

# 'I didn't know I could'



## Museums and young people looked after

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and  
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## 'I didn't know I could'

(The MaCLA report)

This report covers museum-based activities organised for children and young people looked after, which took place during 2010 under the aegis of Renaissance East of England's Museum Hub. These activities came to be known as the 'MaCLA' programme (referring to Museums and Children Looked After).

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Local Level is a community development and social inclusion consultancy. For more information please see [www.Local-Level.org.uk](http://www.Local-Level.org.uk).

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Front page photo: Summer Challenge, Norwich Castle

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# 1 Introduction

It may seem fairly innovative for museums to be involved in targeted work with specific groups of people who experience exclusion. But it has been argued that museums have always been institutions of social service (Silverman, 2010). In the past few years, some museums have been developing expertise and replicable experience in working with young people who are looked after, and the momentum behind their work is beginning to gather. We are witnessing the early stages of a movement that offers significant potential benefits to the young people, their families, carers, teachers and social workers.

## Museums and young people looked after

This report describes the impact of museum-based activities for children and young people who are looked after by the state. In this section we offer some introductory remarks on the category of the participants in the activities, and on the museum context.

### 'We're like objects': young people looked after

'The idea of being a 'looked after child' did not fully strike me until I began to see less of my family, attend more meetings with a varied amount of professionals who seemed to know a lot more about me and my circumstances than I knew about them. I felt as though I was the 'odd one out' everywhere I went.' (Ofsted 2011, p4)

The term 'young people looked after' has a specific legal meaning. It refers to children and young people whose welfare is legally the responsibility of a local authority. Usually this means they are looked after in a residential care home or in foster care; but a child subject to a care order, even if living with their parents or extended family, is also defined as 'looked after'. Young people who are in young offender institutions, prisons and secure units are not necessarily looked after in the legal definition.<sup>1</sup>

The Museums and Children Looked After Project (MaCLA) worked with a range of children and young people aged between seven and seventeen. Some of these participants were in

- There were 64,400 looked after young people [in England] as at 31 March 2010, an increase of 6% from 2009 and an increase of 7% since 2006.

<sup>1</sup> For further information see DfE (2011), p9-11.

foster care and some in care homes. A few were asylum seekers and their welfare was the responsibility of the state; and a few were care leavers, meaning that they were in supported transition to independent living.

As with any project that sets out to confront some aspect of social exclusion, this programme of activities requires us to reflect on issues of categorisation. Are there dangers in labelling a single category of young people as 'looked after'? We have to remain alert to the possibility that in focusing on this group, we might imply or exaggerate greater differences than exist between them and children in the wider population; and/or we might overlook significant differences within the category.

Thus in the activities described in this report we observed boisterous disruptive behaviour which could have been attributed to any group of young people in many kinds of society across history.

But at the same time, we note that, for example, more than two-thirds of children living in residential care are described as 'having a mental disorder', compared with 39 per cent of those placed with foster carers (Meltzer et al 2003). It is true that young people looked after speak about a sense of difference, and can fairly be described as a vulnerable category: but this is not a homogeneous population.

Mental health exemplifies the complexity of the issues in question here, because of the difficulties in disentangling causes, effects, outputs and outcomes in any intervention. This makes it hard for services to identify appropriate measures with confidence, and indeed there could be cases where care provision compounds difficulties:

'Although such problems may exist because of children's experiences prior to entering care, there is emerging evidence that the care system also creates ongoing disadvantage to children in a variety of areas, including educational underachievement.' (Cocker and Scott, 2006, p22)

Ofsted's recent review of the experience of 'having corporate parents' includes powerful accounts from young people themselves. Being a young

- Of these, 73% were in foster placements, 4% were placed for adoption, 6% were placed with parents, 4% were placed in the community, 10% were placed in secure units, young people's homes and hostels, 2% were in other residential settings and 2% were in residential schools.
- Of all young people who started to be looked after in the year ending 31 March 2010, 61% first engaged with social services because of abuse or neglect, 12% because of family dysfunction, 9% because of family in acute stress, 8% because of absent parenting, 4% because of parents' illness or disability, 3% because of child's disability and 2% because of socially unacceptable behaviour.
- 3,200 looked after young people were adopted during the year ending 31 March 2010. This represents a 4% decrease from the previous year's figure of 3,300 and a 14% decrease from the 2006 figure of 3,700. (DfE 2010)

- Among young people, aged 5–17 years, looked after by local authorities, 45% were assessed as having a mental disorder: 37% had clinically significant conduct disorders; 12% were assessed as having emotional disorders – anxiety and depression – and 7% were rated as hyperactive. (Meltzer et al 2003)

person in care implies a profound experience of disruption at a sensitive time of life, when identity is still very much in formation. Often the experience of going into care is repeated a bewildering number of times. One young person describes the disorientation of living in 38 different places. Another noted:

'I've been moved loads of times. I have settled down now after three years. There is no good thing about moving. It affected me. I couldn't think straight. We're like objects.' (Ofsted 2011, p22)

### Museums: what goes on in there?

Museums offer a form of sheltered public space which may be occupied privately or in congregation, with no obligation to pay attention to the surroundings. In that sense they meet the need to be 'private in a public place' (Greenhalgh and Worpole, 1995). They are usually places that readily accommodate people of all generations. In most cases they exude a welcoming, non-interfering ethos.

'Fundamentally, museums offer interactive social experiences of communication in which relationships are activated and people make meaning of objects. This communication yields beneficial consequences: people may meet fundamental human needs like the need for self-esteem and self-actualization; achieve change in essential areas such as knowledge, skills, values, and behaviour; build and strengthen social connections and relationships, including social capital; address social problems; and promote social justice and equality.' (Silverman 2010, p21)

Museums are crucial sites of cultural reproduction: they play a central role in

'the re-creation and reproduction of history, memory, and culture, in the search for identity and understanding of the other.' (Van Den Bosch 2007, p507)

This makes them potentially all the more formidable, and all the more excluding, for those who do not find it easy to access society's dominant culture. Museums are also institutional spaces, sometimes displaying a carefully-constructed municipal gravitas which, it might be argued, is designed to pacify and subject the citizen to a respectful sense of cultural stability or even impregnability. Equally, it could be argued that civic institutional spaces provide positive reassurance to the visitor about notions of public ownership and a sense that such spaces belong to all citizens. We suggest, further, that it is in the interests of those museums that are not maintained by the state to offer the same sense of reassuring 'publicness'.

Learning these interpretations is part of the learned practice of citizenship. Many young people who are looked after may not feel secure in their citizenship, and it's fair to say that their relationship to the state is therefore unequal. Museum activities for these young people are partly about helping to bring that relationship into equilibrium.

Museum spaces require adherence to certain unwritten behavioural codes, such as respect for the space of other visiting strangers, which may not be apparent to some young people. Learning these codes is another way of acquiring cultural capital, and for young people looked after, that value is not trivial. Once understood, this cultural capital can be reinvested in numerous other contexts – institutional or public space contexts - and the benefits reaped.<sup>2</sup>

This is not to imply that there is necessarily a stark contrast between the experience of being in care, and the values embodied in museums. Many of the young people we spoke to had previously visited the museum where we met them, and/or had visited others. And care homes for example, as one correspondent put it in Ofsted's recent review, can provide recognisable cultural understanding:

'It teaches you how to share with others and learn more about different cultures and religions.' (Ofsted 2011, p30)

Museums have an obvious role to play in stimulating curiosity, and prompting coincidental and serendipitous learning – learning which is coincidental, not imposed nor necessarily experienced in schools and colleges.

Museums represent the notion of collecting and keeping things, and sometimes this can be quite poignant. It has been important for cultures across history that objects and experiences that disturb, as well as those that comfort, have been collected and displayed. For young people looked after, this enormous power needs to be handled sensitively:

'For some of these individuals the idea of collections and collecting is quite alien and difficult, because of the transient and chaotic lives that they themselves have led in the recent past.'<sup>3</sup>

## The policy and practice context

The policy context for museums working with children and young people looked after was fluid and uncertain even before the 2010 change of government. Local policy and practice in particular is now subject to severe funding constraints which induce uncertainty and, among other things, accentuate the problems of lack of continuity of staff. In this section we make reference to some key examples where practice takes up

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<sup>2</sup> The term 'cultural capital' is widely used and seldom defined. We adopt a broad understanding of cultural capital, using the term to refer to the value (to the individual) of knowledge associated with influential forms of culture. This capital can be identified in forms of language, behaviour, knowledge, and knowledge claims. In our view, cultural capital reflects more than education. It is institutionalised in other sectors, and in the public realm generally (consider uses of public transport for instance). Its effects can be revealed in the ways in which people discover commonalities (of background and class, for instance) through references such as language, diction, dress, media consumption, use of public space and so on.

<sup>3</sup> Katrina Siliprandi, Head of Learning, Norfolk Archaeology and Museums Service, personal communication, 2010.

on policy directions (especially to do with social exclusion and educational attainment) and offer a note on the economic context.

## Policy context

The last government's Every child matters (H. M. Treasury, 2003) programme of outcomes for children and young people, introduced with a green paper in 2003 and begun in 2004, continues to provide the framework in which policy and practice are expected to match.<sup>4</sup> Its five main outcomes remain embedded in our evaluation framework.

In guidance published in 2005, the then DfES called for authorities to focus in particular on:

'a greater range of placement options for looked after children and young people; fewer out-of-authority placements; and more personalised support and better access to activities and opportunities.' (DfES 2005a; emphasis added)

Again, in March 2010 the government published statutory guidance for local authorities on promoting the educational achievement of looked-after children (DCSF 2010). The section on 'Supporting educational achievement and aspirations' includes, buried away at section 47.10,

'ensuring that social workers, carers and, where appropriate, parents actively promote opportunities for looked after children to participate in high quality learning experiences, including out of school hours learning activities, from their early years.'

The government's Care matters white paper (DfES 2007) similarly expresses determination to ensure:

'that young people at risk of poor outcomes, including children in care, significantly benefit from increased opportunities to take part in positive activities.'

Existing public service agreements (PSAs) established by the last government retain some shadowy influence over practice. In 2007, PSA 11 was published, the target being to 'narrow the gap in educational achievement between children from low income and disadvantaged backgrounds and their peers' (H. M. Treasury 2007). Although there is no mention of formal cultural services, the section on children in care includes the government commitment to:

'transform the availability of positive activities, including free part time access to extended activities, free music tuition in schools and priority status within Local Authority youth work.' (para 3.9)

Similarly, in 2009 the government introduced a statutory requirement for schools to allocate designated teachers to children looked after, working with personal education plans (PEPs) which are expected to take account of -

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<sup>4</sup> We note however that the Every child matters website, where a considerable bank of resources had been collected, has been taken down. At the time of writing (February 2011), it was the subject of a succession of false links.

'participation in the wider activities of the school and other out of school learning activities (e.g. sporting, personal development, community).'  
(DCSF 2009)

It is worth noting that PEPs are specific to children looked after, they are not intended for other children, and thus become part of the defining 'baggage' that goes with being looked after.

