

MLA North West is the strategic development agency for museums, libraries and archives in the region. We are part of the wider MLA Partnership with the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (MLA) and the eight other regional agencies. Together we work to improve people's lives by building knowledge, supporting learning, inspiring creativity and celebrating identity. The Partnership acts collectively for the benefit of the sector and the public, leading the transformation of museums, libraries and archives for the future. We receive core funding from the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council.



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Inspiring North West



MUSEUMS LIBRARIES ARCHIVES
NORTH WEST

Culture Awards 2006



Inspiring North West



The North West of England is a vibrant and creative region in which to live, work and visit. The thriving cultural infrastructure, of which museums, libraries and archives are an integral part, brings great benefits to the region, helping to connect people to knowledge, inspiration and creativity.

The museum, library and archive sector makes a significant contribution to the local and visitor economy of the region. Over 8.2 million people visit museums and galleries in the region each year and nearly 40 million people visit public libraries in the North West annually. Archives use has been steadily increasing as the public's interest in genealogy continues to rise. The sector is a hugely important employer, with an estimated 12,000 museum, library and archive staff in paid employment in the North West and many thousands of volunteers.

MLA North West collaborates closely with regional partners to ensure that museums, libraries and archives contribute to, and are recognised within, strategic plans and policies for the North West. This year, we have identified core themes to reflect what we believe to be the key areas in which the sector excels in delivering value:

- Helping create inclusive and diverse communities
- Engaging children, young people and families
- Making the North West a great place to live, work and visit
- Improving and innovating

I am delighted to announce the winners of the Inspiring North West Culture Awards 2006 as outstanding examples of excellence in the region. The projects and individuals detailed in this booklet reflect how well the sector builds a successful and creative nation, and this is particularly evident in the North West.

Clare Connor

Chief Executive, MLA North West

Engaging Children, Young People and Families

Museums, libraries and archives provide positive cultural experiences which enable children, young people and families to fulfil their potential, develop essential life skills and increase their understanding of the world around them.

They connect children and young people to knowledge, information and creativity, by bringing learning to life, unlocking imagination and deepening curiosity.

Museums, libraries and archives have a proven track record in supporting and delivering transformational opportunities for children, young people and families. MLA North West works with regional partners to ensure that all children, young people and families are able to participate in high quality and enjoyable cultural experiences.

Using Museums for More than Key Stage 2 History / Lancashire Museum Service

This project is an excellent example of how museum education teams can go beyond traditional boundaries and broaden their offer to extended curriculum subjects, such as Business Studies or Leisure and Tourism. The project has looked at how students studying these subjects can benefit from viewing museums as a business in the public sector, and whether Lancashire Museums' sites can provide case studies for students to compare one business with another. Originally aiming to deliver only a workshop, the project has been so successful it has resulted in the students helping to produce a CD resource to encourage secondary schools to use the museum for extended curriculum areas. The students have clearly enjoyed the project enormously, showing a marked change in their attitude to museums, along with a deepened understanding of how they work.

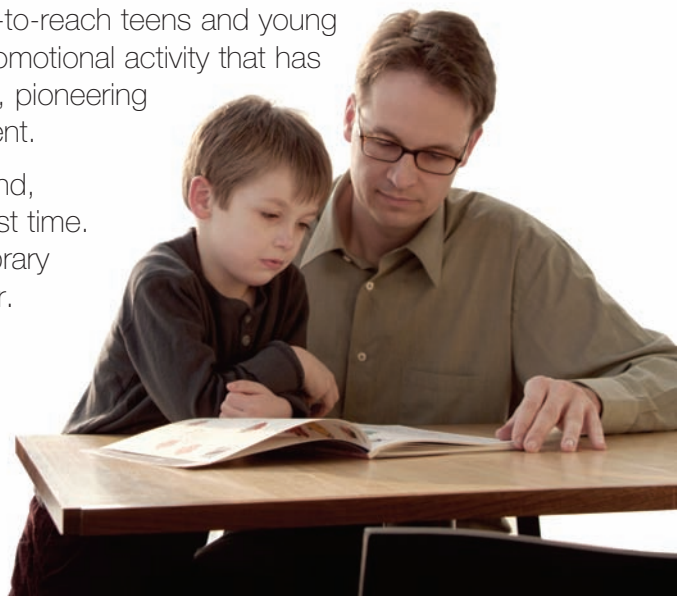
Children First Forum / National Museums Liverpool

