

Family Friendly Resource Ideas

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If you're stuck for family friendly resource ideas then this case study may help. It outlines the year round, permanent provision newly implemented at three organisations who had families as a key target market. You'll find details about the resources along with findings from the qualitative evaluation which was undertaken to monitor the success of the implementation.

The Audience Agency is a not-for-profit organisation created out of the merger between All About Audiences, formerly Arts About Manchester, and Audiences London Plus in 2012.



Year round resources Evaluation

As part of the project the following three venues were given resources to help develop year round provision for families, which had been cited by our target market as a key incentive for making a visit.

In order to evaluate the success of this investment, we carried out some qualitative research amongst users:

1. Whitworth Art Gallery: Globetrotter Backpacks

The Whitworth Art Gallery took inspiration from the backpacks created by London's V&A Museum. They created "Globetrotter" backpacks to help families engage with the permanent collections in the Gallery, with interactive activities and paper based activities to help reinforce the experience of looking. When the packs were launched in July 1999, the Whitworth gathered some qualitative feedback from families:

"Activities were well thought out for each age group. Kept the children occupied. Made us look more closely." (parent)

"Great idea. There should be more things like this." (parent)

"This is a very good idea that made the day enjoyable and memorable. The children will want to come back again." (parent)

"It was fabulous – I loved it." (Dylan, 7)

"It was very good. Not boring – brill. I can't wait to come back." (Simone, 10)

"I thought it was brilliant and enjoyed it a lot and will love coming again." (Sara, 11)

AAM Evaluation results:

- 9 families were interviewed
- total 23 children,
- 9 children aged 5 or under
- All travelled by car to the Whitworth

Main reason for coming:

- 7 came specifically for the activities for children (knew there were things for kids to do)
- 1 came because free and likes to introduce kids to the arts (not reliant on special activities)
- 1 came to see the Ruskin exhibition (not reliant on activities)

Positive reaction to the backpacks:

- Object based activities rather than sheet of paper so more exciting
- Variety of activities
- Gave families a focus for the visit
- Visit was more indepth and everyone learnt more

- Occupied kids whilst adult able to spend more time looking around
- Each pack has different activities which encourages repeat visits
- Some activities were really good for the youngest kids who are unable to read (playdough, crayons and lego)
- “today has been lovely – we all played together with the activities and looked at the sculptures” (family with kids aged 3,2,12)
- made families look at things they wouldn’t normally look at
- a couple of families spent over 2 hours with the backpacks. Average length of stay with the packs is about 1 hour.
- Felt comfortable using them because so many other families using the packs throughout the gallery
- Most felt that the staff were helpful and welcoming. Others that they seemed unbothered
- If children finish at different times, the other gallery activities (ArtCart) help to occupy the others
- All ages loved the clothes and dressing up
- “all day my son’s been excited – his stomach’s been churning – looking forward to the backpacks.” Family visitor
- All said that they would be encouraged to visit other venues with similar resources
- “this is my favourite gallery in Manchester – the staff are very friendly. The Art Cart, backpacks and computer makes the visit easy.” (family visitor)

Areas for development:

- Although most found the pack easy to use some felt that the map could have been easier to navigate
- With lots of children it is difficult to organise the backpacks and be with all of them for the different activities
- Some found it difficult to understand the difference between activities on the sheet as opposed to those in the backpack.

“The backpacks have provided a permanent resource for family visitors which we can use alongside other one-off events to ensure that visitors always have opportunities to engage with collections. One of the great things about them is that the children often lead the adult round, and the activities mean that a whole family group become involved in exploring and discussing the artwork.” **(Emma Parsons, Marketing Officer, The Whitworth Art Gallery)**

2. Bury Art Gallery and Museum: “The Problem with Pictures”

The inspiration to develop a book had come from the Family Friendly steering group case study trips. Nottingham Castle Museum had a book available for families to read

together, based on a story around items in the collection. Bury Art Gallery and Museum came up with “The Problem with Pictures”. This picture book was devised and created by a local artist and local writer to help families engage with paintings in the gallery, particularly those from the Wrigley Collection. At the time of evaluation it had only been available in the gallery for a very short period therefore it was less easy for the venue to be able to assess its impact.

AAM Evaluation results:

- 9 families were interviewed
- 13 children
- 7 aged 5 or under

main reason for coming:

- many came to visit the library then decided to take in the gallery as well
- some were coming to Saturday Morning Art Club

Positive feedback:

- Helps you to explore the pictures
- It was funny
- Good introduction to pictures in the gallery
- Made you want to see the characters for real in the paintings
- Good introduction for kids coming to galleries
- Enjoyed the pictures in the book
- Enjoyed the characterful lettering
- Would buy it if on sale
- Very clear and easy to use
- Child wanted to copy the pictures so used materials from Art Trolley and that led to more interest in the paintings
- It was good to pick out architectural features in the town as that keeps the book alive in your head as you leave the gallery
- Child wasn't bores or bothered about mum nagging to keep up or for wandering off as was engrossed in the book.

Areas for development/improvement

- Doesn't engage younger children – appeals to children over 7. Pictures too abstract and story too old for under 5s therefore doesn't encourage family interaction.
- Suggestions of friendly character in book to guide children around – character to appear next to paintings in gallery to make it easier to match pictures in book to the paintings
- There needs to be other references to the book throughout the gallery in order to make the link between book characters and paintings.

3. Pump House People's History Museum: Search Engine

The “Search Engine” activity trolley was created to help families explore the museum together. This is housed in the permanent galleries and has portable folding stools for families take with them, as well as paper and pencil based activities to lead you around the museum.

AAM Evaluation results:

- 9 families were interviewed
- 23 children
- 6 families came on public transport

Positive feedback:

- “It was good that there was something for the children at this point because they didn’t find the video interesting and we thought the museum might not be suitable.”
- The worksheets kept them interested for ages.
- It got us all talking and working together
- It was easy to use
- The kids got involved and had to ;’use their heads’.
- It didn’t feel like a museum
- ‘pleasantly surprised’!
- it gave the kids a focus to their visit
- the staff are lovely – came over and explained and helped
- appeals to all ages (up to early teens)
- We stayed longer than I expected – we’re all hungry now!
- The staff spent lots of time with us and were very helpful
- It’s a cheap day out for 6

Areas for improvement/development

- The activities are too similar (paper and pencil based)
- Had expected it to be a computer as the name suggests
- Should incorporate more object based activity
- Would like costume, audio guides and cameras to enjoy the visit more
- At first was a bit confusing with the numbers on the floor corresponding with the activities
- Families want to know that on a return visit they will find different activities
- Wanted more questions and quizzes in the displays to encourage more discussion
- Would like to have activities that relate to the temporary exhibitions
- It’s a bit too much like school – perhaps should be more fun

Pump House

“The Search Engine is crucial for families; it allows the whole family to discover lots of interesting ways to explore the museum [and] families are spending more time when they visit – up to 3 hours! [It] has provided a voice for our attendant staff. The Front of House team feel empowered by it. The Search Engine has acted as a trial for future planned interactives and allowed discussion to take place re design and positioning.”

**Paula Robinson, Marketing Officer,
Pump House People’s History Museum**