Also in 2009, a report by the Centre for Excellence and Outcomes in Children and Young People's Services claimed that

'There is growing evidence that new initiatives such as virtual school<sup>5</sup> heads (VSHs), personal education plans (PEPs) and designated teachers are having a positive effect on the experiences of looked-after children and young people.' (Brodie and Morris 2009, p1)

One theme on which considerable advances have been made is public sector participation, with various frameworks and standards having been developed in recent years. We understand for example that Colchester and Ipswich Museums use the 'Hear by Right' framework developed by the National Youth Agency.<sup>6</sup>

These policy developments all suggest a worthy sense of aspiration in policy language, without a great deal of follow-through from policy to practice, that would give momentum to museum-based activities. As far as we can discover, from the child care and education sectors there have been few if any approaches to use museum learning programmes in pursuit of positive outcomes for children and young people looked after.

### Evaluation of practice

Some initiatives have been developed by the cultural sector, however, among them the following:

- Image and identity project involving in particular Manchester Art Gallery and the Victoria and Albert Museum. This scheme was reported in The value of museums second study which concluded in respect of looked after children that:

'The project participants, many of whom felt themselves to be at the margins of society, gained from meeting positive adults and from being involved in museums, which have a high standing and a central position in society. The opportunity for quiet reflection away from stressful lives was judged to be valuable by the museum staff.' (Hooper-Greenhill et al 2007, para 5.5.4.3)

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<sup>5</sup> A virtual school seeks to raise attainment by supporting and challenging the educational provision for children looked after, and works in a partnership of teachers, parents, carers and social services. See definitions for example at [http://www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/education/parents/public\\_care/](http://www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/education/parents/public_care/) and <http://www.bristol-cyps.org.uk/schools/virtual-school.html>.

<sup>6</sup> 'The Hear by Right participation standards framework can be used by museums and galleries to map the current level of youth participation and develop a strategic plan for improvement to ensure the participation of young people becomes embedded in service delivery.'  
[http://hbr.nya.org.uk/news/equipping\\_team\\_involving\\_young\\_people\\_museums](http://hbr.nya.org.uk/news/equipping_team_involving_young_people_museums).

- The Imagined lives project, working with children looked after and archives, was developed in East Sussex in 2006-07 to help children looked after 'to gain an insight into archival materials and to explore what life was like for looked-after children in the past'. (MLA undated b)
- The NMAS 2008 report (an internal paper not an independent evaluation) provides concise coverage of the range of issues that initiatives of this kind have to take into account (NMAS 2008).
- Colchester's 'F.A.T Heritage Project' in 2006 was a combined museums scheme in Essex to produce digital artworks based on heritage materials; it was deemed to have had a positive effect on all those who took part in it, both adults and children alike (F.A.T undated).
- Griffiths and colleagues (2006) assessed the impact of the Paul Hamlyn Foundation's Right to Read Fund, which worked with library authorities, child care agencies and schools to stimulate reading among children looked after and their carers. Their report suggests significant effects from the 45 projects involved, with almost all 'having helped young people view themselves with confidence as readers.'

Much of the policy context for children looked after places an emphasis on partnerships. It is important to keep in mind that children's services already operate in a world of complex multi-agency partnerships. Generally this includes open recognition that an agency playing a small part can have a significant impact on a child's life. This suggests that promoting the potential contribution of museums would not be unwelcome if the benefits that they offer are clearly apparent.

Apart from special activities designed for or including children and young people looked after, the cultural sector has sought to encourage visiting and use of venues through Max Card Schemes for young people looked after, which allow free entry to museums among other leisure sites (such as swimming pools). These schemes now appear to be widespread although we have found no national level evaluation, which would be valuable if it were able to differentiate venues used. A report from South Tyneside published in 2006 suggested that some 47% of respondents use their Max card once per week or more (South Tyneside Council 2006).

### The economic context

Notoriously, public sector finances in 2011 are under particular stress. The principle of cost reduction dominates most policy and much practice, and for this reason it makes sense to try to appreciate the economic context in which museums are seeking to bring about outcomes for children and young people looked after.

In 2005 it was reported that the average weekly cost of a child in local authority foster care was £349, and £2,048 for children in residential homes. It was noted that:

'a significant proportion of resources was being used to fund high cost placements (between £500 and £5,000 per week): 20% of looked after children are in such placements, accounting for 46% of looked after children costs.' (DfES 2005a)

It's inevitable that pressures to reduce these costs will intensify. Most of this pressure will come, almost mechanically, in the form of reductions in what is available, rather than looking to accumulate value from resources like museums that might be under-exploited. There is a need to ensure that museum-based initiatives are given validity in this climate. There is growing appetite within policy for approaches that quantify the social return on investment. In the present report we make suggestions as to how the business case might be advanced, and there is already work to draw on. In particular, the Cost calculator for children's services, a project developed by the Centre for Child and Family Research at Loughborough University, has noted:

'When looked after children are excluded from school, for instance, there may be a reduced cost to education but possibly an increased cost to youth justice and to social care if the consequences are greater opportunities for offending and a disrupted placement. The overall objective is to develop the CCfCS to incorporate unit costs for all services that children receive within specific time frames. These will include the unit costs of social care, education, health, mental health, socio-legal and youth justice processes so that eventually it will be possible to calculate the true costs to the public purse of providing services to children with extensive needs and to explore how these might be better configured to improve outcomes.' (CCFR 2009)

To sum up, this brief review suggests that policy statements concerning cultural activities and opportunities for children and young people looked after, while supportive, are largely aspirational. Notwithstanding the economic context however, they do suggest that there is fertile ground for the kind of systematic evidence we are seeking. Our intention in this study has been to try to add to the qualitative evidence and to show how the business case might be made.

## 2 Summary and recommendations

This report is an independent evaluation of museum-based activities with children and young people who are looked after. The activities took place in and around museums in the East of England in 2010-2011.

The activities combined the creative use of cultural resources with appropriate understanding of the needs of young people who either experience exclusion or are at risk of being excluded from many social and economic opportunities and benefits. The work is empowering because it targets young people's options for empowering themselves.

The study found that:

- the young people gained consistent benefits in terms of confidence, self-knowledge and identity; social skills; cultural capital; and learning
- museum-based activities with young people looked after appear to produce beneficial outcomes reliably and sustainably
- the kinds of benefit identified can probably be accessed for considerably less than £30 per young person per hour
- the costs are such that these activities represent value for money compared with other opportunities available
- the activities are low risk and inexpensive; not addressing the young people's needs is high risk and expensive
- there is potential to sharpen the focus on individual needs, and to improve outcomes through better communication and following up on the experiences. The benefits can be sustained within existing formal and informal care programmes
- there is also potential to involve young people themselves in the design and organisation of activities.

The report provides support for an emerging movement of museum-based activities that contribute direct and consistent benefits to young people looked after.

Pioneers in this field have shown that what has been tried is realistic, with positive outcomes consistently and inexpensively achieved.

Museum practitioners should put energy into the systematic dissemination of experience; sharing ideas, lessons and resources; engaging child care professionals strategically; and explaining the benefits to policy makers.



# 3

## The project activities and methodology

### The project activities

The initiatives we describe in this report were organised under the Renaissance East of England Museum Hub's programme for 2010-11 and run by Norfolk Museums and Archaeology Service; Colchester and Ipswich Museum Service; The Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge; and Luton Culture museums. They had three features in common:

- they involved children or young people who are looked after;
- they were based in museums (although several initiatives involved extra-mural visits);
- and they involved some kind of activity (usually both group and individual activity).

A summary of the basic details of the activities that were observed is shown in Table 2 (see page 57). The activities varied in number of sessions and duration, from a single to fifteen sessions and from 90 minutes to five and a half hours. The age range was 7-17 years. The numbers attending ranged from just one person at the first Campaign session in Luton (subsequently a consistently well-attended programme) to 19 at the Norwich Castle Summer Challenge. We attended 10 out of a total of 45 sessions.

Several of the activities involved volunteers. At the Norwich Castle Summer Challenge, volunteers outnumbered paid staff by three to one, enabling the programme to work with a 1:1 ratio of children to supervisory staff.

All the initiatives recruited specialists to deliver parts of the programme. These included drama and poetry amateurs, photographers, video producers and so on.

Partnerships with other agencies were fundamental to all the initiatives, and the range of partners is noteworthy: a family centre, schools and virtual schools, social services, educational and youth support teams.

Most of the initiatives made productive use of museum resources, expertise and space. At Gressenhall Farm and Workhouse for example, exhibits helped the young people to visualise life in a 19<sup>th</sup> century workhouse and from that to reflect on issues of exclusion. In Luton, participants used objects and campaign materials from the museum's handling collections to learn about campaigning.

The total number of participants in these activities was 63: when there was more than one session, almost all of them were attended consistently. During Luton's Campaign project, two sessions were joined unofficially by two additional participants who were not looked after.

There are two additional details to be noted in this summary of the activities. First, the project established by Colchester and Ipswich Museums involved work with a group of male asylum seekers (those we met were from Afghanistan and Eritrea) who by definition and legally are young people looked after. The men live in a 20-room house. It could be argued that they have more issues than other young people who are looked after: in particular, having no family, and weak English language skills.

Secondly, in Luton, in addition to the two programmes described, museum staff also ran a workplace experience day, giving young people some knowledge of jobs in the museum sector (and also, of course, giving insight into the experience of being employed).

## Methodology

In this section we offer a brief description of the methods used to collect material, with a view to clarifying the main body of our report without detaining the reader at this point. A more detailed discussion of our methodology is provided in Appendix A. This includes the issues of:

- the protocol when working with vulnerable children and young people;
- the necessarily creative and fluid nature of the activities;
- and the problem that the researcher is 'Yet Another Person' whose presence and interest may accentuate the young person's sense of difference.

Our methodology, necessarily, was varied. Numbers of participants were too low to make quantitative data meaningful. There were also limits to the extent to which it was realistic to collect qualitative material systematically: it can be completely counter-productive to formalise interactions with young people if you are not known to them. The evaluation process had to be both opportunistic and responsive.

The bulk of our material comes from telephone interviews with carers, social workers and museum staff; and from conversations with children and young people, staff and volunteers during observation of sessions. We developed a framework of questions, designed to cover the issues we needed to understand. This framework is reproduced as Table 3 (see page 58). It formed the basis of our telephone interviews and impromptu conversations, and was used for email feedback from staff. It also formed the basis of a questionnaire for participants at the Norwich Castle Summer Challenge and group discussions with children from the Unthank Family Centre in Norwich.

In some cases we also had access to evaluation material collected by the projects themselves, for example questionnaire sheets completed by young people from the summer challenge, and recorded conversations with participants at Gressenhall.

The research material was collated and analysed in response to the following lines of enquiry:

- what outcomes there are for young people involved in these activities
- what outcomes there are for the museums and partner agencies
- how any outcomes continue in the months immediately after the end of the project
- how these activities contribute to Every child matters objectives
- the museum-specific factors which influence outcomes for looked after children
- how museum-led activities complement activities for looked after children in other settings.

In practice, it proved unrealistic to try to isolate material in response to the last two of these questions.

Finally, in January 2011 we ran a 'playback' workshop with a group of museum staff, partner agency staff, young care leavers and others, in Cambridge. The meeting was an evaluation session designed for us to summarise what we thought we had learned in the project, and seek refinement of those findings from the expertise gathered.

We should point out that the sum of the experience and material from which we draw our conclusions and make recommendations is wider than the activities described here: we have been able to draw on previous experience, some of it pioneering, at the Fitzwilliam Museum, Colchester and Ipswich, and in Norfolk.



