

Outreach and Partnerships



Use Guide **10** to find inspiration and practical guidance for developing and sustaining outreach projects and partnerships in the community.

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The Portfolio is published as a result of collaboration with a working party, which includes specialist consultants, and aims to support the elimination of discrimination in service provision. The views expressed in these guides are not necessarily those of Resource.

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Front cover:

For outreach, start where people are. This means anywhere we all go, but might include day-care centres, community and health care centres and voluntary groups. Photo: Courtesy of National Museums Liverpool (HM National Customs and Excise Museum)

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Working in partnership with community organisations brings new audiences to museums, archives and libraries.
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Introduction

It is understandably easy to become immersed in the day-to-day running of organisations and overlook the many benefits of reaching out towards the audiences that sustain them. This Guide will focus on crossing barriers between museums, archives and libraries and their disabled users, by defining and examining the value of outreach and partnership.

An increasing number of museums, archives and local authority cultural services are already employing outreach and community development workers. Outreach is gaining in popularity and comes in many forms. However, its underlying principle is one of consultation: talking to potential users, liaising with key people and existing groups in the wider community, leading to sharing and partnership. If it becomes integral to our work it opens up many possibilities, adding new skills and expertise, changing our methods and the way we view our work. Its longer-term benefits will enable museums, archives and libraries to extend audiences and develop a firmer base for remaining sustainable into the future.

This Guide will offer practical guidance and illustrate the nature, value and benefits of outreach work with a number of case studies, highlighting the planning, the processes, outcomes and lessons learnt. Ultimately its aim is to inspire us and nurture our capacity for looking outwards, and to know what it is to be enriched by this process.

1 Good reasons for outreach work

Disability often means exclusion from the mainstream activities taken for granted by so many people. Those of us who may be disabled often cannot fully participate in what most might perceive as basic cultural activities. Being outside of the mainstream immediately creates a barrier of confidence, with all those associated feelings of being undervalued and disconnected. Outreach work offers a means to cross these barriers, to open up our cultural and learning centres to a greater number of people. By definition it is about reaching out into communities, of networking and working in partnership.

Ultimately, reaching out enables organisations to touch the lives of a greater number of people – the people who form the audience, the users, the learners and potential employees. It might begin to address the problem of why a large proportion of the population never visits a museum, archive or library. Exclusion, both real and perceived, can undermine the richness of our cultural diversity, the essential ingredient that enables our museums, archives and libraries to grow and flourish. Resource's response to the Social Exclusion Unit's *Consultation Document: Social Exclusion and Mental Health* talks of "the need to build more effective bridges and sustainable links between, cultural, educational, social, voluntary and health sectors" (see 'Further information').

Value and benefits of outreach and partnership

As keepers and guardians of society's culture, museums, archives and libraries ought to represent the fullest possible picture of who we are and how we came to be. Outreach can enable a deeper exploration of our cultural diversity, helping us to better understand and celebrate our differences.

Outreach may provide new incentives to expand and re-emphasise collections and materials held, as fresh ideas and ways of working feed-back into organisations.

It can play a vital role in generating a climate of inclusivity, of benefit to both individuals and organisations, encouraging a broader perspective on widening participation.

By being more fully involved it can encourage us as communities to be proactive rather than passive recipients of information, which will have positive knock-on effects on societal development as a whole.

Partnerships can lead to shared skills and funding, opening up new opportunities for networking and adding a sense of balance and equality, furthering the spirit of co-operation rather than competition.

Outreach and partnership can also be a useful impetus in creating new routes to professional development, with the added possibility of cross-sector training.

2 Getting started

Some key principles

Outreach work relies on the readiness to undertake something new and to experiment.

- **Perhaps most vital is time.** Good and sustainable outreach cannot be hurried. Planning time always pays off. Be prepared for the unprepared, for lots of cups of tea and flexible working hours, in order to meet people when and where they are.
- **All outreach is essentially grass roots in origin.** This means starting at ground level, finding out from the potential audience what it is they can and want to respond to. Consultation is crucial; find out what is going on and respond accordingly with what you are able to offer. Exchange ideas.
- **Start where people are likely to be.** For disabled people this means anywhere we all go, but might also include day centres, community and health care settings, schools, voluntary and specialist groups/agencies. Such organisations are invaluable in the process of networking, one contact leading to another.
- **Talk to other community workers and key people.** These might include people who run centres, teachers, health care professionals, social service and other outreach workers, arts organisations, adult and community education workers, local employers, group leaders, others in your field who have or are doing similar work.
- **There is great scope for partnership.** For example, museums, archives and libraries to work in partnership with, for example, arts organisations such as Shapearts in London and regional Disability Arts Forum who specialise in the field of disability (see 'Further information'). Workshops in creative writing, story

telling, reminiscence, music, visual arts away from a museum or archive might be the starting point of a journey that leads to a museum, archive or library visit.

