



BIRMINGHAM CULTURAL CHAMPIONS, 2010-2011

An Evaluation for Birmingham City Council Community Arts Team: Executive Summary

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Birmingham Cultural Champions: EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Overall aim and objectives of Cultural Champions project

The aim of the project is to ensure that culture is at the heart of the continued development of Birmingham, improving engagement with people who live and work in the city and increasing participation by residents in the full range of cultural opportunities on offer.

Table 1: Proportion of adults that attended a museum or gallery at least once in the last 12 months (2008)

	%	Compared to Birmingham %	Compared to +/- National %
ERDINGTON ¹	16.81%	-26.79%	-36.99%
HODGE HILL	17.75%	-25.85%	-36.05%
LADYWOOD	29.75%	-13.85%	-24.05%
PERRY BARR	30.24%	-13.36%	-23.56%
BIRMINGHAM ²	43.6%	-	-10.20%
NATIONAL	53.8%	-	-

The Cultural Champions activity and choice of target constituencies was inspired by the findings of *Identifying the Barriers to Cultural Participation and the Needs of Residents of Birmingham, a Final Report to the Birmingham Cultural Partnership* by Ecotec, 31st March 2010³.

The participating city centre cultural organisations worked to break down the attitudinal and financial barriers, and to provide a better cultural offer for all⁴, through the provision and promotion of high quality, accessible cultural facilities, programmes and activities which are relevant to local people.

As museums and galleries, the particular barriers the four cultural organisations needed to address were:

- Inappropriate facilities & activity (eg quality and type of provision)
- Lack of awareness
- Lack of inclusivity / cultural elitism
- Cost (including perception of cost)
- Lack of time
- Lack of need / interest / understanding

For detailed information concerning the barriers to cultural participation in Birmingham, which inspired the Cultural Champions activity, see *Barriers to Cultural Participation*, 2010.

Cultural Champions project outcomes

Outcomes for Communities & Participants

1. Increased awareness and understanding of the cultural institution partnered with the constituency through project activity and associated outreach and visits
2. Increased desire to contribute to or participate in cultural activity in city centre
3. Increased uptake of cultural offer through participation & visits
4. Increased
 - a) inspiration to carry out cultural activity autonomously
 - b) ability/confidence to carry out self-supported cultural activity as a group or individual
 - c) enjoyment of cultural offer and creative activity

Outcomes for Cultural Organisations

5. Increased understanding of constituency and residents

6. Creation of sustainable local/ organizational infrastructure to bridge the gap between city centre institution and constituency members
7. Increased enjoyment & creativity in working with constituency groups

Summary description of delivery

The four city centre cultural organisations were partnered with the priority constituencies as follows:

			
ERDINGTON Birmingham Central Library & Archives	HODGE HILL Birmingham Museum & Art Gallery	LADYWOOD Museum of the Jewellery Quarter	PERRY BARR Thinktank

Cultural Champions project delivery took place between 1 April 2010 and 31 March 2011. As a result of local government funding cuts, the initial activity outputs agreed in the Working Neighbourhood Fund bid of June 2009 were revised downwards in August 2010.

The delays caused by the renegotiation of the project funding targets delayed the start of project delivery until the autumn in Perry Barr, Ladywood and Hodge Hill, thus reducing the time available to build links with community partners and hard to reach groups.

Each cultural organisation employed a similar delivery model. The practitioner worked closely with constituency partners in order to engage residents and to raise the local level of cultural awareness and participation through facilitated sessions in local venues. The nature of the interventions varied according to the skills of the practitioner and the needs/motivations of the residents (see table 2).

After a number of sessions in the constituency, during which practitioners built trust and raised the profile of the Cultural Champion organisation, residents were invited to take part in facilitated sessions/visits at the city centre venue.

The quantity and depth of these visits to cultural venues varied: Ladywood residents toured 6 different organisations within the constituency/city centre, whereas Hodge Hill residents only visited BMAG once to take part in the sharing event at the end of the project.

For detailed information concerning delivery activity, see individual case studies.