# 4

## Outcomes

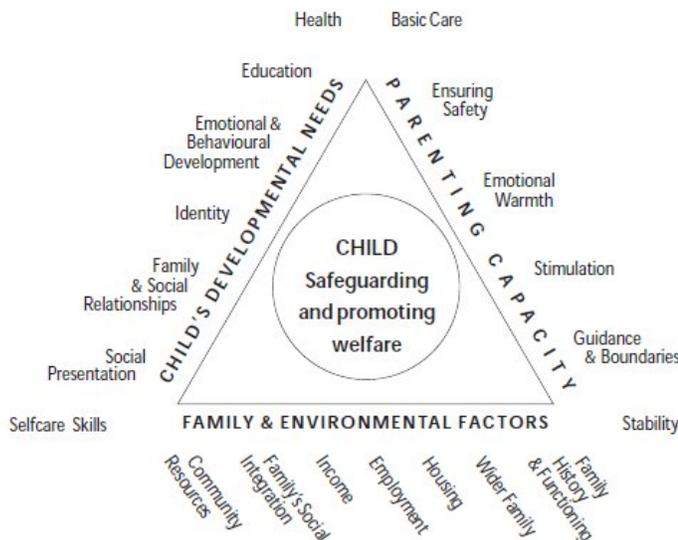
### Introduction

It helps to ground our discussion of outcomes in some observations about needs. This is not to suggest that only those outcomes which reflect identified needs are worthy of consideration: as will be seen, we have taken care not to 'retro-fit' our findings into any specific framework. But we consider it important to appreciate the work that is being done by museums within the professional context occupied by carers and social workers.

It has recently been claimed that there is a lack of 'a coherent conceptual framework that enables reflection on the child, the systems the child engages with and the total ecology within which they are embedded' (Coman and Devaney, 2011, p47). Nonetheless there are useful frameworks, such as the objectives of Every child matters and the Department of Health's Framework for the assessment of children in need and their families, that can help us locate and relate those aspects of the child's needs where museum-based activities can be expected to contribute. The DoH framework covers three fields:

- the developmental needs of children;
- the capacities of parents or caregivers to respond appropriately to those needs;
- the impact of wider family and environmental factors on parenting capacity and children. (DoH, 2000)

This is summarised in the following diagram:



As an example of the ways in which museum programmes could feed into such an approach, we note that 'Family and Social Relationships' includes:

'Development of empathy and the capacity to place self in someone else's shoes.' (DoH 2000, p19)

Several of the initiatives we witnessed, such as the drama exercises based on 19<sup>th</sup> century workhouse life at Gressenhall, were very clearly helping the participants to do just this. Similarly, it is hardly contentious to observe that museum-based activities can directly help young people's

'growing understanding of the way in which appearance, behaviour, and any impairment are perceived by the outside world and the impression being created.' (DoH 2000, p19)

In this section of the report we present our findings on the outcomes for the participants, organised under four headings which we believe reflect the most significant aspects of our material. We then go on to discuss these findings in relation to two important frameworks: the Every child matters outcomes, which frame child care work; and the Generic learning outcomes (MLA, undated a), which guide initiatives in the cultural sector.

Two preliminary remarks are in order here. First, we are talking about human beings at a complex stage of development, often facing a bombardment of challenges. They interacted with museum staff and volunteers for a tiny fraction of their waking lives and with the researchers for even less.

We asked participants in our playback workshop what it was about museums in general that represented something of value to young people looked after, and the responses are summarised alongside. The diversity of perceived potential benefit is striking.

So it is worth stressing that there is no single or dominant benefit, and none is necessarily easy to isolate from the others. For instance, in some cases the stability of a young person's placement with a given carer might be a desirable (and obviously measureable) consequence of museum-based activities: but it is subject to numerous influences which may be hard to distinguish.

#### Perceived benefits

- Skills: analytical, life, social skills, tolerance
- Group forming and interaction, and sharing life experiences
- Being in learning environment outside school
- Introducing wonder and magic
- A place for a shared focus
- Provides something extra for those who miss consistent schooling
- A neutral safe space
- Meeting other people, friends
- Being valued
- Having a stake in the community
- Confidence and self-esteem
- Peer mentoring and foster carer support can develop
- The learning environment can impact learning ability, and behaviour
- The idea of 'corporate parenting'
- Activities provide steps on the way
- Learning about alternative cultures

The only way to make sense of the impact of the museum activities is to try to see them in the broadest possible ecological context: what we focus on as outcomes reflects the interplay of multiple factors, and not a single factor with a clear direction of causality (Coman and Devaney 2011, p50).

Secondly, outcomes for young people or for museums can be either crystal-clear or very fuzzy, and they can be either temporary or highly-durable. They can be evident at one point in time (e.g. increased self-esteem) and then obliterated by events (e.g. problematic parental contact) at another. Even if a follow up event is organised, there is no guarantee that the young person will attend. The sustainability of the outcomes will obviously be of interest to all concerned, but cannot be clarified with any degree of certainty until in-depth longitudinal research, backed by child care expertise, has been undertaken and reported.

## 4.1 Confidence, self-knowledge and identity

The experience of being in care – quite apart from the circumstances which may have provoked the need to be taken into care in the first place – can erode an individual's confidence and self-esteem profoundly. Even with the most dedicated and professional support from carers, some young people need every opportunity that can be contrived to bolster their readiness to engage with others.

'What no one else seems to realise is that it is not the fact that we continuously have to ask for these things when moving from home to home, but the fact that we have to spend ten, twenty minutes building up the courage to ask where the plates or ketchup are.' (Young person cited in Ofsted 2011, p8)

Questions of confidence were discussed with more frequency than any other factor by professionals and volunteers working with the young people; and self-confidence was consistently cited by the participants themselves as the most obvious benefit that they gained.

### Confidence breeds confidence

Much of the evidence comes from individuals' before-and-after perceptions. For example, at the Norwich Castle sessions organised with the Unthank Centre, we asked 7-11 year olds how they felt about themselves before they came to the museum sessions. Responses included:

'Scerd + frittind'

'Befor we came I felt sceard'

'(shy)'

'I felt worried'

When we asked how they felt about themselves afterwards, all the children said either 'great', 'happy' or, in one case, 'fantactik'.

Such confirmation of positive experience was offered from all quarters. After the sessions at Gressenhall, the eight participants were invited by museum staff to offer a score (out of 10) for their level of confidence on the first morning and at a point before their drama performance on day four. In one case these questions were marked 1 for before and 10 for after – a perceived tenfold increase in confidence. Others were: 6-10, 5-9, 6-10, 3-8, 6-9 and 8-10. The last response was 5 – 1,000,000, in other words this young man was claiming a 200,000-fold increase in his self-confidence. Only a few days previously he had moved from a residential home to stay with a carer for the first time: the experience at the museum for four days was described by his social worker as being 'in the midst of chaos'.

However unsystematic or even trivial such material may seem, taken together with our other findings, it points clearly to consistent benefits from participation in these projects, celebrated by the young people themselves.

Two questions arise: what can the young people do with this new-found confidence? And is it sustained? These questions are intertwined, because confidence breeds confidence. One respondent said simply:

'We're all working as a team and we all just get on. I feel more confident about performing.' (Participant before drama performance)

'I feel much more comfortable with other people now.' (Young person, evaluation form)

The experience can here be seen as an injection of 'identity capital,' which we discuss below. Barring a huge setback, this investment could reap consistent dividends for this individual in the future.

New-found confidence is more likely to be sustained if the young person is aware of it, as in this case:

'My confidence is not that good after all the things that have been happening in my life... I can see that I can just do it, but I don't show it... and don't put the effort to it. But now I'm doing it and I enjoy it.' (Young person, interview)

The comments we received from carers and social workers contribute a little more depth. One young person, according to his carer, went to the museum on a Saturday with his volunteer visitor, and

'knowing more and showing off his knowledge was a big plus.' (Carer, interview)

There is evidence that such benefits are likely to be sustained. One carer answered:

'In terms of self-esteem, yes, her starring role has an ongoing effect, and she talks about it a lot.' (Carer, interview)

Another said:

'He is a lot calmer, in himself, and is putting himself forward.' (Carer, interview)

A girl who had also participated in several days of museum-based sessions was described by her carer in an email:

'Since her time at the museum she is more confident to try new experiences and meet new people. Her concentration span has improved as well. She now likes to try new things and because she is more confident in herself she likes to help others try new things.' (Carer, email)

Other comments we received included the following:

'It has given her more confidence to join in the activity (instead of waiting for a helper to tell her what to do). Answer questions more freely instead of just standing there. She is now able to put some of her ideas into her work - although at a very low level.' (Carer, email)

'The school have noticed a great difference, especially in the confidence area.' (Carer, email)

The above three reflections were offered some months after the activities and they certainly suggest that confidence had been retained and built on.

Similarly, one of the participants at Gressenhall who had been under the eyes of social workers since birth, still appeared transformed as a person several weeks after the activities:

'she still talks about it even today when in an interview at school about moving her to another school to escape the attentions of certain peers.'  
(Social worker, interview)

Museum-based activities often involve a tangible product which the participants can take away, and we should not under-estimate the value of this in terms of sustaining the benefits, especially for young people for whom attachment to objects ('belongings') can make them vulnerable. Thus one carer told how one young man was boosted by having taken part in producing a film:

'he has shown this to friends and family and shows confidence as a result.'  
(Carer, interview)

Asylum seekers at the Ipswich photography project had their images (a 'memory book') to take back with them - wherever 'back' means in this context. Young people at the Fitzwilliam and Scott Polar Museums made ceramics and took away plates that they had painted. One subsequent email told us that two boys returned, that evening,

'in to their foster homes with plate concealed under their coats as they were Christmas presents for the carers. 'B' had in fact made two plates so that he could give "one to my foster mum and one to my real mum".'  
(Education support staff, email)

Enhanced self-esteem contributes to self-knowledge, with young people beginning to understand themselves in relation to others. We were offered numerous little examples where participants felt confident to acknowledge their own deliberate behaviour toward others. For example:

'I have been nice to people'. (Young person, evaluation form)

These effects begin to have value in the context of identity, which we discuss next; and interaction with others, which we discuss in section 4.2 below.

'He has not lost the confidence that he gained while attending the week's experience, if anything this has grown further. He now takes a lot more in his stride and has become quite cocky (in a nice way). He also sees things from others' point of view more. His understanding of how things can go on without him actually has improved. He has also gained some understanding of the fact that lots of people can do different things which compliment each other when put together.' (Carer, interview)

## Identity and difference

It is important to reflect on the extent to which young people are supported in the tricky, essential business of investing in who they are (this has been described in terms of 'identity capital': see Coté 1996, p424-427). Those who are looked after may be significantly vulnerable in this respect, often having limited access to the resources needed for image consumption (fashion, movie-going, etc) and hence the cultural capital that goes with it.

But the activities we have witnessed – especially the 'Image and identity' project in Luton - have revealed how this can happen. One young woman knew exactly what she was getting from the experience:

'It's given me confidence, expressing myself. It's helped me describe myself... Yes, I'm confident that I'll keep the confidence. And I like to meet different people, it's easy to come here, not a threatening environment.'  
(Young person, interview)

Again, in a very straightforward way, one young man explained his participation in the project partly in the following terms:

'It's something for my c.v., I want to be able to get a job.'  
(Young person, interview)

This does not mean that his participation reflected raw selfish pragmatism; rather it illustrates how a museum project can help young people in various ways at given points in their lives. Asked about previous experience that had made a difference to his sense of self-esteem and identity, he cited passing his driving test and 'results at school': measures that matter, in his case.