- **Go with an open and receptive attitude.** Also be clear about what your organisation can offer at the initial stages of any co-operative work. Don't promise what you may not be able to deliver and keep the process rather than any product as a guiding factor.
- **Nothing is ever wasted in this field.** Contacts made and ideas floated may have to wait for their time, or may simply feed into another piece of work, unforeseen at an earlier stage.

Managing projects

Once your project plan is building on the principles in the previous section, here are some considerations for the project itself:

- Ensure that as far as possible, all the practicalities of meeting, times, venues etc. are clear and be prepared to change arrangements if something appears not to be working in practice that seemed fine on paper (see Guides 8 and 11). Transport is likely to be an important issue for those of us with disabilities.
- Build in some ongoing consultation time, as well as time for evaluation and feedback. Use the skills of the participants and encourage and support autonomy when appropriate for work that may be ongoing beyond the life of the project.
- If you are using space within your organisation, consider how this might continue to have some form of community function in the longer term. For example, there is a library in rural Oxfordshire,

which since 1990 has allowed a group of older writers from the local community to meet there during a morning when it is closed. This was initially set up by a local education authority outreach worker and the group now run themselves, occasionally exhibiting their work in the library and sometimes helping with story time during the school holidays.

- Always be prepared for unpredictable outcomes. Outreach is an organic process and that is what makes it exciting. For example a group who start off looking at the history of their local area may find that they want to learn how to represent their knowledge visually. Another worker may be needed, so build in contingencies for the unexpected or room for follow-up work.
- Outreach often involves working or being contacted at unusual times. If a time is not convenient, be clear and friendly about arranging another. Don't feel that just because the group or members of the group have a disability that you have to say 'yes' when you mean 'no'.
- Look for ideas to the case studies in Chapter 3, highlighting just some of the innovative and inspiring work being done around the country.
- Celebrate what you have achieved.

3 Case studies

Chisenhale Gallery's 'Get Art' project

This contemporary art gallery in East London is publicly funded and aims to promote innovative and experimental work by artists early in their careers. The Get Art project was initiated in 1997 by the gallery's Education Co-ordinator and ran until 2003. She had a working relationship with a local special school. On approaching the Borough Council for funding, the Council widened the brief to cover all special schools in the area. The project is a good example of the value of making early contacts and of how an idea can blossom.

Get Art's aim was to enable all the students in special schools in Tower Hamlets to actively engage with contemporary art. Students worked alongside artists in the schools and gallery, experiencing the enriching potential of making their own work. The children and young people exhibited their work within the gallery space at the end of the year. High value and emphasis were placed on the exploratory nature of the process.

Time was a key factor here. As with all outreach, planning and preparation played a vital role in ensuring that once underway, the project was built on secure foundations. The gallery wanted to enable its own approach to creativity, to become integral to the lives of the young people, and by implication, to the wider community. They didn't set out to use artists to teach, but rather to enable the participants to make and interpret for themselves.

Meetings, workshops and inset days were planned to build and sustain productive working relationships between the partners, students, teachers and artists. As schools have their own culture and their agenda, looking outwards is sometimes a new experience for them too.

In the early years there were problems with the perception of the project in the wider artistic world. It held a positive place in arts education but not as part of the gallery's main function. This was tackled by encouraging the exhibiting artists in the conventional gallery programme to take part in joint discussions with the Get Art artists.

The enduring legacy of this good practice model has been one of inclusion, leaving all concerned feeling valued and wanting to learn more.

"Pupils who visited the gallery at the beginning of their school career will often remember that visit when they attend a few years later... returning once again provides continuity, and further deepens the value of visiting a gallery in the locality." David McClements, Phoenix School, London Borough of Tower Hamlets

The project has resulted in a new Teachers' Forum, where Special Educational Needs teachers and mainstream teachers plan to co-ordinate events at the gallery. In addition Chisenhale and Bristol Creative Partnerships are together setting up a similar project in Bristol, working alongside Art and Power, a group of disabled artists (see 'Further information').

