative activities to inspire them to engage with Ipswich Museums' collections and offer a small distraction from anxieties they might be feeling due to COVID-19.

Where is it happening?

Primarily Ipswich, but with some reach to Suffolk more broadly.

Are you working in partnership?

This project was only made possible through reaching out to local organisations, which families know and trust to distribute the activity packs. Our distribution partners are:

- Volunteering Matters,
- BSC Multicultural Support
- Anglo-Chinese Cultural Exchange
- Suffolk Primary Association for Head Teachers
- Suffolk Young People's Young People's Health Project (4YP)
- Suffolk Parent and Carer Network (supporting families with SEND children)
- Trinity YMCA and Trinity YMCA Parent and Child Unit
- Benjamin Foundation (supporting young people who have recently left care)
- Lighthouse Women's Refuge
- Suffolk Family Carers (supporting children and young people with caring responsibilities)
- Local Virtual Schools List (improving educational opportunities for children being looked after by Suffolk County Council)

We partnered with Ipswich-based cultural organisations to add additional resources to the packs. Our cultural organisation partners are:

- Suffolk Libraries
- Pacitti Company
- Red Rose Chain
- Dance East

How many people took/are taking part?

We have already made 945 activity packs and will have distributed another 1,200 by the end of August.

For how long has it been happening?

We commenced making the activity packs towards the end of April 2020, and will continue to create and distribute activity packs until August 2020. This work might continue depending on further funding becoming available.

What were/are the main outputs?

The creation of activity packs for a range of groups – children aged 7 to 11, children with SEN, under 5s and young adults.

Feedback:

“Thanks so much, I know the families are very appreciative, as are we!”

“we have had some amazing feedback from our vulnerable families... They loved the games and activity books.”

What have been the challenges and successes for you?

Our incredible community partners meant that we were able to distribute the completed packs through their existing routes and without them this project would not have got off the ground.

The most significant challenge was creating the packs without easy access to spaces within Ipswich Museums’ spaces and with most of the Museums’ team being furloughed. Most of the packs were built in a staff member’s garden, and once COVID-19 restrictions were lifted to allow people to spend time in other’s gardens, four Activity Pack Volunteers were recruited to further support producing packs.

The conversations between staff members and community partners during this time has been hugely positive and we’ve been encouraged by their feedback. Through producing the packs, Ipswich Museums have stayed engaged with their community partners and been of service to Ipswich communities.

Further information

<https://suffolkmuseums.org/taking-the-museum-to-our-community/>

<https://twitter.com/IpswichMuseums/status/1269934771607658496> (video)

Colchester + Ipswich Museums (CIMS) is a joint service uniting Colchester Castle, Hollytrees Museum and the Natural History Museum, with Christchurch Mansion, Ipswich Art Gallery and Ipswich Museum. We serve our local communities and share their stories through an exciting programme of exhibitions and events.