As we have noted, the sense of difference experienced by young people looked after is largely unrecognised and sometimes keenly felt. Observing sessions we witnessed several moments where young people moved into a new space of engagement with these others who had similar experiences.

Several carers and social workers noted how important and valuable this was, most tellingly for the carer of one boy with whom 'involvement only occurs if he wants to, otherwise he blanks you'. When we asked did she think he had developed any skills, she included:

- 'It's important to talk to others in care, that helps to normalise their situation.'  
(Carer, interview)
- 'They benefited from the fact that as they were all looked after there was no stigma attached to them.'  
(Carer, interview)

'an understanding of not being alone as a young person looked after.'  
(Carer, interview)

There were also individual examples of how participation in the activities helped young people to feel 'special' – for example

'as an 11 year-old to have been somewhere behind the scenes that people she knows hadn't been to'. (Carer, interview)

This is a potential example of cultural capital that the young person has been able to acquire: the experience has value for her in terms of esteem among others.

## 4.2 Social skills: teamwork, association and interaction

'Inclusion has never happened to him before.' (Carer, interview)

This study is about what happens when a category of humans meets a set of cultural resources. On the one hand, we have the museum experience, with all that it can offer. Lois Silverman (2010, p15) asserts that the museum experience by definition 'constitutes relationships and interaction through which... growth and development may occur.' And on the other hand, we have young people whose personal experience of interacting consistently with others has been constrained, whose opportunities for friendships have been limited, who feel different and who may have very good cause to be reluctant to trust others.

Some of the chemistry in these encounters has been remarkable to witness. For example, there was quiet celebration among staff and volunteers when one young girl, known to be selectively mute, spoke about what she was doing. Such moments owe a great deal to the skilful sensitivity of those involved.

Our purpose in this section is to summarise the evidence relating to interactions, exploring ways in which the young people appear to benefit from opportunities to learn and try out social skills.

### Understanding the background

The Department for Health 2003 study of mental health in young people looked after found that just 58 per cent had belonged to any kind of club, and for girls the proportion was noticeably low: less than one third (31 per cent) of 16-17 year-old girls had belonged to a club (Meltzer et al 2003, para 9.2). This is not surprising if we reflect on the sapping experience of being moved around (see section 1 above):

'You have to get used to new people looking after you and learn different sets of rules about what you are supposed to do and not do.' (Ofsted 2011, p22)

One consequence is that outside of school, many of these young people are likely to spend a good deal of time in introspection with few opportunities to develop social skills. The youth engagement officer at Luton told us:

'they don't seem to go out and socialise with the other young people, most of them. It's been the social element, the teamwork, that's been quite empowering.' (Museum staff, email)

Some of the young people came to the events together, by minibus, but in most cases found themselves with unfamiliar faces around them in unfamiliar surroundings. For a few it was a repeat experience to which

they were looking forward excitedly,<sup>7</sup> but most of them would have had only shadowy notions of what they were getting into.

The point we want to make here is that for these young people, helping them to feel relaxed about what was expected and with each other, and to interact creatively together, was not just a necessary preliminary to running the event smoothly

'For most of them it is the first time they have socialised with other young people in care. For one participant it is the first time he has socialised with young people his own age outside of school.'  
(Museum staff, email)

(as it might be for those who are accustomed to socialising among their peers). It was a fundamental and critical part of the experience. There was no warm-up: for most of the participants, they were in the deep end from the very first moment. This is why we stress the importance of social skills as an outcome from these projects.

### General socialising

At the sessions we observed, young people chatted, spoke up in turn, stayed quiet, listened, made space for each other, tolerated disruption, joined in when expected to, joked and giggled, asked questions and responded enthusiastically to prompts and suggestions. The acquisition of these skills appeared to be ceaseless. It matters because, as one girl was described by her carer, 'she is more able to do things individually as a result of group activity.' Another put it like this:

'She is more able to speak out in a group, less reticent than before.' (Carer, interview)

Children wrote down some of what that they had learned:

'Lisen to the parson who is talking'  
'Say pleaseand fankyous'  
'I have achieved by helping some body who was up set'  
'I helped lots of people'  
'If someon is scared I will help them'  
'not being noisy and distracted'  
'To stop being loud'.

During a fluid, creative session with four boys in Luton, with some making bags and others planning an open day, there was genuine debate (about racism, in this case), disagreement and reasoned argument mixed with a keen readiness to learn, even among the most disruptive. One of these boys was quite withdrawn, but his carer told us clearly:

'The sessions offer a chance to express himself in a small group – in contrast to school.' (Carer, interview)

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<sup>7</sup> Several participants at the Norwich Castle Summer Challenge had attended in previous years, some now granted the status of 'helper'. Several questionnaire responses included notes asking 'Can I come back next year?'

## Friendship

Mention of friendships, of various kinds, permeates our material. It could be that this category of young people has an acute hunger for friendship. It was mentioned by young people and carers with dependable consistency. By attending on the first and later days of some programmes, we were able to witness some changes ourselves:

'When we first got here we was all shy and we didn't know each other. Now we're close friends.' (Young person, interview)

Lasting friendships can be hugely significant and can give a young person much-needed stability. It's also important to keep in mind that among growing children there are many degrees and nuances of friendship; what may matter just as much here is relatively painless experience of making and sharing friends.

For the young asylum seekers based in Ipswich, this seems to be what the museum-based activities provided. We were told:

'They got on really well – on the beach they spent 45 minutes taking pictures of each other and as a group.' (Children's rights worker)

Understandably, carers were keenly aware of the friendship situation of the young people in their care:

'He doesn't go out to play, so it's good for him to make friends.' (Carer, interview)

'Just getting on the transport was a challenge, but by doing so she met and made a friend.' (Carer, interview)

'Making friends and developing rapport is an important learnt behaviour. They had to mind and behave.' (Carer, interview)

One fairly withdrawn young man, according to his carer was 'drawn in' by the others in the group in sessions he attended: we witnessed this process ourselves. The others arranged to meet up independently and invited him along. His carer told us that he did not mention it at the time and so he did not go. Her interpretation was that 'inclusion has never happened to him before' (Carer, interview). Subsequently a member of staff told us:

'I anticipate that the young people will continue to meet up socially.' (Museum staff, email)

## Participation and teamwork: 'growing up through social interactions'

Most of the museum activities involved some form of collaboration. Some depended on it: at Gressenhall, participants prepared a script and play about workhouse life; in Luton, they prepared a script and produced a film about racism. The young people tended to be straightforward about their achievements:

'I have achieved to take part in everything and helping people' (Young person, evaluation form)

'Working together in a group'. (Young person, evaluation form)

But it doesn't necessarily come easily. One carer of two young people who both attended sessions told us:

'One of them joined in more and the other less so. Teamwork for them is a problem, an objective they have yet to master. One of them was more on the outskirts, more separate and pre-occupied, whilst the other flitted about.' (Carer, interview)

She went on to remind us that promotion of individuality is as important as team working: 'it's a big thing to be different'. Other carers noted that participating with other young people who are looked after compounds the benefits:

'It helped her to be more mature, by being with different people who are also looked after, and with one particular new friend. Each time she goes she learns more, she's growing up through social interactions.' (Carer, interview)

Another carer of a girl whose behaviour 'had been a concern' said that she appeared to have established good relationships and 'speaks well of the others'.

It can take skilled work with young people to help them to engage in some form of collective project as a team, and to benefit from that participation. This may take time, as Luton's youth engagement officer pointed out:

'The young people have always been respectful and tolerant of one another. Initially they wanted to complete tasks individually, but as the project progressed they began to work very well as a team, sharing their ideas, ensuring everyone felt included, and working towards shared outcomes.' (Museum staff, email)

Our contemporary preoccupation with participation is potentially problematic for excluded young people. A culture that insists loudly on involvement risks further alienating those who find it hardest to engage, unless that involvement is carefully supported. The young girl who is selectively mute provides a striking example of this. Her carer told us:

'She seems more aware and asks more questions. There was a different approach at the museum... we'll be able to expand on that. She's looking forward to going to an after-school group for XXX, but she has a history of joining activities but not participating.' (Carer, interview)

Here the sensitivity of the museum staff and volunteers was noted, because it gave the child and her carer something to build on.

## 4.3 Cultural capital

'The different surroundings were enriching, culturally. For example, she is now able to identify some songs heard on the radio, and she has been able to see county hall and the record office.' (Carer, interview)

We have offered a definition of cultural capital in section 1 above. We use the term to refer to the value of knowledge associated with influential forms of culture. Many people who experience social exclusion are likely to lack cultural capital – the resources of knowledge and behaviour that might help them become accepted by, and to associate with people who have influence. Our view is that museum-based activities help young people who are looked after to begin accumulating cultural capital. As was made clear in the session at the Fitzwilliam Museum, painting and sculpture can help young people to have conversations about 'big issues', like history, society, money, taste and fashion. The other activities we observed reinforce this view, echoed by carers:

'Young people respond to their environment – in this case, one of cultural richness – facilities, space – and the chance to make links between things – music, the arts, research, arts practice and just "bouncing off each other".' (Carer, interview)

This is not just about exposure to cultural artefacts and knowledge in the museum space: it is also about learning how personality can be reflected and relationships shaped in the conversations that we have about aspects of culture. Two features of the activities help us to understand this: the sense of the past; and the themes chosen. We discuss these in turn now.

### Appreciating the past

One young man had a strong interest in history and this was stimulated by the museum experience. For others, as carers noted, there was 'unawareness of the past' but in these activities it was made relevant to them. One of the children who attended the Norwich Castle Summer Challenge had been taken to the museum in advance of the sessions: through the Beatles exhibition on display and by discussing the carer's own Beatles era experiences,

'she was able to get an idea of the past: what we did and what she might do'. (Carer, interview)

Another of the children who attended these sessions wrote:

'Now I can explain history and archaeology to people.' (Young person, evaluation form)

We were offered a cross-cultural perspective by one of the asylum seekers from Africa, who gave his thoughts about the museum in Ipswich after walking round:

'You can see the culture explained. We saw old things, and the differences to our home background, it helped to understand British culture. We saw important people from Ipswich, historical places, Anglo-German relations, traditional housing.' (Young person, interview)

The activities at Gressenhall were suffused with history, some of it fairly unpleasant, and the young people were constantly in an environment that invited them to compare their own lives with those of young people in the nineteenth century. One of the carers commented:

'The history that they learned was good - they understood what the museum was about. Afterwards they talked about what life was like in the past and how it might have been for them.' (Carer, interview)

Similarly, a social worker enthused about the benefits for one of the participants:

'He hadn't been to a museum and understood how life was in the past – a whole new experience!' (Social worker, interview)

We cannot say how personally these experiences affected participants, but we should record here that over lunch on the final day several of them were overheard sharing stories about their own past – including tales of horrible violence at home.

### Themes for the activities

We have been struck by the shrewdness of some of the choices of theme for the activities. Organising staff have needed to select an issue or topic that is likely to appeal to the age group, for boys and girls alike, and which allows for individual discovery and group creativity. There needed to be appropriate museum resources available and enough depth or 'mileage' in the topic for interest to be sustained over the period of activity.