Table 2: Activity in each constituency

City centre venue	Constituency	Constituency groups	Demographic	Activity
Birmingham Central Library & Archives (BCL&A)	Erdington	Rookery House Restoration Group & Castle Vale Library	All ages (white, C2DE)	Local history
		The Cube		Art & Archives
Birmingham Museum & Art Gallery (BMAG)	Hodge Hill	Your Birmingham	Young people (DE groups)	Film making
		In our Backyard	No data	Community arts
Museum of the Jewellery Quarter (MJQ)	Ladywood	Ladywood Community & Health Centre	40 yrs + (mental health, DE groups)	Silver-smithing & cultural visits

Thinktank	Perry Barr	Various community, youth and older people's groups	Young people; Older people (65+ yrs); C2DE	venue tours; collection handling sessions
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A PERSONAL JOURNEY - Ileisha Watson and MJQ

'I won't come with you to JW Evans. I don't like museums. I went to Soho House and it was all too much talking and not enough wandering.'

Ileisha was persuaded to visit MJQ despite her expectation that the *'staff would talk too much'* and it would *'be boring.'*

After her visit she said that the staff *'did talk a bit too much, but it wasn't too bad'*

She really liked the shop, but felt the items were a bit too expensive – she would have liked to buy some jewellery.

Ileisha was so pleased at what she had achieved that she asked to have a certificate when she finished. The practitioner had not expected that the participants would want one but Ileisha said: *'I've got stacks of certificates, I am used to working for certificates'*

Ileisha attended 8 of the 10 sessions and made a spoon which was exhibited in the MJQ gallery. She brought her children to the opening event to show them her work.

Outputs

Table 3: summary outputs	BCL&A	BMAG	MJQ	Thinktank	Target (Aug 2010)	TOTALS	Performance +/- revised target
No of sessions	26	97	15	36	119	174	+55
No of individual beneficiaries	401	616	37	2897	1240	3951	+2711
No of individual contacts	492	616	178	2897	-	4183	-
Exhibition	1	2	1	0	3	4	+1
Community/showcase events	1	5	1	1	6	8	+2
Publications	2				2	2	-1

Table 4: Participants & engagements

	Initial targets (Mar 2010)	Revised targets (Aug 2010)	ACTUAL totals	Performance +/- against revised target
BIRMINGHAM CENTRAL LIBRARY & ARCHIVES				
No of individual participants/beneficiaries	30	30	107	+77
No of individual contacts	250	200	198	-2
No of participants at public sessions	200	150	294	+144
BIRMINGHAM MUSEUM & ART GALLERY				
No of individual beneficiaries	620	620	616	-4
MUSEUM OF JEWELLERY QUARTER				
No of individual participants/beneficiaries	40	40	37	-3
No of individual contacts	-	-	178	+178
THINKTANK				

No of community membership visits and Community Open Weekend voucher entry	400	400	2107	+1707
No of people involved in creating new loans box	25	0	0	Not delivered
No of people involved in Birmingham Stories website	30	0	0	Not delivered

Table 5: Sessions, exhibitions and publications

	Initial targets (Mar 2010)	Revised targets (Aug 2010)	ACTUAL totals	Performance +/- against revised target
BIRMINGHAM CENTRAL LIBRARY & ARCHIVES				
No of sessions	25	20	26	+6
Exhibition	0	1	1	On target
Digital scrapbooks	3	2	2	On target
BIRMINGHAM MUSEUM & ART GALLERY				
No of sessions	70	70	97	+27
Contribution to other city events and priorities	4	4	2	-2
No of showcase events	2	2	3	+1
MUSEUM OF JEWELLERY QUARTER				
No of silversmithing workshops with Louise Cheshire	6	6	6	On target
No of sessions in city centre/cultural venues	6	6	7	+1
Deaf Awareness training for museum/library staff	2	2	2	On target
Exhibition of spoons made by participants	1	1	1	On target
THINKTANK				
Science & Heritage Career Ladder recruitment sessions	3	3	3	On target
Facilitated handling collection sessions	12	12	24	+12
Facilitation training sessions for handling collections	12	0	6	+6
Unfacilitated handling collection sessions	24	0	3	+3

Table 6: Proportion of participants by location and frequency of engagement

	BCL&A	BMAG	MJQ	Thinktank
% of sessions in constituency	65%	88%	46%	73%
% of sessions in city centre venue	35%	12%	54%	27%
% of new participants (engaged once only)	63%	26%*	22%	84%**
% of return participants (engaged more than once)	37%	74%*	78%	4%**
% of participants attending constituency-based sessions	51%	48%	46%	27%
% of participants attending sessions in city centre venue	49%	52%	54%	73%
*data relates to Your Birmingham activity only **does not include visitors to Community Open Day				

Table 7: Desire to engage with city centre cultural venues

	BCL&A ⁵	BMAG ⁶	MJQ	Thinktank ⁷
% of respondents who WOULD LIKE to visit	No data	71%	No data	47%
% of new participants (engaged once only)	63%	26%*	22%	84%**
% of return participants (engaged more than once)	37%	74%*	78%	14%**

Lessons learned

During 2010-2011, 3951 residents of the four priority constituencies participated in the Cultural Champions project. Proportionately, this represents 0.04% of the combined population of Erdington, Hodge Hill, Ladywood and Perry Barr.