The National Archives' Housebound Learners project

Based in Kew, the National Archives house one of the largest archival collections in the world. The Education and Interpretation Department employs an Outreach Co-ordinator who works to widen the interest in and use of the archives. In June of 2002 the Co-ordinator was approached by the Housebound Learners group,

an independent charity based in Wandsworth established to meet the needs of students unable to participate in adult education. The mere existence of an outreach worker in an organisation can encourage a climate of mutual co-operation from the wider community.

At that time, the archive was planning an exhibition to mark the hundredth anniversary of the formation of the Women's Social and Political Union in 1903, so a project based on the suffrage movement was suggested. Six volunteer tutors and six home learners took part and during the summer of 2003, the Outreach Co-ordinator developed Teaching and Home Student packs, ready for the course to start in the autumn.

Lightweight materials to assist people with limited dexterity were developed, with an emphasis on the visual. Staff at the archives compiled an audiotape to accompany the packs. The course content covered different aspects of the suffrage movement, with a focus on individual stories to represent a cross section of people across the age range and from varying backgrounds, thus deepening the themes of inclusivity.

In mid December the tutors and three of the students visited the exhibition and the Archives to mark the end of the project. The archive now plans to run another course along similar lines during the spring/summer of 2004.

The Outreach Co-ordinator found that tying in the course with an existing exhibition, while appropriate, presented difficulties in having access to some of the materials. Access to archival material can also present particular challenges to both staff and users, especially to users with disabilities, because of the way it needs to be stored and handled.

In this project the Outreach Worker had minimal contact with the users until the end of the project, which can be problematic when trying to build a sustainable relationship. She emphasises, too, the difficulties of measuring the value of such work, which operates at a subtle level within an organisation.

However, these were all solvable problems and such projects open up and strengthen channels of communication with communities.

Portsmouth Community Library Service

Portsmouth Library Service has a small Community Library Service team. Two part-time librarians and three part-time assistants work in the thriving housebound reader service, together with two blind assistants who deliver the Vision Impaired Service. Six years ago a partnership with Portsmouth Social Services and funding from the Ulverscroft Foundation enabled their vision impaired work to begin. Social Services introduced two volunteers from the local vision impaired community to help library staff develop a new braille unit. Their involvement has proved crucial for the sustained growth of the service.

The partnership led to a number of initiatives and spin-offs: a reading group was established to meet the need of library users who depend on audio books. More recently, a project on wartime memories linked to the BBC's People's War initiative, encourages older people to use IT. It has been developed with community organisations offering support and expertise, including Age Concern and local schools – who provide the school minibus to help with transport to library and community events.

IT has played a key role in enabling the service to take their work out into the community, offering tuition with laptops both in library

settings and outside. Braille tuition is also being developed, proving invaluable also for several people with severe dyslexia. Statistics show that braille literacy is declining and the library provides an active contribution to reverse this trend in an un-institutional setting.

Partnerships with Social Services and Learning Links, a local community educational charity specialising in work with under represented groups have led to a project in which a blind library staff member works as an IT teaching assistant to offer IT tuition to vision impaired people in the Central Library. A newsletter for vision impaired people is also produced.

Disabled and housebound users are helped to keep in touch via the Internet with Internet drop-in sessions.

Such a wealth of work and ideas is proof of what can be done by applying the energy and will of a wide range of people in a community, both within a service and outside. Portsmouth Library service won the respected CILIP Libraries Change Lives Award in 2003 for its innovative work and Social Services are considering developing the role of the Library as an information service for disabled people. As a librarian puts it: "We have many ideas, very little money and few staff but working together works."

Challenging perceptions

Having a disability demands a different and often creative way of looking at and dealing with the world. When appreciated and harnessed it offers opportunities for challenging preconceived ideas and enhancing the creativity in us all.