At Norwich Castle, children from the Unthank Family Centre explored the theme of 'dragons in the castle', studying an exhibit and working with an artist to create their own fiery-eyed monster. At Gressenhall, the museum's powerful stories were used to fuse together a masked drama created by the young people. In Luton, young people explored the museum's war time campaign material, analysed it and identified the key messages; they then agreed their own choice of campaign, and used what they had learned to design and run the campaign, making materials like badges and a video along the way. Participants met the Local History Curator and interviewed a woman who had lived through the second world war, particularly about her experiences of 'making do' and 'digging in'. This is cultural engagement and therefore investment of cultural capital.

We argue that cultural capital is important for young people looked after, and that it needs to be acknowledged as a valued outcome from museum-based activities. Without following the young people further into their lives, we cannot prove that by opening a cultural capital account with a small deposit, they will be able to 'enjoy and achieve, make a positive contribution and achieve economic well-being' as the Every child matters outcomes require. What we can do is point to the very clear sense that in the activities we have witnessed, this process has taken place and been valued by young people and carers.

## 4.4 Learning

'The Best part is we can lurn aBout stuff & get a good edykashon and lurning about dragons.' (Young person, evaluation form)

We know that young people looked after are vulnerable to low educational achievement, sometimes for complex reasons.<sup>8</sup> We also know that museums have a recognised function in stimulating formal, semi-formal and informal learning. Watson and colleagues (2007) found that museums support the needs of school pupils with different learning styles, in particular the 'less able':

'Museums motivate pupils to do well, provid[ing] an immersive learning experience that is both enjoyable and enables learning to take place.'

How have the museum-based activities in this programme contributed to the participants' learning? In section 4.3 above we noted that learning about the past can contribute to the acquisition of cultural capital. In this section we discuss more generally the significance of learning in a museum environment for young people looked after.

In contrast to the school context, learning in the museum context can have more appeal because it is non-competitive and not constrained by the curriculum. In most cases, the young people will have volunteered readily for these activities or been persuaded, and they were free to drop out. This work is not usually curriculum-based but has several key advantages:

- the young people all know that they are among others who are in care
- the museum's resources – including physical space in which to move around - are available to them to discover, offering colour, variety and the sense of wonder
- the ratio of supervisory staff to participants is usually higher than in schools.

Of course, museum-based learning needs to be seen as complementary to school-based learning, but the point here is that the environment seems to stimulate the essential self-motivation to learn – and to learn how to learn. We should keep in mind that many of the young people have been excluded from school, some repeatedly.

So the first point to be made is that non-school, semi-formal learning can be crucial for young people looked after, and not a luxury that the state may or may not provide. Supplementary opportunities mean that they have a greater chance of catching up. In the activities we observed, the

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<sup>8</sup> By comparison with their peers, young people looked after 'tend to be behind in their attainments, leave school with fewer qualifications and be more at risk of being excluded from school' (HMIE 2001, para 1.4). Research in Scotland has shown how factors such as placement type, reason for becoming looked after and age on becoming looked after were significant in determining educational achievement (McClung and Gayle, 2010).

young people's status as being 'in care' was acknowledged and accommodated: they knew that and responded to it. In response to the question (on an internal evaluation) 'Do you think a museum is a good or a bad place to learn?' one young participant wrote:

'Yes because you can learn about all sorts of things'. (Young person, evaluation form)

This may seem insignificant unless we know that this was a particularly troubled girl who seems to have had no firm ground on which to establish a learning style of any kind. One carer reported:

'He seems to have learnt more than for a long while. He appears to have retained information more than at school.' (Carer, interview)

Our observations lead us to suggest that the diversity of the museum offer in these activities is important for inspiring learning: hearing about and visualising the past through objects, making things with their hands, filling in question sheets, creating musical and theatrical events, analysing the significance of collections or objects, understanding emotional content and so on, in a supportive non-threatening environment – such possibilities in combination help 'to bring them on' (as one carer put it).

The diversity of responses to learning reflects the diversity of opportunity to learn. Asked what they had learned about, participants said things like this:

'We learned more – and new – things'

'I didn't know I could do this'

'I didn't know I could make things'

'We learned how mummies are made'

'If a man or woman killed some one the[y] will be hung up and be killed'

'To learn more and be more seriously engaged about where I live.'

(Young people, various)

This brings us to our second main point. We have argued that this kind of learning is not a luxury but a necessity for many young people looked after. If this point is accepted, then the attributes of museum-based activities that support and enhance learning for these young people are very hard to ignore.

It's appropriate here to refer to the experience of wonder. The sessions we witnessed in museum galleries were punctuated by gasps and 'wows', giving the impression that some of the young people had seldom had their sense of wonder stimulated in this way before. This is not trivial: museums are concentrations of curiosities that provoke imagination, they have been under-used as resources that stimulate learning, and we are only just beginning to exploit their potential for work with young people who are looked after.

It's clear that more could be done, if time and partnerships allowed. Wyse and colleagues, reporting on a study of how children's writing was enhanced through museum visits, have called for closer collaboration between teachers and museum staff:

'The teachers' detailed knowledge of their children and their pedagogical expertise could perhaps have been combined more effectively with the museum educators' knowledge to create even stronger opportunities for learning.' (Wyse et al 2009, p44)

What we are suggesting in this report is that there is sufficient evidence to claim that investment in these relationships, with designated teachers as well as social workers and carers, would make the museum's offer even more compelling and even better value for society.

## 4.5 Concluding remarks on outcomes: how they fit the frameworks

In this section we offer some reflections on the extent to which the outcomes that we have observed can be aligned with two key frameworks: the Every child matters objectives (H. M. Treasury, 2003) for child care, and the Generic learning outcomes (MLA, undated a) for museums, libraries and archives.

As we have noted, the future of the Every child matters framework seems uncertain, although it is likely to have resonance in child care practice for some time to come. In what follows we comment on the evidence we have found that contributes to each of the five objectives.

be healthy	The museum-based activities made a clear contribution to the participants' sense of well-being. As we have noted, there were numerous references to increased sense of confidence, and we were told of several instances where this enabled the young people to be more positive in new situations.
stay safe	Most of the young people we asked had initially been apprehensive about attending the activities, so there was perhaps an anticipation of something challenging which they might have regarded as 'unsafe'. It was apparent that their views about the museum as a physically safe place were either neutral or positive.
enjoy and achieve	We have noted the sense of wonder, fun, and various statements about what the participants achieved. We have also drawn attention to the importance of tangible objects and records of the activities, which serve to sustain and if necessary reboot that sense of accomplishment.
make a positive contribution	Interviews with carers, social workers and other professionals supported the argument that in most cases the young people became at ease with each other and began to work together creatively and positively.
achieve economic well-being	This objective can be considered in terms of skills, learning and employability, but also more widely in terms of cultural capital. We have seen that the participants gained confidence, developed social skills, invested in their cultural capital, and learned how to learn. Some even indicated that their presence at the activities was directly linked to their employability.

The future of the Generic learning outcomes in policy may also be uncertain; but this too is a framework which has proven value for many practitioners. Our comments on the evidence that we can offer to contribute to each of the five objectives are as follows:

knowledge and understanding	Often the young people learned particular pieces of knowledge and took pride in that. They also showed that they could make sense of things (the experience of the workhouse for example) and make links and relationships between things, for instance with regard to the impact of racism. Some of the young people showed confidence in the value of learning and in discovering the ease with which understanding can be accomplished in the right circumstances. This objective also includes 'learning how museums operate', which was achieved at least to some degree for all participants.
skills	This objective includes knowing how to do something, being able to do new things, and social skills. The title of our report quotes participants who were able to take the opportunities offered to try something new, and discover something they could do, which previously they were not aware of. We have also noted the emergence of all-important skills in social interaction.
attitudes and values	The young people gave evidence of a sense of empathy and feelings of tolerance. They showed motivation to make progress on their projects (for example a drama production or campaign) and were able to express positive and negative responses to their experiences. The activities gave them valuable opportunities to reflect positively on their self-esteem.
enjoyment, inspiration, creativity	The participants had fun, expressed a sense of wonder, were highly creative and appeared to relish the opportunities to explore and make things (for example in making dragons, badges, T shirts etc).
activity, behaviour and progression	Our research has shown that the young people's behaviour and attitudes were influenced by the museum experiences in a positive and sustained way.

The two frameworks considered above serve to crystallise the beneficial outcomes identified in the preceding sections, and may help to draw these findings into policy.

In conclusion, it's worth pointing out how encompassing are the benefits we have identified. In this final section we have looked at frameworks developed for practitioners in two distinct fields, and have found that museum-based activities for young people looked after can contribute to each of the objectives in each case. The outcomes we have revealed are not partial: considering how brief the interventions are, they are extraordinarily comprehensive.

# 5

## Practical issues

### Introduction

Our research has revealed a range of practical issues that arise in organising and delivering museum-based activities for young people looked after. Such issues clearly have an impact on the outcomes for young people and for museum practice. In this section we offer a brief summary which is intended to inform future practice.

### Partnerships and relationships

Reliable partnerships are needed with social services organisations and staff, educationalists, carers, young people's groups, media organisations, and this requires respect and trust between their different interests. It takes time to build up to a common understanding of the role and value of museums and what they can offer to young people and those involved in their care; one museum worker reported that council staff would ask her 'are you a social worker?'

To some extent this understanding depends on people being made aware of successful outcomes for children looked after being achieved through museum activities; our evidence is that personal relationships are proving a vital component of this. Personal contacts based on shared understanding however are not always easy to make and sustain. The nature of what the museum is offering, and its value may be unclear. For example, one museum worker reported that she had worked closely with social services to offer 'a massive opportunity' but had to overcome concerns from its staff that the young people would report negatively about them.

Good communication is thus essential, but this is problematic because, as a museum worker put it during our playback workshop, 'the communication links are tenuous' – they 'extend down' like tentacles through organisational hierarchies. Finding the appropriate channel for consistent communication may be difficult, because of the need to extend the message through organisations and to individuals including the young people themselves. Given the busy nature of the work and the likelihood of disruptive patterns of employment and responsibilities, and the nature of the support to the young people, this takes time. For social services for example it was reported that

'every steering group meeting was like having a workshop in its own right'. (Museum staff at playback workshop)

We have observed contrasting strategic approaches to provision of activities for young people looked after. For example, one local authority is developing a learning network, which includes arts and libraries; while in the adjacent county there is an emphasis on outdoor activities. It's apparent that museums can and do make a contribution in both cases.

What matters is that those responsible for the overall strategic direction are fully aware of the potential contribution of museums. Museums have shown that they can take a flexible approach to planning and delivery.

Communication with carers and young people directly can be difficult largely because of questions of confidentiality. Two solutions were presented by those we spoke to: direct involvement by museum staff with the virtual teams at schools; and in Cambridgeshire, there are five groups of children looked after in two age groups for 7-11s and over (that have cross-group contacts and activities, and who communicate via a blog), that could be used to make contacts and publicise activities.