Barriers & Bridges

'You need to be very persistent [to overcome barriers]... When I've made the right contact ... often they move on. I eventually found the right Ring a Ride manager, then he was transferred. [Then] ... I tried to get the Young Disciples involved but... their budget was under threat'

Bertram Yeboah, Cultural Champion, Thinktank

'The personal invitation'

'I was impressed by David [King]'s professionalism, which helped the project go well. His combination of skills in filmmaking and youth work and personal skills such as perseverance really paid off. The young people respected him.'

Phil Bodenham, youth worker in Firs & Bromford

The most effective tool for tackling the barriers to participation in museums and galleries appears to have been the practitioners themselves who worked to bridge the gap between cultural venue and constituency.

'Andy Green is a do-er. Lovely guy – nicest fella I've met in years. A gifted communicator, really got us thinking. I wish I'd had teachers as talented as him at school. We were blown away; he was fantastic.' Phil Mist, Chair of Rookery House Restoration Group

'I think that Ruth [Swallow] has learned a lot from this project ... She has been extremely sensitive to the needs of the group and has gently steered the project to meet their needs.' Victoria Emmanuel, Curator of MJQ

'Bertram [Yeboah] told us about it -- he is wonderful, we loved it when he came to our club.' member of Age Concern, Handsworth Wood

This direct and accessible contact was described by Julia Kingston, Thinktank's Head of Learning, as ***'like a personal invitation'***, a view endorsed by Graham Taylor from Ladywood Health & Community Centre who observed that ***'Service users know now that the places we visited are places they can return to on their own.'***

KEY KESSONS

- Recruit practitioners for their people skills as much as their knowledge and skills
- Ensure the participants' experience is as comfortable and familiar as possible

The time barrier

'Better to have done it in the summer as would have got more people involved',
participant in Your Birmingham, Firs & Bromford

In delivering the Cultural Champions activity, **lack of time** was a key barrier to progress in changing perceptions and increasing engagement:

'Trying to build links with the Polish community didn't succeed because an established link was not there at the outset, and the time period was not long enough to build up trust' Andy Green, BCL&A cultural practitioner, Erdington

KEY KESSONS

- Be flexible, focussed and have an exit strategy
- Work with constituency partners to create networks and speed progress
- Be aware that sometimes, there may never be enough time

Develop a local infrastructure - BCL&A

'We now feel we can talk with confidence and authority about the house to the Council, HLF and other potential funders. The process has been a catalyst for us to strengthen our Board ... [to] enable the group to successfully take on the house if the Council hand over the keys.'

Phil Mist, Chair of Rookery House Restoration Group, Erdington

Aware of the limited resources of BCL&A and building on his experience in delivering Connecting Histories, Andy Green, cultural practitioner, used his increased understanding of the constituency to build links locally and plan an exit strategy that would enable local interest groups to act autonomously.

The confidence engendered through Cultural Champions in participants has empowered the partner groups to work autonomously and plan ahead to develop a cultural activity of their own. Working with artists from the Cube to develop creative responses to the archive collections has captured people's imagination.

'People have visited the [BCL&A] archive searchroom as a result of seeing what we're doing at Cube. [We are] keener to work with the public on an archives project – people came in from the street during installation to help out.'

Heather Rowlands, artist, The Cube, Erdington

KEY LESSONS

- **Think ahead and develop an exit strategy**
- **Be responsive to the needs of the participants and accept when you are not needed**
- **Seek to empower whenever possible**

Enable or sustain? - BMAG

Both groups were able to offer their own interpretation on what Birmingham means to them. Because all of this was done on their territory rather than getting them to interact with the museum directly, this had greater effect on them as individuals – we were interested in their story rather than dictating what we felt the themes should be'

BMAG project coordinator⁸

BMAG's 2004 consultation⁹ with young people in Ladywood had revealed ***'that young people lacked understanding of the art and the advertising was felt to be unappealing to their age group... [and] the staff were not welcoming'***

Oliver Buckley, Interpretation & Audience Development Manager ***'jumped at the chance'*** to work with young residents, community partners and a series of creative practitioners to ***'learn a new working style... and change our ability to represent these communities'***.