- Manchester Art Gallery worked with a focus group of visually impaired people to develop an audio guide for the gallery. The project has resulted in staff and volunteer training programmes, stronger links with members of the participating community and a greater depth of appreciation of the gallery's collection through other senses. This has resulted in awareness of new and enriching ways of exploring and presenting collections.
- Stockport Heritage Services Hidden Talents Diversity Festival is working with a number of different communities in the area. One project, 'Disabled Centuries', is being run in co-operation with disabled people. It will result in an exhibition exploring Stockport's disabled people's movement over the past 150 years. The hope is to expose hidden histories and create the basis for a clearer understanding of how to achieve a more accessible future. Two disabled people have been recruited as consultants to work with the disabled community and develop informal learning opportunities structures for Stockport Heritage Services.
- Art and Soul offers exhibition space at the Orleans House Gallery in Twickenham to people with mental health difficulties. This ongoing programme, organised by local arts professionals, mental health workers and service users, aims to celebrate mental and emotional wellbeing through the arts. Partnership took on a practical form as the gallery mounted and framed many of the works prior to the exhibition, whereas the Stables Gallery was renovated with help from Art and Soul committee members. Recognising and celebrating the creativity of people with mental health difficulties can help break down the stigma attached to any of us who have or have had mental health difficulties or a mental illness.

Partnerships

- The Home Library Service in Hartlepool is aimed at people whose access to the general library facilities is limited due to age or ill health. Early in 2003 Hartlepool Borough Libraries initiated a project in this department to enhance this service within a time period ending in March 2005. This was done with the help of government money via the Public Service Agreement (LPSA). Working in partnership with Social Services and New Deal for Communities and a local company who deliver meals, plus publicity in the Hartlepool Mail, information about this facility is now reaching a much wider audience. To the Social Inclusion Officer, the main lesson learned so far is that the targets are only achievable with the help of several other agencies. New skills and new ways of thinking are being developed as an important outcome of the process.
- Pallant House Gallery in Chichester has a lifelong learning programme aimed at creating and sustaining partnerships with local organisations. The partnership with Wrenford Day Centre for adults with learning disabilities has led, thanks to a local government grant, to the centre becoming an integrated arts venue. The Gallery's Education and Outreach Officer prioritises long-term, rather than short-term partnerships.
- Museums, archives and libraries are increasingly developing partnerships with the health sector. For example, Calderdale and Kirklees Libraries set up the Reading and You Scheme (Rays) in partnership with the then local primary health care groups. While some people attend at the suggestion of a GP, community psychiatric nurse, or social worker, it is open to anyone. The work of the bibliotherapists consists of one-to-one sessions with readers, finding suitable fiction or poetry for them. There are visits to day

centres and residential homes for older people, as well as the weekly workshops. What is on offer is not therapy, but 'normality' – the sociable activity of talking about books.

- In Newcastle the Hatton Gallery has been working for three years with St. Nicholas' Hospital. GPs and consultants have been referring clients with mental health difficulties to the gallery, though they are under no obligation to attend. Groups of eight to ten people work together to produce their own artwork and create an exhibition, including all the design elements, labelling, panels, hanging etc. The artist's pieces are sold and the money goes back into an Art Fund pot for another group to participate. Participants have gained confidence and self-esteem and the project is liked by the hospital because of the relaxed atmosphere at the gallery.

4 What we can learn

Outreach presents us with many and varied opportunities to fully appreciate the value of continuous learning and therefore continuous growth. It emphasises the importance of consultation and partnership if real and lasting inclusivity is to be achieved.

Outreach with disabled people

Sometimes it is necessary to concentrate on the needs of groups, but every group of disabled people will be just as diverse the rest of the population. Special projects and events may be required and demanded on occasion, but more crucially it is important to recognise the need to create a climate where wide participation is encouraged and nurtured.

Training

Often, too, such work will highlight a need for training and, depending on the level required, this can be done in partnership with the other groups involved in a project. Resource's database of disability trainers will be useful for all who have identified a need for general disability awareness or disability equality training (see Guide 4 and 'Further information'). It is also worth consulting other specialist organisations in the field, as well as disability organisations, such as Shape and others with outreach expertise.

A national partnership and training opportunity

In 2001, the National Library for the Blind (NLB) developed 'A Touch More', a partnership with three public library authorities: Bury, Essex and Manchester. This was supported by the DCMS Wolfson Challenge Fund. The aims of the project were to encourage visually impaired people to use their local public library and to encourage inclusive reader development. This included making available a wide range of reader development based tools for browsing and choosing, including accessible websites. More than 35 library staff received training, senior library managers took part in the consultation process and some 60 authorities heard about the project at the 'Feeling Your Way' conference in March 2002.

The project demonstrated a need for more information and support on access technology and the NLB has now developed the Access Tech Primer with support from the Health Foundation. The Primer provides online tuition for librarians and other people who support visually impaired people in using computers. It is freely available on the NLB website (<http://atp.nlb-online.org>).

