

# MUSIC AND MUSEUMS

## EVALUATION REPORT

March 2014



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## **Project Description**

A music and writing project with homeless adults in Oxford led by the Oxford Concert Party (OCP) in partnership with Crisis Skylight Oxford, The Old Fire Station and the Ashmolean Museum (University of Oxford Museum). The project was generously funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund.

## **Project Delivery**

Participants attended an OCP performance of music from different cultures at the Old Fire Station, home of Crisis Skylight Oxford. The music from around the world responded to and introduced the Ashmolean Museum's unique collection of artefacts from around the world.

A 6-week programme followed (1 session per week) including: museum tours, music and creative writing workshops on the theme of different cultures. These workshops were split between the museum and The Old Fire Station.

The musicians and writers used the museum's collections as a starting point for an exploration of differences between people, lifestyles and cultures – making comparisons with the participants' own experiences. The project took place in environments familiar to the participants (such as The Old Fire Station) as well as in the museum.

The participants were homeless adults who are clients of Crisis Skylight Oxford.

The group and participants came together for the opening concert and there was a final performance/sharing of their work at the museum. The participants' work will be put on the websites of the OCP/the museum/other key participants where possible.

## **Purpose of Project**

The project offered a range of opportunities for homeless people to participate: attending a performance, music and creative writing workshops, museum tours and being part of the final public performance/sharing. The project adopted a user led approach to increase participation.

Participants worked with a range of unusual musical instruments from around the world. Those with existing musical experience increased their skills, those with no prior experience developed new skills. Skills were developed through the creative writing workshops. Participants learned about different cultures through the museum collections in a way that was creative and accessible. 'Behind the scenes' tours of the museum were arranged to offer a unique opportunity to develop an understanding of how such institutions operate and also to learn of the university buildings' history and heritage. Throughout the whole process participants developed personal skills such as working as part of a team towards a shared goal (creating joint poems / the final sharing). The University Museum made their building and collections more accessible to disenfranchised individuals and communities.

Members of the public (attending the performance/accessing the website) had a better understanding of the people and cultures presented in the museums – and the cultures of homeless people in their community. This project has encouraged greater use of community/public buildings ie. The University of Oxford's museums.

## **Project Highlights**

The participants started off wary of the project but grew in courage and skills as the project developed, in equal collaboration with the other partners. As one example, Martin, a Crisis client, brought in a new piece of music he had composed for the keyboard to each session and gave to Arne to sight read. At the end of the project, his confidence has grown such that he sat down and played the piece himself to the assembled group. This is not something he would have imagined doing at the outset of the project.

Everyone engaged equally with the project, creating poems and sound pictures for the final concert at the Ashmolean Museum. There were some extremely moving moments in the final sharing of work, which took place in a very informal way. The participants met at the Japanese tea house. Jude had explained the Japanese tea ceremony and shown them articles used in it at an early session and this had inspired much of the work. Here, they performed haiku underscored with music. They then moved into galleries housing artefacts they had used and performed their poems in situ, whilst visitors to the gallery stood and watched. It was a lovely example of 'performance art', a very casual but heartfelt performance of work which surprised and delighted the people who had come into the museum and which gave them an additional insight into the artefacts around them. It was an organic performance which echoed and responded to the organic nature of the project.

The engagement with the artefacts at the Ashmolean, and being able to handle them, was a huge gift and inspired and stimulated everyone in producing music and written work. This was a generous allowance by the Ashmolean Museum which took the project and its' creativity to another level.

Three volunteers from Crisis were attracted to the project and came and joined in, one changing his shift so that he could participate. They added an extra dimension to the project, so that you had three 'groups' (workshop leaders, homeless clients and volunteers) who came together seamlessly creating a single body producing words and music and working towards a joint endeavour. One of these volunteers also took on the creation of the CDs.

Each session was designed to be both stand alone (necessary due to the uncertain nature of homeless life) but also to work cumulatively. It was an unusual way to work, but it worked brilliantly. People who came for one session picked it up immediately and jumped into the work enthusiastically. This was in large part due to the generosity of spirit of everyone on the group and the commitment that this was trying out something new and good for Crisis clients to which all were able to contribute. The sessions were validating experiences which opened up new horizons and gave new opportunities. They were inclusive, hands on and full of laughter and sharing.