'...Sustainability was not the top priority. David's methodology meant we could do something museums can rarely do: reach out to young people who hang around and are totally disengaged. Just to get them engaged in the community is a breakthrough.'

The young people who engaged with BMAG's Your Birmingham film-making activity had a decided sense of what they wanted. Reluctant to engage with anything that might be a short-term initiative, they challenged the practitioner and project coordinator to make sure that the experience would be mutually rewarding.

David King, the practitioner, worked at arm's length to the BMAG team. 95% of the Your Birmingham sessions were delivered in the constituency and 5% were delivered in BMAG, the city centre venue

By empowering the groups to drive their own activity, David found it a challenge to ***'balance BMAG's requirements with his own, and the participants' aspirations for the films'***.

KEY LESSONS

- Is it better to enable participants in the short term than engage over the long term?
- Does arm's length delivery enhance or disable bridge building between the commissioning cultural venue and the constituency?

MJQ – We, the constituency

'It's been a brilliant experience. We've got to go behind the scenes at places I'd never thought I'd go, let alone the service users. It's been eye opening; fascinating... Service users know now that the places we visited are places they can return to on their own.'

Graham Taylor, Creative Group Leader, NHS Birmingham Mental Health Services

According to Victoria Emmanuel, Curator of MJQ, the team deliberately worked in great depth with a small and vulnerable group because *'we wanted to give residents a holistic sense of Jewellery Quarter as a working/cultural area'*.

At the outset, according to Lana Finnegan, Community and Health Centre Manager, the participants *'would never go to these places without an organised trip and transport provided.'*

The project activity combined facilitated tours to other constituency venues, during which participants could safely take a passive role, with silversmithing workshops at the day centre, which was familiar and safe. Participants were taken to see their tutor's workshop, and had their spoons assayed and hallmarked

with MJQ's own registered stamp, all of which lent authenticity to their own creations.

At the participants' request, Victoria arranged for them to visit BMAG to see the Staffordshire Hoard, and arranged for them to have privileged access to it while it was in Conservation.

At the end of the project, the participants were transformed and highly motivated to explore the city centre cultural offer still further. Graham Taylor, Creative Group Leader, said *'it's been a brilliant experience. We've got to go behind the scenes at places I'd never thought I'd go, let alone the service users. It's been eye opening; fascinating.'*

'I can't believe they are displaying something made by me, an ordinary person. There are so many important people here.' Ladywood participant, during the private view of the exhibition at MJQ

Such an approach is highly labour- and cost-intensive, as Lana Finnegan acknowledged: *'We'd love to [do more work like this] but we're restricted... Anyone is welcome to come here and put things on as long as it doesn't cost the Centre anything.'* Yet such experience can spread across the service. Graham Taylor, Creative Group Leader for the Mental Health Services Partnership: *'I work in seven other centres and would be keen to export the work to these other settings.'*

Victoria Emmanuel said that *'Funding for such programmes has always been problem and is likely to become worse in the near future.'* However, where possible, she plans to *'build on our new relationships with the Centre and with BID and look for future ways of working together'*.

KEY LESSONS

- Build a strong relationship with the target group through repeated engagement
- Mix 'passive' engagements with active skills development to encourage the less confident
- Ensure the partner organisation learns the wider benefits of working in cultural venues
- Explore other models of joint working that might not be so cost-intensive

Thinktank - Raise the profile

'I thought it would be like Bertram brought in, lots of old things, not all the robots and computers.'
Grandmother from Handsworth, visiting during Community Open Weekend

Thinktank is the only Cultural Champion venue that charges for entry. Cost was cited as a barrier to participation by 71% of participants questioned. The team's key focus was to address constituents' perception of Thinktank and their concern that it was too expensive to warrant a visit.

Julia Kingston, Head of Learning at Thinktank, acknowledged that there is ***'a key perception that Thinktank is a 'children's museum' ... although there is a lot for both adults and children to do.'***

The community worker provided one-off handling workshops or tours to community groups under-represented in Thinktank's visitor demographic: Older people (65+ yrs) and Young People (15+ yrs). The intention was to provide potential audiences with an insight into the collections on display.