Carers have an essential role in understanding what is possible, making the case for it with school or social work staff, and with the young people themselves, and in supporting the activities. Where there has been direct communication with museum staff, the benefits have been recognised by carers:

'What was unexpected ... how organised he was, he communicated - so unlike my experience of 21 years of social services! A wonderful change.'  
(Carer, interview)

In some cases communication was thought to be inadequate, as we were told without prompting:

'Communication to me as her carer was poor... I thought a note at the end of each day would be useful to say what is required.'  
(Carer, interview)

## Planning activities

The planning horizon for activities for looked after children can be long. It will involve working with carers, schools, social services and children's support agencies in their various guises, museum staff, other centres, and with the young people themselves. Some museums have developed activities and sought to recruit young people; others have with growing confidence started processes that provide a framework within which the young people themselves are given the opportunity and tools to work up their own programmes and outputs.

It may be possible to tailor programme and event design to the individual needs of the participants, but this will be limited by the likelihood of inconsistent attendance.<sup>9</sup> Nonetheless, by taking a flexible approach, particularly where there is a sequence of themed sessions, both programmes and individual sessions have been shown to develop with input from the young people themselves. In Luton for instance we were told:

'Initially the young people were reluctant to work as a team or to work towards outcomes that they perceived to be ambitious. Over the course of [the] project they have begun to work very well as a team, actively asking for input from one another and ensuring no-one feels left out. With each success as part of the project they have also set themselves increasingly ambitious targets for what they want their campaign to achieve.'  
(Museum staff, email: emphasis added)

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<sup>9</sup> Unwillingness or intransigence, changes to the care regime, failure of transport or social workers to 'turn up' have all been instanced as reasons.

And as one care leaver in our playback workshop put it, 'I wouldn't go to a group where there was too much intervention'.

## Skills

With an overall framework for an event or programme decided, museum staff have had to ensure that the necessary skills are in place. As well as the technical skills required of museum staff and external specialised freelance workers such as arts, drama or media workers, the key skill that was evident to us from our observation of the sessions was that of working in a supportive, focussed, disciplined and output-oriented way with the young people themselves. The museum staff we met have evident skills and training to work in education, with young people or on community outreach. These were supplemented by staff with social care or teaching responsibilities and volunteers with similar skills including some with personal experience of being in care. It was clear that sessions for looked after children are extensions of work already being done with young people. It was pointed out that people can come into care at different ages and have different expectations, and that preparing for teenagers will require 'a Plan B, and C and D to cope with evolving situations'.

## Attitude to risk

All of the activities we saw offered challenges to the young people, challenges that included unknowns such as travelling independently, meeting strangers, occupying and working/performing in public spaces, sometimes in front of peers and families as well as strangers. Just being there and being exposed to yet more unknowns has involved a sense of risk for the children looked after. They will have their own interpretation of risk and act accordingly, but of course this is not sufficient: as one workshop participant put it, sometimes 'the risks are greater than we realise'. Reaction to these unknowns has varied, and staff running sessions have had to be flexible in response. Setting and agreeing challenges and what is to be achieved, and involving the young people in shaping the activity seem crucial. At one museum we were told that

'the best thing was they came up with their characters through the improvisation sessions and over two days the script was written using their own words (without them realising that this would be the case)'. (Museum staff, interview)

Planning for risk has meant consideration of failure. In this case this meant casting the net wide to find suitable children looked after who might benefit from what was perceived as a risky programme,<sup>10</sup> which in turn added to the time for set-up and the difficulties of recruitment. In contrast, attendees at one session at the Fitzwilliam museum were recruited in a more straightforward way through the Aim Higher Programme that links with schools to identify and promote the brightest disadvantaged young people who might become undergraduates.

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<sup>10</sup> The risk was in creating from scratch a public drama performance with older teenagers largely unknown to each other or to the museum staff.

## Recruitment and 'the offer'

We have not found it easy to establish what is 'the offer' that museums are making to children looked after and those responsible for their care. There is no single statement of the purpose and anticipated benefits of the activities. When we challenged museum staff on this, we learned that the offer is highly nuanced, becoming an understanding between partners, subject to subtle, trusted re-interpretation as it is tailored for individual young people. The network of those partners can be complex and communication in it is attenuated. As the offer is taken further and further from the museum – to teachers, social workers, carers, parents - the less control or influence museum staff have over how it is presented or the expectations among those who take it up.

Sometimes direct offers have been made via social services on behalf of museums and in the light of previous work (Ipswich). In Luton, a direct approach (by unsolicited email) was made to designated teachers at schools with the offer of taster sessions for children looked after to volunteer to attend. The individuals would not necessarily have known of others like them at the same school. However

'It's very onerous to get even a small group, a lot of the time was spent doing recruitment and taster sessions.' (Museum staff, email)

In this case, only one young person attended the first session but in time it proved to be an exceptional project.

In Norwich, work with looked after children came to the attention of a family centre manager by chance. In Cambridge, a university college 'taster' day for children looked after led to a series of further events at the museums after the head of the Looked After Children Education Support Service (in Suffolk) had held detailed planning discussions.

If much of the recruitment to activities for looked after children lies beyond the control of the museums, to what extent does this matter? The process of identifying and matching who can come and when they can come is complex: hence it is challenging to match any programme to the availability of the young people themselves. Given the complexity of arrangements for social care (in what is likely in 2011 to be a turbulent period) we were not surprised to hear that one museum worker would plan to have a social worker contracted into any future programme of events. More concerted cooperation would appear to be the way forward.

How can this be planned for to meet the needs of young people looked after? One answer may be to use the Personal Education Plan (PEP)<sup>11</sup> process that brings together social workers and carers at school level. This may help the carer and young person (neither of whom may have had any interaction with museums) to understand and commit to museum activities. The PEP may help alleviate the issue of commitment: it has been suggested to us that the only way to get some young people to fulfil

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<sup>11</sup> Amongst other things a PEP provides essential information for schools and carers, encourages dialogue between social workers, carers and schools, and provides a framework to ensure any additional support is put in place.

their promises is to make arrangements as late as possible before the planned start.

A final point: we cannot say whether the ways that recruitment is carried out means that many children looked after simply miss out on the opportunities, either by self-exclusion or simply because the invitation or knowledge was unavailable to them or their carers, or if it was not understood. The established process appears to select according to who will show interest and fit into the dynamics of a group of strangers, some of whom might exhibit 'volatile behaviour'. One unintended consequence may be that young people who might 'fail' (at the museum) are excluded. An area for future development of museum work with young people could be to focus more closely on individual needs within the recruitment process and explore ways of maximising inclusion.

## Sessions

We were told that the choice of venue (particularly the first time if more than one) is particularly important. Its variety invokes 'magic and wonder', it nurtures, provides an introduction to public space, and a sense of the past and its relationship to personal experience. The full expanse of some museums can be very daunting, of course: at the Fitzwilliam we were told that for this reason, some sessions begin in a smaller room until participants have settled down. Catering is important too: offers of food and drink, and space for secure and relatively unsupervised lunches, where appropriate, work well.

Getting young people to sessions, especially when they are geographically scattered, usually involves transport arrangements that complicate the scheduling.<sup>12</sup> Taxis are a familiar part of the child care experience, of course, and the costs can be a significant proportion of the budget. In fact transport can be a real barrier: a planned 'gifted kids' event on a Saturday at a visual arts centre in Norfolk was 'defeated' by the organisational problems of small cohorts widely scattered. Also in Norfolk, we were told of a separate occasion on which one child had to withdraw when social workers realised his birth sister was in the group, although they had never met and weren't aware of each other. This illustrates the organisational complexities.

The number of young people attending sessions has varied widely, as has the number of adults in support. Museum staff recommended planning for participants to drop out, and aim for 10-12 participants: have a reserve list if you can. The ratio of supervisory staff to young people has also varied in the activities we have observed. The optimum will depend on the age of the young people (the older the fewer), the type of activities, and the environment they are in. The Norwich Castle Summer Challenge was attended by 19 young people and had a supervisory ratio of 1:1. With lower ratios, disruptive behaviour can be difficult to handle. Against that, it is important to remember the value that participants have described in talking to one another about their own comparable status of being in care.

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<sup>12</sup> Transport where accompanied by support workers can be easier than taxi hire, although the latter was reported to be a real plus to the experience in many cases.

Allowing unsupervised conversations to flourish could have enormous benefit.

This highlights the sensitivity of structure: too controlled an experience, and creative opportunities can be missed; too relaxed a structure, and the benefits to the young people can be dissipated. Where sessions had a clear beginning - with introductions of all present, and ground rules if appropriate; a middle in which they were occupied; and a defined conclusion - the participants knew where they were and most proceeded with confidence. At Gressenhall, action games were used to engage and focus the young people. At the Fitzwilliam, the museum was introduced through getting a group to look at and talk about a painting. The group leader with them reported she was at first

'embarrassed at the chatty informality, except that the youngsters from year 10-11 were talking about paintings!' (Education support worker, interview)

Elsewhere, guided tours or handling of objects have been used to introduce themes that have later underpinned the creative activities.

During the sessions, flexible breaks (but only at the discretion of the workers), short lunch breaks for day-long sessions, and alternative exercises to control the flow of activities have all played a valuable part in retaining the focus and interest of the young people. As discussed in Section 4.1 above, many of the young people will not have been in an environment where they are openly with other children looked after. The need to keep to the ground rules was clear in the sessions we observed, and there were penalties to pay: one young man was given a 'red card' on a trip to London and had to miss the next session. Rewards, in the form of verbal compliments, gifts and the offer of carrying out special tasks were more common. Where the ratio of adults is high, getting them to join in has proved beneficial by creating an entirely productive environment. (Even the researchers were involved in some drama warm-ups, ceramic design and a group rendition of 'Puff the Magic Dragon').

A programme of sessions for this category of excluded people means that museum staff have to be highly alert and flexible. Nevertheless, sessions with specific targets and outcomes worked well by meeting the objectives set by workers and the young people themselves. Often sessions have been planned to include some feedback from the young people themselves, either through formal completion of questionnaires or by discussion. This can be problematic if taxis are waiting at the door, or if the young people have relaxed at the end of a session and have started to talk amongst themselves. At Gressenhall, the feedback was privately videoed on an individual basis with some valuable insights from the young people. Where there was a product at the end of a session, this was commonly on display at the museum, or went home with the young person, representing an achievement:

'I find it really moving when a child clutches a piece of art work that she has done and says she is going to give it to her mum tomorrow when she sees her for contact.'<sup>13</sup>

These outputs provide an opportunity for further conversations and feedback to the young people, who prize the attainments they have made. Using the local media too can have a beneficial effect: on two occasions, participants at sessions asked the researcher if our 'report' meant publication in the newspaper.

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<sup>13</sup> Linda Gower, Looked After Children Education Support Service, Suffolk, personal communication, 2010.



# 6

## The business case

### Introduction

There are evident benefits from these activities for young people looked after. While we have not been able to demonstrate sustained benefit in a significant proportion of participants, the comments of carers and social workers lead us to believe that it would be confirmed by further research.

These outcomes obviously have immense value for the young people themselves. They also have value to the state. Some of them are precisely what social workers, care home managers, foster carers and teachers strive for. They are what parents and employers would hope for. Where young people are not given the opportunities to gain confidence, develop social skills, invest in cultural capital and learn to learn, there are cost implications for the state. Two key questions arise:

- how reliable or consistent are the outcomes?
- how much does it cost to provide these benefits?

It seems likely that a business case can be made for museum-based activities with young people looked after. This section is intended to start that process.