A lasting legacy of the project is that Jude Barrett at the Ashmolean has arranged an afternoon a month where she will take Crisis clients on a tour of the museum, to any galleries they want, and will also take them for free into ticketed exhibitions. This will be an opportunity for all Crisis clients, not just those who were on the project. Jude is delighted with the response of people on the project and eager to support others to discover the delights of the museum and more importantly, to feel welcomed and at ease there.

The collaboration between Crisis Skylight, the Ashmolean Museum and Oxford Concert Party went extremely well and was very smooth. All three partners worked with enthusiasm, professionalism and commitment to provide the best experience for the participants. Stronger links have been created between all three partner organisations which will be a lasting legacy for the project and all three are eager to refine and develop this project.

For the Oxford Concert Party, we were delighted to work with Jude Barrett at the Ashmolean and Kate Crocker and Natasha Crosher at Crisis, all of whom embraced the project with enthusiasm, generosity, humour and terrific openness to us and the participants.

### **Project Issues from Which to Learn**

One aspect of the project was to include students from another organisation. This was to get the homeless people to mix and work with another group of people equally as way of reintegrating them with society, and of introducing the students in a non-confrontational way to the issues of homelessness. However, some volunteers took part from Crisis, having been attracted by the opening concert and the premise of the project, and they added a valuable dynamic to the group. As the group worked together so brilliantly and generously, we felt that the self confidence and personal skills that the homeless people developed through working with the group and each other more than compensated for the lack of other students.

Crisis loved the project and their only concern at the end was that it was too short (also a comment made by several participants). If we are able to run the project again, they would like to run it over two terms, with the first term allowing people to find their feet and the second term producing more work as they are more confident. However, they acknowledge that we had got the group working extremely well together in a very short time.

Crisis also suggested adding a visual artist to the mix as they find visual arts a good way to encourage more people into a project, as they feel it is less threatening. OCP has good links with several visual artists so this would not be a problem.

## **Project Outline**

### 14 January 2pm - 4pm: Opening Concert - The Loft, The Old Fire Station

The full Oxford Concert Party plus writer and all participants on the programme to introduce the participants to the project, each other and the course leaders, through music from around the world related to artefacts in the museum.

### 21 January 2pm - 4pm: Workshop 1 - Education Room/Galleries, Ashmolean

Tour of Museum collecting information and ideas to be used towards poetry / lyrics. Discussions of types of music which could be linked with different geographical areas / time periods. Building links within group. Music sharing.

### 28 January 2pm - 4pm: Workshop 2 - The Loft, The Old Fire Station

Working with musicians and writer to begin to play with ideas for songs. Learning about music and writing.

### 4 February 2pm - 4pm: Workshop 3 - Education Room/Galleries, Ashmolean

Tour of Museum collecting information and ideas to be used towards poetry / lyrics. Discussions of types of music which could be linked with different geographical areas / time periods. Building links within group. Music sharing.

### 11 February 2pm - 4pm: Workshop 4 - The Loft, The Old Fire Station

Working with musicians and writer to begin to play with ideas for songs. Learning about music and writing.

### 18 February 2pm - 4pm: Workshop 5 - Education Room/Galleries, Ashmolean

Tour of Museum collecting information and ideas to be used towards poetry / lyrics. Discussions of types of music which could be linked with different geographical areas / time periods. Building links within group. Music sharing.

### 25 February 2pm - 4pm: Workshop 6 - The Loft, The Old Fire Station

Pulling together all the final pieces and rehearsing them ready for the final concert. Deciding on who will sing, play, recite, etc., and the play list. These decisions were guided by the musicians and writer, but decided by the group.

### 4 March 2pm - meet at The Loft, The Old Fire Station: 3pm - 4.30pm Public Concert/ sharing at Ashmolean

performed by 2 OCP musicians, writer, project participants. The audience will be other homeless people, friends and colleagues and general public.