Bringing together a range of Early Years providers, Children First succeeds in its aim of sharing expertise, exploring professional training and, ultimately, increasing the quality of children's development and learning opportunities. The Forum includes representatives from Sure Start networks, Foundation Stage teachers, artists, museums and libraries from across the sub-region. They work together to examine current and future opportunities for developing a skilled and motivated workforce, to celebrate the highest standards of creative practice, and to remind partners of why they are engaged in their work with children. The project's first year resulted in a conference and training programme and the team have ensured their longevity by producing a business plan for the coming years.

Get it Loud in Libraries / Lancaster Library

This project has succeeded in engaging and motivating hard-to-reach teens and young adults by designing a cutting-edge programme of exciting promotional activity that has included competitions, on-the-spot giveaways and, ultimately, pioneering live rock shows in the heart of the traditional library environment.

The project offers the community a fresh, vibrant approach and, in some cases, has led to people visiting the library for the first time. The development of a progressive, modern, media-friendly library image has ensured a rise in teen visitor levels across the year.



Helping Create Inclusive and Diverse Communities

Museums, libraries and archives help create and promote inclusive, sustainable and prosperous communities, and they play a key role in engaging with socially excluded individuals. By celebrating diversity and building on good practice, they offer new experiences and perspectives that change people's lives.

Diversity is an underpinning principle of community engagement. It encompasses the range of visible and non-visible differences that exist between people, including ethnicity and race, class, intellectual and physical ability, urban and rural living, faith and gender, sexuality and age. Celebrating diversity is about recognising, respecting and engaging with these differences.

Museums, libraries and archives provide a unique insight into the identities of individuals, and into the past, present and future of diverse communities. Their rich collections, varied activities and safe spaces engage and inspire individuals, strengthening communities and helping to build an informed society.



What Do You Want? The Art of Community Consultation / Bolton Libraries

Bolton Libraries are using creative and imaginative approaches when consulting with their diverse local community about plans to demolish an existing library and replace it with a new library building. By using a variety of artistic formats, users and non-users have developed a greater knowledge and understanding of libraries, and have been able to express their ideas, through creative and fun activities, about the types of services and facilities they want from their new library. These suggestions have been put forward to the project board for the new library building, and will be incorporated into the specification for the new library layout and facilities. Not only has the project team managed to succeed in uncovering what the community want by developing original methods of consulting, but they have also produced a toolkit for use by other authorities to assist in a range of library issues.

Homeless Families Play and Learning Project / Tameside Central Library

This Tameside Library project has focussed on developing services for a Homeless Persons Unit (HPU) with the aim of improving literacy levels and access opportunities for children living in temporary accommodation. The library developed a series of information packs for every child in the HPU and established a special book collection which was loaned to the children and families living there. An impressive programme of activities and events at the library and the HPU has ensured improvements in behaviour and school attendance, as well as literacy and numeracy levels.

Slave Trade Arts Memorial Project (STAMP) / Lancashire Museums

The STAMP project used the power of creative arts to address sometimes difficult and controversial issues. Fourteen dedicated artists worked with young people to uncover Lancaster's hidden history as England's fourth largest slaving port in the 18th Century. Using a mixture of artist-led activities, along with consultation, has ensured an open debate with the young people about the history, legacy and issues of contemporary slavery. The project is an example of true partnership working, and has received significant support from local people, schools, press and the council. It has resulted in a permanent memorial to those lost to the slave trade being erected in the city.

Making the North West a Great Place to Live, Work and Visit

Museums, libraries and archives contribute to the economic well-being and vitality of the North West. They are central to the knowledge economy and play an important role in enhancing the region's reputation as a centre of innovation and learning.

By providing access to information and rich collections they stimulate creativity and develop essential employability skills. They are a major contributor to the regional tourism industry and the exciting cultural life of the North West.

