

Case studies: How have culture and creativity been supporting people in health, care and other institutions during the Covid-19 pandemic?

Organisation: University of Cambridge Museums

Region: East of England

Designed for: Mothers and children living in emergency accommodation provided by the Women's Refuge

Family workers have reported that the families were delighted to receive the packs, and those who had received them as part of the first phase were keen to be involved again.



Image credit: University of Cambridge Museums

Introduction

The Fitzwilliam Museum is the lead partner of the spectacular collections of the University of Cambridge Museums (UCM) and Botanic Garden. From antiquity to the present day, the Fitzwilliam houses a world-renowned collection of over half a million beautiful works of art, masterpiece paintings and historical artefacts. We are free to visit for all.

We designed creative activity packs based on objects from our collection. These were particularly targeted at families with children aged 0-5, but were flexible enough for older children to enjoy as well.

Each pack contained:

- high quality colour reproductions of artworks suitable for display at home
- structured suggestions for activities to do together based on each of the artworks: look, think, do!
- Colouring sheet versions of each artwork
- A range of high quality art materials

Funders

This initiative was part of a larger programme which was jointly funded by Cambridge City Council and the Marlay Group (Patrons of the Fitzwilliam Museum).

Partners

Cambridge Women's Aid

Who is it for?

One group of families we focused on with this work were those supported by Cambridge Women's Aid. This included mothers and children living in the emergency accommodation provided by the Women's Refuge, and previously resident families who have now been resettled in supported homes in the area.

Are these people you have worked with before, or new participants?

We have collaborated with Family Workers from the Women's Refuge in the past, and some recipients of the activity packs have taken part in museum activities before, but we were also able to reach new people through this initiative.

How many people took/are taking part?

Approximately 20 families

Where is it happening?

Cambridge

For how long has it been happening?

Packs were sent out in April and July 2020, with a further pack due to be sent in November.

What were/are the main outputs?

The outputs – art making, conversations, play – happen in participants' own homes.

What outcomes were/are you aiming for?

Planned outcomes included: opportunities for families to play and create together; supporting mothers by providing art materials and activity ideas for free; helping isolated families feel connected with their local community, even when unable to leave their accommodation.

Have you adapted existing work to make this happen? If so, how?

This work is an alternative to our usual in-person programme of events for young children, for both universal and targeted audiences.

Does your work support people who identify with one or more of the protected characteristics¹?

We did not collect demographic details of these families as their anonymity must be protected, however, we did take care to ensure that the content of the activity packs, and how they were distributed was equitable and non-discriminatory.

¹Protected characteristics are age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation (Equalities Act 2010).

Evaluation & Feedback

It is not possible to contact participants directly for safety reasons. Instead, we are in dialogue with Women's Refuge support staff about the packs. Family workers have reported that the families were delighted to receive the packs, and those who had received them as part of the first phase were keen to be involved again.

What is your own impression of how it has worked? What have been the challenges and successes for you?

I understand, based on feedback from other families who have also received these activity packs, that they were very valuable, particularly for those who did not have lots of art materials at home, or reliable access to online resources. Families enjoyed the fact that the pack was self-contained, with all materials provided, and they appreciated the quality and the careful planning that had gone into them. Some of the challenges were not knowing all of the families personally, and having to take a one-size-fits-all approach, rather than being able to tailor materials to individual interests. Not being able to see how families are using the packs has meant that we need to base future developments on our assumptions, and second-hand feedback.

Are you reaching more people/fewer people/different people?

This initiative has enabled us to reach families who have not visited the museum in the past, and who may not have been aware of it before receiving the pack, as well as continuing to develop a relationship with people who have collaborated with us previously.

What would you say has made this project possible?

We received additional funding for this project, as well as being able to reallocate funding from work that could not happen because of the pandemic. In addition, the trusting relationships that we have made with community partners such as the Support Workers at Cambridge Women's Aid have been crucial as it is through these that we have been able to reach the families. Flexibility and shared values with leaders at the museum has also been important as our role as educators has needed to adapt.

What would have made it easier?

The nature of the Women's Refuge means that it is not possible to share the address or to deliver items in person. Instead, it was necessary to rely on a local food store to act as a hub or to ask one of the family workers to collect the packs at her home: having a P.O. Box would have made this easier, without compromising on safety.

Further information

<https://www.museums.cam.ac.uk/blog/2020/06/17/keeping-creativity-going-during-lockdown/>
<https://engage.org/resources/engaging-communities-remotely/continuing-connections/>