### Outcomes of Project

Homeless people and students will create work together, during which they will develop understanding and appreciation of each others' lives, skills and expectations and develop their team working and communication skills. They will perform together in a concert of the work they have created/learned for their peers and the public. This will give them the satisfaction of seeing a project through to completion and having that work recognised publicly. They will also gain self confidence.

All the participants will receive a booklet and CD of the work they have produced together as a lasting reminder of the project.

## Project Feedback

### Feedback from Participants

We gave feedback forms to the participants which consisted of tick boxes and open ended questions. The responses were as follows:

What did you think of the artistic quality of the Oxford Concert Party & Poet, Pat Winslow?

Excellent 100% (other options: Good / Average / Poor)

What was your experience of the project?

Better than expected 100% (other options: As expected / Not as good as expected)

What did you think of the way the musicians & poet worked with the participants?

Excellent 100% (other options: Good / Average / Poor)

The Oxford Concert Party has the following outcomes for the project. How well do you think we did?

Learnt about and engaged with heritage in the museum

Excellent 80% Good 20% (other options Average / Poor)

Got better understanding of people and cultures presented in the museum

Excellent 60% Good 40% (other options Average / Poor)

Developed understanding and appreciation of other participants' lives and skills

Excellent 80% Good 20% (other options Average / Poor)

Changed own attitudes and behaviour

Excellent 40% Good 60% (other options Average / Poor)

Had enjoyable experience on project!

Excellent 100% (other options Good / Average / Poor)

What did you like most about the project?

- Learning about the museum
- Interaction with people and objects
- Harpsichord
- Fascinating and taught me to think and observe more!
- The collaboration

What did you dislike most about the project?

- Nothing
- Short
- Contemporary music
- It being too short

What would you like to have done more of?

- Allowed to bring my keyboard
- Interact with artefacts
- Historical

What would you like to have done less of?

- Nothing
- Blues

Is there anything else you would like to tell us about the project?

- Nothing
- Thank you
- Please do another one!

### **Feedback from Artists:**

#### Arne Richards - Oxford Concert Party:

This was a very successful project from everyone's point of view. Although each of the sessions were of a "stand alone" nature, we accumulated ideas, songs, poems and instrumental pieces which were carried over to the following sessions and eventually to a final sharing. Both the Ashmolean (Jude) and the Old Fire Station (Natasha) were totally supportive and Crisis chaired another evaluation session for OCP on 4<sup>th</sup> March 2014.

It became apparent that the participants relaxed in our company and they felt free to explore their own ideas and to make individual contributions in a safe and interesting environment. We were lucky enough to have three volunteers who also supported and encouraged the Crisis members. Everyone participated on a level footing and people were encouraged to lead the group themselves.

We all felt that this had been a remarkable project. We have made many friends and all participants want to continue visiting the museum on a regular basis. Jude has arranged for them to visit any exhibitions for free and several people have been attending other regular musical events there now that they have experienced some of the objects in a meaningful and creative light.

#### Isabel Knowland - Oxford Concert Party:

The project was well managed by Crisis and the Ashmolean and I felt all three agencies worked together very well. It was a great pity that Brookes pulled out.

It was really great to be able to handle the artifacts from the museum and this gave a momentum and trajectory to the project.

It was wonderful to see some members of Crisis really 'grow' and become more confident and communicative during the course of the project.

I felt that everyone who took part - 'clients' and practitioners - were on an equal footing: it was a genuine sharing of ideas which instigated a creative impulse all of its own. This, to me, was truly inspiring.

I think there is huge potential in this kind of collaboration: we just scratched the surface. I would like to see such a project in an intergenerational setting, or perhaps with refugees/asylum seekers.

#### Pat Winslow - Poet:

I was very impressed by the Ashmolean input. I think Jude (Barrett, Education Officer for Adults and Young People) is inspired and inspiring. She's clearly passionate about the work and she has excellent communication skills. It was wonderful to have three different strands running through the project – music, artefact and poetry – for all of us I think – practitioners as well as the people from Crisis. The way things fed into each other and linked up was unique and people brought their own knowledge and expertise to each session.