Recent research in the region proves that local communities support public funding for museums, libraries and archives, recognising their value in enhancing people's quality of life.



Creative Tension / Gallery Oldham

Four partner galleries in Oldham, Rochdale, Preston and Bolton succeeded in designing a unique touring exhibition, Creative Tension, aimed at increasing the regional and national profile of North West municipal galleries and their collections. The project is an excellent demonstration of the principle that the whole is greater than the sum of the parts, with teams from each of the galleries working collaboratively to develop their knowledge and expertise in areas such as conservation and marketing. Four collections were drawn together, including outstanding works by Royal Academy blockbusters, British Impressionists and artists associated with the Slade School. The touring exhibition has been complimented by a superb catalogue which is still selling well and is acting as a valuable legacy of the project for all partners, and the project has greatly increased visitor numbers to host venues.

Transforming Liverpool Museum into World Museum Liverpool / Liverpool Museum

The Liverpool Museum team significantly increased access to collections by re-opening galleries that had been closed to the public for over sixty years. Through extensive community consultation, they have ensured they meet the public's needs and have been able to considerably extend the variety of ways in which visitors engage with, and learn through, collections. Record-breaking visitor figures confirm their success in providing a world-class service to a diverse range of communities in the North West.

Enabling Homeless Men to Make Positive Changes in Their Lives / The Museum of Science and Industry in Manchester

The Museum of Science and Industry joined with Manchester College of Arts & Technology (MANCAT) and English Churches Housing Group (ECHG) to engage residents of four homeless hostels in learning activity. Following a ten-week course, the residents produced films, displayed at the museum and on the BBC Big Screen in Manchester, which gave viewers a unique insight into the lives of those affected by homelessness and drug addiction. By achieving accreditation, new skills and confidence, the men increased their employability, their potential to find housing and their ability to contribute to society.

Improving and Innovating

Museums, libraries and archives offer modern, user-focussed services and facilities which connect people to knowledge, information, creativity and inspiration.

They are rising to the challenge of modernisation by transforming their services, making them more accountable and efficient and by developing innovative work practices. They are improving their standards and are building a workforce which is fit for purpose, diverse and more representative of the communities they serve.

Museums, libraries and archives are instrumental in delivering on wider social and political agendas and can provide powerful learning, inclusion and participation opportunities to the widest range of audiences.

Collective Conversations / The Manchester Museum

This project clearly demonstrates that if museums want to modernise they need to listen to, and work, with their communities. The museum identified that despite its collections being of national significance under the Designation scheme, they had been relatively under-used by surrounding communities. Collective Conversations creates new ways for the public to engage directly with museum objects by involving them in 'conversations' about collections. It has successfully established inter-cultural dialogue and debate, and by embracing alternative perspectives, has created new ways of reaching audiences. Moreover, through round table discussion and outreach work, the museum staff themselves have increased their understanding and learning, enabling them to identify, document and interpret collections in a more meaningful way. In turn, it has challenged the notion of the curator as the font of all knowledge and has repositioned the user as not merely a passive consumer but as active agent.

Gurdeep Thiara / Curator of Community Engagement, The Manchester Museum

Since joining the team at The Manchester Museum, Gurdeep has been determined to understand not only how museums best serve communities, but the ethical questions that lie at the heart of such work. She has challenged the museum's assumptions in a strong, yet diplomatic way, and has played a significant role in ensuring its national reputation as a beacon of innovation. Gurdeep has been pivotal to the success of the Collective Conversations project, and, throughout all her work, has demonstrated a clear commitment to embed practices which improve access to collections, diversify the workforce and improve audiences' experiences.

Joining Forces to Deliver Cultural Services / Western Lake District Learning and Cultural Network

This network has brought together museums, libraries and archives to act as a forum to share ideas, experience and best practice, as well as providing a valuable tool in delivering lifelong learning in West Cumbria. Full commitment from cross-sector partners, regular attendance at network meetings and a genuine support for each other has meant the energy and impetus of the group has been maintained. This is a great example of cross-domain working, involving museums, libraries and archives, and it has already succeeded in supporting older learners in Cumbria and in delivering four Action Research projects to school pupils.

