

‘In Touch’ Volunteer training programme at the Manchester Museum and Imperial War Museum North

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In February 2007 an innovative volunteer training programme, serving people from the local community at risk of exclusion¹ was launched in Manchester, England. A collaboration between The Manchester Museum and Imperial War Museum North the ‘In Touch’ programme set out to change people’s lives, the diversity of the museum workforce and the way the museums work with and sustain relationships with local communities and service providers. Supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund it also offers opportunities for direct access to museum collections for individuals that wouldn’t usually access heritage sites.

‘In Touch’ is conceived as a model that is transferable to other heritage sites and cultural venues. It recognises the importance of volunteers and volunteering in strengthening the museums relationship with local people and local communities. It also acknowledges that volunteers must benefit from the relationship and so it promotes lifelong learning, improves basic skill levels and offers opportunities to develop confidence, self-esteem and interpersonal skills alongside literacy and core skills. The ultimate aim is to improve the quality of life and employability of the volunteers involved.

The project has been successful and has addressed key questions and challenges in the sometimes difficult areas of:

- recruitment, retention and motivation of volunteers
- training, learning and skills development

¹ The specific target groups for the project are all at risk of economic, social and/or cultural exclusion. Our target groups are: long term unemployed, people with a disability, youths at risk of exclusion and/or offending, refugees and asylum seekers, lone parents

- accreditation
- sustainable partnerships
- working with hard to reach audiences
- embedding a volunteer programme and involving all staff
- creating cultural ambassadors in local areas
- diversifying the museum workforce
- providing opportunities for cross-cultural and inter-generational dialogue

The following presentation offers '**In Touch**' as a case study. The project is a product of its time and so clearly illustrates the key initiatives, social agendas, skills strategies and cultural programmes of today. During the presentation I will explore further the impetus, development and delivery of the project before focussing on the successes and challenges for the museums and the participants involved.

The University of Manchester
The Manchester
Museum

MANCHESTER
1824

IMPERIAL WAR MUSEUM NORTH

'In Touch' Museum Volunteer Training Programme 2007 - 2010



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Heritage
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The Manchester Museum



Imperial War Museum North



Commitment to Learning – creating understanding and ownership

- Engaging with community
- Partnerships
- Access to collections and stories
- Family friendly
- Accessible



The programme 07-08



Aims of the Programme

- Promote lifelong learning
- Promote heritage and direct access to collections
- Diversify the museum workforce
- Embed a comprehensive accredited training programme
- Improve basic skills levels/vocational skills
- Help volunteers take the next step
- Work with Hard to Reach Audiences



Crucially it develops self-esteem, interpersonal skills and confidence combined with literacy and core skills to improve quality of life and employability



'I've got more confidence to talk to people, being around people and feeling comfortable with it. Working within the Museum which I have never done before – you do see the place in different light and as a volunteer its not as daunting as being a full time member of staff'.
(November 07)

Partnerships

Partnership working is key to the success and the sustainability of the project. We have developed a network of partners across the communities, agencies and further education organisations throughout the Greater Manchester

Our partnerships are strong because each partner benefits in real terms from working with the project

Main Partners:

- Heritage Lottery Fund
- Further Education Colleges: Trafford and Salford
- University of Manchester
- Agencies: Manchester City Council, Refugee Action, Connexions, Job Centre Plus, Voluntary Action, Mental Health agencies and community groups

The Project: recruitment

- Research to establish relevance and need
- Consultation and discussion/dialogue
- 30 participants per year
- Collaboration with partners is key to success



The Project: The Cultural Heritage Course

- Embeds the Literacy curriculum
- Developed and delivered by college tutors in conjunction with museum staff
- 10 week course that covers key areas of museum knowledge: visitor services, education, marketing, object handling, collections and conservation, being a volunteer
- Part way through the course new volunteers begin volunteering – supported by a buddy

A cultural heritage session

To be successful and achieve all our stated aims each session must:

- Embed literacy elements
- Incorporate group work
- Enable discussion
- Provide opportunities to present opinions and views
- Be based on the home museum or visit to another museum



The Project: volunteer roles



- Meet and greet visitors
- Orientation around the Museum
- Staff 'Your History' stations
- Support education sessions
- object handling tables
- Work on the collections
- Outreach
- Produce promotional material e.g. DVD
- Develop website pages
- Volunteer Newsletter
- Support events programme



The Project: benefits

■ Museum

1. Diversity
2. Audience development
3. Access to collections
4. Social responsibility
5. Community ownership
6. Staff development

■ Participants

1. Confidence
2. Knowledge and further interests
3. Work experience
4. Employment
5. Social interaction and new friends
6. Life skills
7. Understanding of people learning
- 8.

'To be honest its got me out of myself a bit because sometimes, due to me the nature of my medication it can make depressed, in a certain way it brings me up. I've realised meeting people always brings out the best side in me, you can always make a joke and have a laugh about it and life always feels better that way. The Museum is wonderful.' (September 07)



Initially some volunteers scarcely had the confidence to walk through the door. Now I see the same people talking to everyone, speaking up for themselves and playing an important role in the museum'

Debbie Walker, Head of Learning and Access (IWM North)

The Project: 08-09

Challenges:

- Disseminating the value of the project for all involved
- Embedding the project as a part of staff development so that a cohesive, supportive and responsive environment is created
- Increasing diversity, audiences and community engagement
- Develop existing and new partnerships as part of 2010 exit strategy

Any Questions? Any Comments?

