

Family Friendly Case Study: The Herbert Art Gallery



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The Herbert Art Gallery and Museum has re-opened its doors after three years of extensive redevelopment. This has seen a fresh approach to exhibitions and creative programming along with the creation of brand new galleries and three education spaces. We hope this change will encourage others to recognise our museum as a contemporary and exciting place to visit where they will engage with the collection and local heritage.

Although large physical alterations have occurred within our organisation, priority was always to ensure that we remained accessible and family friendly to all, during the partial gallery closure and now after the reopening and this was made possible through small but significant changes.

One of our aims was to provide information for our family and school groups prior to their visit. If our audience had greater insight into what museums are about, this in turn would give them greater confidence in their visit. The best way to do this was through our website where we have launched an interactive game. The player enters a 'Collections Store' and through the game that follows, are introduced to the idea of what a museum is, what sorts of things are collected and why, along with the different roles within a museum; helping to answer some of the difficult questions that can make some audiences apprehensive about visiting.

Our next step was to make family visitors feel informed on arrival and we decided a good way to ensure this was through a family guide. The key to the guide was that it was visually appealing for younger visitor and therefore picked up by their adults. We found an appropriate way to make this work was to use a friendly and attractive character/ mascot, that not only looked fun but at the same time summarised and was relevant to what the Herbert Museum is about and where its was heading.

The guide identifies in brief, what each gallery offers for family groups, particularly focusing on hands on and interactive experiences and can help them plan and be in control of their route and visit. It also provides practical information including a map, location of the toilets, lift and café. In addition as we felt that evaluation was an important element to best practice, we are using a feedback form within the family guide as a way to obtain this information. A free sticker and colouring sheet are used as an incentive for the groups to return a completed feedback form. Although a new addition to our family friendly programme, the guide is already proving very successful and is providing some useful feedback.

Although due to the new fit out, our exhibitions offer tactile and hands on experiences, we are expecting to implement additional hands on experiences that may take a more temporary and changeable form such as explorer bags, art trolleys, puzzles and quizzes and we are keen to steer away from the use of paper and clipboards and allow them to enter into a trail where they can physically participate and experience, rather than write

down answers. We also believe that one of the key points in our family friendly offer is that a small token of the visit can be taken away with them; from a small colouring or sticker sheet, to a puppet made during a craft activity workshop.

Finally, we have found that family groups don't always need to know the finite details of a family event; providing there is consistency in when and where they occur, they are happy to turn up on the day knowing that there will always be something suitable for them.

In the future we hope that our museum will continue to push forward our new mascot, so it becomes further utilised as a recognisable symbol that is associated with what is suitable and available for our family audience e.g. used on in-house signage and marketing and external literature. In addition, through outreach and inclusion projects with targeted family groups, we are able to continually evaluate our family friendly suitability. A family friendly representative is also involved with creative programming.

We are currently participating in a training programme supported by Renaissance in the Regions and Warwickshire and Solihull Council, with an aim to help us (along with other museums in the region) re-audit our museum from a family friendly and early years perspective which will help us to make informed decision about family content and practicalities and also will help us begin the process of introducing more suitable food in our café and a more varied and suitable products in our shop.