The Crisis staff were welcoming, helpful and supportive. I'm pleased that the link between the Ashmolean and Crisis has been strengthened. This is a promising legacy.

What really struck me quite forcibly was how much people grew over such a short space of time – and this was, as participants have said, a short project, so it's all the more remarkable. People's body language is a clear indicator as well as eye contact and direct physical and vocal engagement. For someone to talk about Russian nationalist composers and play a piece of Borodin must have taken a wee bit of courage. You could have heard a pin drop. He took complete control. It was humbling. Another participant took responsibility for sound recording and editing. Everyone involved created live sound 'pictures' and wrote their own poems as well as contributed to the group poems. One person told me he'd never written poetry before and he didn't think he could, but he'd felt encouraged and was now much more confident about his writing ability.

I asked everyone to imagine they might be a statue in the museum and to strike two poses – one to show how they felt before the project and one to show how they felt on its completion. You can see the results on the first page of this document. Worry and relief are apparent, as well as perplexity and joy.

Being able to handle old objects – just being able to handle museum pieces – was important. Being able to handle musical instruments, too. One can't underestimate the damaging effects of disempowerment. This project was the exact opposite of that.

OCP are first rate workshop leaders and facilitators. As a practitioner, I also felt nourished. Artists need to extend their horizons too – this project did that for me.

I'd certainly be up for working on an intergenerational project and/or with refugees and asylum seekers.

#### Natasha Crosher - Crisis Skylight Oxford:

Natasha thought that the artistic quality of the Oxford Concert Party and Pat Winslow was excellent, as was the way they worked with the participants. She also scored us as excellent on how we delivered all the outcomes for the project.

When asked what she felt worked well with this project / partnership, she said:

The relationship between OCP facilitators and Crisis Skylight members was a real highlight of the project. I also thought this project offered something quite different and special for our members and real additionality in terms of what we as tutors can offer. I am sure that the members felt much more connected with the Ashmolean as a result and hopefully will feel able to visit the museum now whenever they wish.

When asked what she felt did not work well, she said:

It would have been good to have had a higher attendance. I think for our members the necessity of moving between Crisis and the Ashmolean made it a little complicated and perhaps daunting (but of course that was the heart of the project and therefore essential). I was also very aware however that the members who engaged in the project attended regularly – which is a testament to the quality of the project. Only one member pulled out as she had earned herself a full time job.

### Jude Barrett, Ashmolean Museum:

Jude felt that the project was “an exploration we all went on together” and she was delighted with what came out of it. She could see how it raised peoples’ confidence and self esteem and was very pleased with how participants were inspired by and engaged with the artefacts. She hoped that it opened up horizons and gave the participants the ‘key of the door’ to the Ashmolean.

## **Conclusion**

All three partner organisations were delighted with the way the participants quietly immersed themselves in the project, took full advantage of the opportunities on offer and melded themselves into a sharing, inclusive and welcoming group. This was a project which offered so much in terms of participation, skills building (both hard and soft skills) and which opened up wonderful opportunities to be part of the museum. Each person who was involved has gained insights and the satisfaction of being able to contribute in a way that was safe and non-threatening. Between them, they have broken down barriers (real and/ or perceived) for the homeless to access a valuable heritage resource where they can feel welcome, be inspired and learn. This helps them and other homeless clients from Crisis.

We were delighted with the outcomes of the project. The links between the three agencies developed smoothly and have begun very strong conversations for building future projects, perhaps with other groups. The Ashmolean are working with Crisis to take groups into the museum. We have also begun to organise Sunday concerts and other events at the Ashmolean Museum, bringing music to their visitors and bringing our followers into the museum.

As a result of an evaluation meeting between the three organisations, we are all very keen to repeat and develop this project. We will be keeping in contact with everyone and revising the project with a view of delivering a larger project over two terms next Spring. Taking feedback from participants and planners, we will be looking at involving a visual artist. We will therefore be developing the project to deliver an even more meaningful experience for participants and seeking funding to allow us to deliver it.