Building on the success of these projects, NLB will run nine regional reader development seminars in 2004 with a grant from DCMS, and develop web-based guidance on good practice as a result of the workshops.

Time

Outreach work is analogous to an iceberg. What is seen above the waterline is really only a third of the story. Most of the work goes on out of sight. This is true of all the case studies mentioned.

Learning to appreciate the importance of time is especially pertinent when working with those of us who are disabled. Since the world is designed on the basis of averages, disability can put a person outside of the average. Everyday tasks can take longer for some groups of people, but with the help of a more creative approach, they need not. If recognition of this is already implicit in the work then the results are likely to be that much richer and longer lasting.

Conclusion

New ways of working are always challenging and sometimes daunting. Outreach with disabled people is just one example of confronting such challenges. The rich variety of work being done by museums, archives and libraries across the country is testimony that the journey is well worth it.

It is clear that if it is to work, then outreach demands that organisations learn how to focus on the needs of their communities and their audiences, and to introduce strategies to meet these needs. Only then can opportunities for growth be embraced.

Outreach can serve to create the conditions for us all to gain a better understanding of ourselves and our culture, as well as a stronger feeling of connection through our shared histories.

Further information

National Coalition Building Institute

Building active and inclusive communities.

The Learning Exchange

Wygston's House

Applegate

Leicester

LE1 5LD

Tel: 0116 222 9977

Email: info@ncbileic.org.uk

www.ncbiuk.org.uk

National Disability Arts Forum

Mea House

Ellison Place

Newcastle Upon Tyne

NE1 8XS

Tel: 0191 261 1628

Email: ndaf@ndaf.org

www.ndaf.org

National Institute of Adult and Continuing Education

Publications and resource materials on outreach work with disabled people.

21 De Montfort Street

Leicester

LE1 7GE

Tel: 0116 204 4200/1

Email: enquiries@niace.org.uk

www.niace.org.uk

Society for Storytellers

General Enquiries

PO Box 2344

Reading

RG6 7FG

Tel: 0118 9351 381

(See the other Guides in the Portfolio for more information on useful organisations).

Publications

Bread and Roses: National Institute of Adult and Continuing Education (NIACE)

A powerful testament to the importance of art and culture in lifelong learning, as well as looking at what is meant by social exclusion.

The author examines government policy, makes recommendations and also cites practical outreach examples from the field.

Thompson, J. 2002.

Consultation Response: Social Exclusion Unit – Social Exclusion and Mental Health

Resource's detailed response to a consultation questionnaire relating to the work of museums, archives and libraries, and covering inclusivity and partnership. Resource 2003.

Fresh Today: 100 years of art + power

Publication documents of a five month project by art + power, a membership organisation of disabled artists worked with the Arnolfini Gallery in Bristol. Arnolfini 2003.

***Get Art: The Special Educational Needs Project
at Chisenhale Gallery***

Catalogue of the work during the six years of the project.

Chisenhale website: www.chisenhale.org.uk

Pringle, E. (Ed.) 2003.

Outreach – What is it good for?

Report initiated by Samantha Heywood, the Head of Corporate Education at the Imperial War Museum, to identify best practice in outreach work across a range of UK museums. Lim, R. 2002.

What Did We Learn? The Museums and Galleries Lifelong Learning Initiative (MGLI) 2000–02

Report on the seven projects – including Words and Wings – A Guide to Creative Reminiscence, funded by the DfES throughout the country on social inclusion, work with young people, family learning and older learners. Department for Education and Skills. Gould, H. 2002.

- 1 Disability in Context
- 2 Meeting Disabled People
- 3 Training for Equality
- 4 Audits
- 5 Disability Discrimination Act (DDA)
- 6 Inclusive Information
- 7 Using Technology
- 8 Access on a Shoestring
- 9 Accessible Environments
- 10 Outreach and Partnerships
- 11 Consulting Disabled People
- 12 Employment at Every Level

The **Disability Portfolio** is a collection of 12 guides on how best to meet the needs of disabled people as users and staff in museums, archives and libraries. It gives invaluable advice, information and guidance to help overcome barriers and follow good practice.

The Portfolio is available in 12 point clear print or 15 point large print formats, braille, audio cassette and on the website. Please contact 020 7273 1458 or info@resource.gov.uk

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