### How reliable and sustainable are the outcomes?

We have been struck by the consistency of the benefits from these activities, and by the degree to which the benefits appear to have been sustained. While there have been some drop outs and one or two negative comments – for example about poor communication, and complaints about one young person from another - there have been no failures and apparently no damage to these vulnerable people. We asked repeatedly if there had been any negative outcomes and were not told of any. We also found that in interviews and email correspondence weeks and months after the activities, the evidence of benefit was still recognised and the museum was credited with that change.

That is a remarkable achievement on the part of those involved, working in a sensitive area, and it points to a dependable model. This is an important part of the business case: museum-based activities with young people looked after appear to produce beneficial outcomes reliably and sustainably.

## The financial context

Public sector finances in 2011 are under particular stress. The principle of ensuring savings dominates most policy and much practice, and for this reason it makes sense to try to appreciate the economic context in which museums bring about outcomes for children and young people looked after.

In 2005 it was reported that the average weekly cost of a child in local authority foster care was £349, and £2,048 for children in residential homes. It was noted that:

'a significant proportion of resources was being used to fund high cost placements (between £500 and £5,000 per week): 20% of looked after children are in such placements, accounting for 46% of looked after children costs.' (DfES 2005a)

Another 2005 study provides two examples of individual care costs: a girl who has remained in a stable foster care placement, and a boy with emotional and behavioural difficulties who was placed in an agency residential unit. The researchers found that:

'The total cost incurred to look after Jennifer for the twenty-month time period was £35,106 (the cost to social services was £27,125 and £7,981 to other agencies). The costs incurred to look after Michael for the same time period were more than six times higher than for Jennifer (total cost £215,756).' (DfES 2005b, p10)

These costs work out at £21,064 and £129,454 respectively for one year. They help us to get some sense of the relative value of museum-based outcomes.

## Costing museum-based activities

There are few previous sources from which to begin estimating the costs of museum-based activities for young people looked after. The budget for Colchester's FAT Heritage project in 2006 was £10,775 for a total of 91 attendances on eight day-long workshops, which is far longer than any of the activities we have been studying. It sounds like exceptional value but the budget does not appear to include staff costs, preparation or travel.

The costs of the activities we have studied in the Renaissance East of England programme varied according to factors like age group, employment of extra-mural specialists, off-site visits, the need to invest in preparatory meetings, expenditure on taxis in rural counties compared with towns, and so on. We note that the difference in costs for an organisation which is experienced at setting these events up, compared to those for an organisation which has not done it before, could be significant.

We asked two of the museums to provide detail, as accurately as possible, on the costs of their activities.<sup>14</sup> The budget headings included the following:

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<sup>14</sup> For reasons of confidentiality the amount of detail provided here is limited.

- Staff costs, including non-museum professional staff
- Freelancers
- Transport for participants (usually estimated and coming from social services budget)
- Catering and venues
- Volunteer training sessions and travel where appropriate
- Off-site visits
- Materials.

The duration and number of the sessions differed significantly. From the figures supplied we have calculated the cost per young person per hour as follows:

Museum A: £17.74

Museum B: £24.84.<sup>15</sup>

These are surprisingly similar given that there were notable differences in the numbers attending and in the recruitment and preparation time needed. In terms of social return on investment, it might be important to include a value for the volunteers involved: our estimate for one museum was £3,000.

The figures break down as follows:

	Staff	Materials & travel	Freelance specialists
Museum A	49%	33%	17%
Museum B	67%	25%	7%

Our point is that the kinds of benefit we have described in this report can probably be accessed, quite reliably, in most cases for considerably less than £30 per young person per hour. As museums gain experience in delivering these programmes and supporting agencies gain confidence in contributing to the partnerships, we can expect the costs to fall and the benefits to be more profound and sustainable.

Experience will allow professionals, carers and the young people themselves to assess how many hours are needed, on average, to deliver the outcomes we have described. The average duration of the programmes in this project was 16 hours, but the variation is too great for this to be meaningful. A series of four two-hour sessions might cost £240 per child. This can be compared with the annual costs to the state of £21,064 for Jennifer and £129,454 for Michael (mentioned in research quoted above). This kind of argument needs to be kept in mind when monitoring museum based activities from now on.

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<sup>15</sup> At our 'playback' workshop, participants carried out an exercise in groups where they 'invented' a fictional series of activities for a client group and were asked to estimate the costs of their proposed project. The figures they came up with were between £65 and £160 per child per session. The average duration of the sessions in the programme we have been studying is just over three hours. On this basis, they are comparable with the more systematic calculations above.

## Taking the argument forward

This argument cannot be taken forward without collaboration among agencies concerned to support young people looked after. Care providers need to be part of the debate, helping to shape the design of programmes and assessing their value. A key contribution can be expected from the Cost calculator for children's services, a project developed by the Centre for Child and Family Research at Loughborough University,<sup>16</sup> which allows agencies to calculate costs of social care processes for looked after children.

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<sup>16</sup> <http://www.cfcfs.org.uk/>

# 7

## Conclusion

### Museums and children looked after: the emergence of a movement?

This study has involved various discussions about the potential of the growing movement of museum-based activities to make a recognised contribution to the lives of young people looked after. Gaining that recognition may require a strategic approach to forming a movement that can attract attention to the work being done.

Pioneers in this field have shown that what has been tried is realistic, with positive outcomes consistently and inexpensively achieved. It may now be time to put energy into the systematic dissemination of experience; sharing ideas, lessons and resources; engaging child care professionals strategically; and explaining the benefits to policy makers.

The coalition government is committed to early intervention in the interests of minimising future costs to the state. According to Action for Children, between 25 and 50 per cent of young people leaving care end up in custody as adults.<sup>17</sup> A recent interim paper on financing early intervention (Cabinet Office, 2011) suggests that initiatives like the Big Society Bank or innovative processes like social impact bonds could be used to support the costs of intervention. Referring to a pilot project with social impact bonds, which seeks external investment to help reduce reconviction among prisoners, the paper notes that:

'The challenge will be ... to demonstrate cashable savings for Government at the end of the pilot period, and to attract commercial investors.'

Given the clearly beneficial outcomes we have described and the relatively low costs, we suggest that the potential for museum-based activities with children looked after might be appropriate for this kind of funded early support: the benefits are low risk and the costs of not addressing them are high.

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<sup>17</sup> Action for Children, <http://www.actionforchildren.org.uk/content/409/Leaving-care>. accessed 28 February 2011.

We believe that one of our responsibilities as researchers is to draw attention to the uncelebrated work of staff who bring about small miracles. It is subtle, quiet work, and its impact can be profound. Remarks such as these probably encapsulate sentiments that are widespread:

'The staff were absolutely brilliant with his diet and [their] inclusive approach.'

'The team - staff and volunteers - at the museum were both brilliant.'

'The clear dedication of all those who helped put it together...'

'The museum is wonderful... and it was the hands-on approach that worked. Looking is not enough.'

'We were astonished at how much was achieved in a week.'

'The staff managed brilliantly.'

## What we did not find

There are some things we did not find in our study, or did not find consistently; and some areas of potential development that we would like to suggest. We discuss these now.

- We did not find evidence of the recognition of museum-based activities by local authorities at a strategic level. By extension there was little evidence of those authorities committing to the activities as a component in what they are trying to achieve for the young people in their care.
- Some of the projects developed because of collective decisions made by the participants. But none was initiated by young people looked after; nor were they involved at an early stage in the planning, as had happened for example at a project in Colchester in 2006. The complexities of travel and scheduling have to be taken into account, but there seems a lot to be said for including young people in an organising group, helping to take decisions that influence the design and delivery of activities; and for encouraging networks of young people looked after to consider taking their suggestions for activities to museums.
- 'Who's not here?' We have seen that the nature of the offer and the recruitment process are complex. At various points in this process, museum staff seem to have little or no control over how the offer is presented to young people. We were not able to discover how those who choose not to attend make their decision, or perhaps have the decision made for them. Are these likely to be the more vulnerable and excluded young people? Closer collaboration with care agencies, and linking with existing care networks and support groups, could help to ensure that museums are not accused of simply working with the least challenging young people.

- There is potential for more focused work with individual young people. While we saw plenty of adjustment for individual behaviours, there is more potential for activities to be tailored for the different needs of young people looked after. This is more than taking account of the likelihood, for example, that those in residential care are far more likely to have conduct disorders (Meltzer et al, 2003). Museum staff in Norfolk have worked with children and young people looked after to explore the meaning of their personal belongings in relation to the notion of collections. Could there be genuine therapeutic potential, for example, for young people looked after contributing to the Museum of Broken Relationships?<sup>18</sup> Or drama that develops the relationship between objects and notions of 'home'?<sup>19</sup> As experience builds, there is clear potential for projects to work more deeply and personally with individuals and groups. A worker from a family centre saw the potential of the museum very much in terms of helping young people to deal with harmful experiences:

'we can use its materials therapeutically...being able to address and heal the bits that hurt.' (Family Centre staff, interview)

- Communication with carers, social workers and designated teachers after the activities was sparse and unsystematic. Carers in particular could benefit from being more informed as to what to follow up on, in conversation with the young people. Such liaison is of course time-consuming and may be difficult to arrange, but might add considerably to the impact.
- Similarly, longer-term follow-up, to find out if the outcomes have been sustained, seems to have occurred only by happenstance. This is not just a research question, it is also about having a feedback loop which can inform future planning.

## Concluding remarks

These projects are centrally concerned with addressing social exclusion. Ultimately, what's powerful about them is their combination of creativity and realism. They combine the creative use of cultural resources with appropriate understanding of the needs of young people who either experience exclusion or are at risk of being excluded from many social and economic opportunities and benefits. The work is empowering because it targets young people's options for empowering themselves.

The young people not only gained confidence, sometimes in very striking ways, but most seem to have made an investment in their own identity, which they could build on. The boost to self-esteem contributes in turn to other outcomes.

The key points that we would want to draw to the attention of policy makers are these:

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<sup>18</sup> <http://new.brokenships.com/en>

<sup>19</sup> See for example [http://www.londonbubble.org.uk/recent\\_work/my\\_home](http://www.londonbubble.org.uk/recent_work/my_home)

- museums can provide activities in a public space in which life skills can be developed and aspiration can be nurtured
- museums link the past to the present in a way that affirms and extends, and stimulates learning
- activities tailored for young people looked after can address their issues of exclusion, identity and a place in society
- young people can enjoy new experiences in the company of others while developing a range of social and practical skills
- the activities led consistently to beneficial outcomes for the young people
- the activities are low risk, and the costs of not addressing the young people's needs are likely to be high
- there is potential to sharpen the focus on individual needs, and to improve outcomes through following up on the experiences. The benefits can be sustained within existing formal and informal care programmes
- the likely costs are such that these activities represent value for money compared with other opportunities available.

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# Appendix A

## Methodological issues

In this section we begin with a description of the methods we used to acquire our evidence. We then go on to discuss the three problems, and conclude with a note about some questions of interpretation.