Additionally, in an attempt to overcome the economic barriers to entry, 400 community memberships were allocated to allow Perry Barr participants free entry to Thinktank during the project delivery period. Only 27% had been used by February 2011, suggesting that cost is not the only barrier.

The local knowledge garnered by concentrating on a single constituency enabled the Thinktank team to develop an appropriate offer for the Community Open Weekend, improving on the original, model, describe by Julia Kingston as a ***'blanket distribution of vouchers to all city residents.'***

'... Now [our community team] talk to specific groups in the target constituency and hand out Vouchers. ... The return of visitors is now greater even though we hand out less vouchers. It is like a personal invitation.'

0.036% of the constituency population engaged with Thinktank during the Cultural Champions activity, largely due to the uptake of free vouchers for the Community Open Weekend. This was the highest proportion of engagement by any of the Cultural Champions.

However, there is still a great deal of work to be done, even in drawing the key family audience. The final word goes to Ricky Dehaney of Prison Link who described the outcome of their visit to Thinktank:

'People enjoyed the activities a lot. It made them realise they're missing out on things. It was a new experience for a lot of people and there were a lot of positive comments... People realised that museums are places to take their kids [and] the children who went weren't keen on the idea of visiting a museum, but they enjoyed it and said they'd tell their friends. We were surprised by how much we enjoyed Thinktank, but didn't really feel it displays our history.'

KEY LESSONS

- Work strategically to establish a wide network of contacts and engagements
- Ensure the cultural offer is clear to the target audience
- Make it easy for people to participate by removing barriers

Conclusion

'Cultural organisations need more cultural competence. There's an unwritten perception that museums aren't for black people, that they are not part of our heritage... they're for middle class white people. They don't seem accessible for financial reasons and also because it's not our history on display.' Ricky Dehaney, Prison Link, after visit to Thinktank

Both groups were able to offer their own interpretation on what Birmingham means to them. Because all of this was done on their territory rather than getting them to interact with the museum directly, this had greater effect on them as individuals – we were interested in their story rather than dictating what we felt the themes should be' BMAG project coordinator¹⁰

As the above quotes suggest, there is still a long way to go in overcoming barriers to participation and building bridges between city centre cultural organisations and constituency residents.

On the one hand, non-audiences believe that their stories are not going to feature or that they do not have a part in the cultural offer, and thus do not participate.

On the other, in seeking to work with and represent disengaged groups, cultural organisations might find themselves redundant because they do not link the local activity and participants to the central cultural offer.

KEY LEARNING POINTS FROM THE CULTURAL CHAMPIONS ACTIVITY ARE

- **More than 9 months are needed to build a sustainable relationship with a disengaged group**
- **Develop a joint exit strategy that enables the partner group to sustain future activity**
- **Be responsive to the needs of the participants and accept when you are not needed**

KEY POINTS TO CONSIDER WHEN PLANNING FUTURE PROJECTS

- **Is it better to enable participants to achieve new experiences in the short term rather than engage in a deeper relationship over the long term?**
- **Does arm's length delivery enhance or disable bridge-building between the commissioning cultural venue and the constituency?**

ENDNOTES

¹ Constituency participation figures, p.62 *Barriers to Cultural Participation*, 2010. Source: Annual Opinion Survey, 2008 and 2009

² Birmingham and national participation figures, p.26 *Barriers to Cultural Participation*, 2010. Source: Active People Diagnostic, Sport England. Based on Active People Culture data collected April 2008 - April 2009.

³ Hereafter *Barriers to Cultural Participation*, 2010

⁴ WNF Cultural Champions proposal, Jun 2009

⁵ Data from session questionnaires and in-depth interviews with a sample of visitors to Archive searchroom.

⁶ Data from in-depth interviews with 15 participants, Your Birmingham film-making workshops, Autumn 2010.

⁷ Data from session questionnaires and in-depth interviews with a sample of visitors to Community Open Weekend (12 Feb 2011). (15 events evaluated, 329 participants interviewed).

⁸ Cited in 'Evaluation of Your Birmingham for HLF', Sally Fort, Feb 2011

⁹ Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery Non-Visitor Research, 2004, BMAG

¹⁰ Cited in 'Evaluation of Your Birmingham for HLF', Sally Fort, Feb 2011