### Methods

There were five main sources of material. The methods by which they informed our study were as follows:

Table 1

Source	Methods
Children and young people	Observation and conversation (10 occasions), facilitated discussions (four occasions), questionnaire survey (one programme), interview (one programme), playback session
Carers	Telephone interviews, emails, conversations (about 13 in total)
Museum staff and volunteers	Conversations, emails, telephone interviews, playback session (about 16 in total)
Social workers and other partner agency staff	Conversations, emails, telephone interviews, playback session (about 14 in total)
Documentary evidence	Reports, government publications, research literature, personal communications

A total of 68 young people participated in the activities that we monitored directly. Of these, we spoke to 42 about the activities they were involved in. Contact details were collected for us by museum staff on the basis that we would be making contact to ask some questions. In some cases we gained agreement to telephone social workers and others when we met them at activities. Not all carers were prepared to answer questions, and in one case, the carer suggested that we might better ask the young person herself, and passed the phone to her. In all cases, staff were fully prepared to discuss both in general terms and answer questions about their views of the activities. In a few cases, staff requested that we send out the questions first. Here we tended to get more full answers, but lost the opportunity for spontaneous enquiry and follow through. Most respondents were keen to express their overall feelings about the activities as they saw it.

The playback session involved about a dozen staff, from museums, social and education services and some young people. It provided enriched details based on a note of preliminary findings that was sent out in advance. It also proved to be a valuable networking opportunity for staff from different services and a chance for the project managers to be directly involved.

For the project as a whole we prepared a framework of questions for children and young people; museum staff; parents and carers; and social workers. The questions covered the following areas:

- Outcomes for young people
- Outcomes for museums / partners
- Sustainability of outcomes
- How activities contribute to Every child matters objectives
- Museum-specific factors that influence outcomes
- How museum activities complement those in other settings.

The full set of questions prepared is shown in Table 3 (see page 58).

### Methodological problems

There are three key methodological problems to be reported here: they concern protocol when working with vulnerable children and young people; the necessarily creative and fluid nature of the activities; and the problem that the researcher is 'Yet Another Person' whose presence and interest may accentuate the young person's sense of difference. In addition we have added a comment on the difficulty of interpreting some off the material.

### Protocol

After some discussion the following protocol was agreed:

- The key contact at partner museums will send out a consent form in advance in order to get signed permission from the relevant adult (carer or social worker) prior to the evaluation activity taking place.
- The form will make it clear that the actions of the children taking part in this activity as a group will be generally observed and that there might be some fun activities that will be part of the group evaluation. The form will make it clear however, that without permission from the responsible adult, children will not have their opinions, words or individual actions noted down for the record and will not take part in any questioning or interviewing.
- Prior to the researchers starting their evaluation activity, they will be informed by the key contact at the museum (or someone deputising for them) of any children without adult permission to participate the evaluation.

- At no time will any researcher be present alone with any of the young people.
- In addition to responsible adult consent, in order to gain consent from the children, a plain English statement will be read out on the days the researcher is present by museum staff. This will introduce the researcher, briefly explain the research, remind children that they can opt out from taking any active part in the evaluation or from having their particular words or actions noted down at any time and inform them that they can do this by telling any member of staff. All staff present should be made aware of this. Prior to any interviewing, Local Level will just check with the child that it is ok to ask them some questions.
- None of the names of children and young people will be kept by the research team after the end of the project, and names may only be used for the purposes of identification during conversations with staff, carers, parents or social workers.
- A project report will be made available to all participants on completion.

### The nature of the activities

It can be very difficult to get systematic evidence from young people in this kind of creative context, especially when they are not expecting it: it can be counter-productive to try. Thus one of the museum staff advised:

'Because of the nature of the group I think observation may be more appropriate than any interviewing'.

As researchers we adopted the role of being 'in attendance' with the participants and with museum staff and volunteers. This meant, for example, participating in drama warm-up activities at Gressenhall and the group rendition of 'Puff the Magic Dragon' at Norwich Castle. Thus the main source of material was observation and noted conversations: a practical and sensitive, but not a systematic way of capturing material.

This observation was augmented in different ways. At the Norwich Summer Challenge we ran short workshop sessions with groups of about four children accompanied by their carers. At Gressenhall we were invited to participate in a sound recorded interview of individual participants organised by the museum staff. Ideally, we would have liked to have had a feedback session, prepared together with museum staff, organised for all the sessions with the looked after children .

### 'Yet Another Person'

The challenge of 'Yet Another Person' was particularly apparent through written comments from some of the young people at Gressenhall. The museum community outreach officer had spoken to the participants by phone in advance, at the recruitment stage. In a short questionnaire at the end of the activities they were asked: 'How did you feel when I rang up?' The following are four out of the six responses to this question:

'I don't know who u r'

'Who the hell are you? OK I'll give it a go.'

'A bit scared and who are you?'

'one I forte how the hell you, and oh my god'.

It could be very damaging not to take account of such sensitivities. Young people who are looked after are often faced with a bewildering stream of adults who have an ephemeral and partial interest in them, however well-intentioned. Many will have very good reasons to be distrustful of adults in the first place.

Against that there is the public sector funding argument: it is right that publicly funded initiatives should be evaluated, both to account for the spending and to clarify and disseminate lessons learned. The researcher has to make do in the middle of this tension.

### Interpretation of evidence

Finally, we should note that of course there are subtleties in some of the evidence that can make it difficult to interpret. For example, one of the children (9-13 year olds) attending the Norwich Castle Summer Challenge wrote:

'I have made some friends!'

This might have been straightforward delight expressed at the end of the day. But equally, the exclamation mark might disguise a debilitating private anguish of loneliness exquisitely relieved.

Nor is it clear whether group discussion will yield a better result than an individual conversation. One young man, interrupted earlier, was keen to ask the researcher to finish his questions. A group discussion, potentially rewarding, at the end of a busy day was of less benefit due to disruptive behaviour that clearly prevented others from having a say.

# Appendix B

## Researching costs for the business case

It has proved difficult to access consistent budget data for the museums, and children and family services in the local authorities in which we have observed activity. One exception to this is Luton, where details are fairly readily available online for the budgets, and in particular for the museum services that are provided by a charitable trust, and hence are published online on the Charities web site. One of the problems is that local authority budget statements are generally restricted to large corporate departments and not to detailed services, and without a direct approach to these, this level of detail is not available. Council web sites are not generally designed to yield management information, and the level of access to documents is patchy. In particular, individual service web pages seldom contain access to key data, plans, budgets, strategies or other internal documents. Nationally we have yet to find useful data on museum budgets, or Families and Children's Services budgets, by local authority.

To prepare the case for delivering services to young people looked after, we would need to understand:

- Overall museum annual budget
- Museum education/outreach/special services budget
- Staff, facilities and premises rates to determine activity costs per hour/session
- Overall 'social services' budget within overall council budget
- Overall Children and Families Services budgets, and within that discretionary spend on children at risk or in care
- Staff, transport and other costs associated with the activities.

It would also be useful to know of any guidance published nationally by the government or the Local Government Association on recommended proportions of budget according to local demographics and other factors.

We would also need to impute a value for the time invested by volunteers.

With an idea of a likely cost for a session for young people looked after, and an idea of what proportion of a budget this might be, a better case can be prepared, and the offer quantified in order to argue the case for funds or take up of special events. It may also be possible to prepare base budget lines for inclusion in spending plans.

Table 2: MaCLA evaluation summary of project activities 2010-2011

	Norfolk	Norfolk	Norfolk	Colchester & Ipswich	Cambridge	Luton	Luton
Main location	Gressenhall Farm and Workhouse	Norwich Castle	Norwich Castle	Ipswich Christchurch Mansion and High Street Museums	Fitzwilliam and Scott Polar Museums	Wardown Park Museum	Wardown Park Museum
Theme	Life in a 19 <sup>th</sup> C workhouse	Summer challenge	Dragons at the Castle	Work with young asylum seekers	Painting and ceramic design; polar life	Campaign: Make an Impact	Image and Identity
Number of days/sessions	4	5	4	4*	1	15	12
Hours per session	4.5	5.5	2	2	4.5	1.5	2
Number of YP**	8	19	8	7	8	5	8
Age range	16-18	9-13	7-11	16-18	12-13	12-16	16+
Paid staff : volunteer ratio	2:0	1:3	5:2	N/A	1:1	1:0	1:1
Supervision ratio (supervisory personnel : YP)	1:4	1:1	7:4	3:2	1:1	1:5	3:4
Key partners	Social services – various contacts	Virtual School, Study support	Unthank Family Centre	Brighter Futures	Suffolk Looked After Children Education Support Service	E-Learning centre; schools (virtual and actual)	16 Plus Team
Extra-mural specialists	Drama animateur; video producer	Poetry animateur; artist; film animator; dance tutor; peripatetic musicians; archivist	Artist	Photographer; interpreter	Volunteers/ staff with teaching experience	E-learning manager/video producer; museums marketing; artist	Artist; animateur; poet
Attendance by Local Level	26 Jul 10 29 Jul 10	2 Aug 10	27 Sep 10 11 Oct 10	28 Oct 10	22 Dec 10	12 Jan 11 2 Feb 11	13 Dec 10

\*Only one session exclusively at museums: a further session was subsequently offered by the British Museum. \*\*Numbers attending individual sessions varied.

Table 3 Questions for MaCLA project evaluation

	Questions	CYP	Parents carers	Staff	Social workers
Outcomes for young people	Do you think attendance at the sessions is having a continuing impact? What do you think you got (gained) from the sessions? What sort of outcomes did you expect for the young people? Were these expectations met? Were there any negative outcomes? Were there any unanticipated outcomes?	✓	✓  ✓	✓  ✓	✓  ✓
Outcomes for museums / partners	What did you think about museums before you came on the sessions? And what do you think now? What did you hope to achieve by running the sessions? What happened? Are there any lessons from your work with YPLA that might change your museum practice generally? How have the sessions affected the way you are planning for future sessions for looked after children? How has attendance at the sessions affected the way you are planning for/supporting the YP?	✓		✓  ✓	✓  ✓
How sustainable are outcomes?	Do you think attendance at the sessions is having a lasting impact? How might positive outcomes be sustained? And how might negative outcomes be eradicated? Have you done anything as a result of going to the sessions? [Yes - Will you keep doing it do you think? No - What might you like to do again?]	✓	✓ ✓		✓ ✓
How activities contribute to ECM objectives:					
be healthy	Did the activities help you feel good about yourself, or not so good? In what way? Did the activities appear to affect how the YP feels good about him/herself, or not so good? In what way?	✓	✓		✓
stay safe	How did the YP benefit from being in different surroundings? Did you feel safe whilst you are/were there? What makes you say that? Was there any impact on their self-reliance and confidence in dealing with new situations?	✓	✓ ✓		✓ ✓

Table 3 Questions for MaCLA project evaluation

	Questions	CYP	Parents carers	Staff	Social workers
enjoy and achieve	How did he/she interact/get on with other people at the sessions? What did they achieve? What was the best thing you did? How did you get on with the others in the group? How would you encourage others along to sessions like these?	✓ ✓ ✓	✓	✓	✓
make positive contribution	How did the YP contribute to working in a group? (Evidence of any contributions) What part did you play in what your group achieved?	✓	✓	✓	✓
achieve economic well-being (proxy: employability)	Do you think he/she has learned or developed any skills? What have you found out that you are good at? Did you get any ideas for what you might like to do when you leave school? Did you perceive any useful life skills being developed?	✓ ✓	✓	✓	✓
Museum-specific factors that influence outcomes	What was different about going to the museum from other things that you do? What is it (do you think) about the museum that helps the YP achieve positive outcomes?	✓	✓	✓	✓
How museum activities complement those in other settings	What other activities do young people take part in that have given them new experiences? How do the museum sessions complement those?		✓	✓	✓