

Case Study



Developing new audiences for libraries



Image: Eric MacLennan Journey to the Centre of Your Heart

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Transported is a strategic community-focused programme which aims to get more people in Boston Borough and South Holland enjoying and participating in arts activities.

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Background

Transported's Journey to the Centre of Your Heart

About the project

Transported is a strategic community-focused programme which aims to get more people in Boston Borough and South Holland enjoying and participating in arts activities. It is funded by the Creative People and Places fund from Arts Council England.

As part of the second phase of the project, Transported had eleven different strands of arts activity including one working with Lincolnshire County Council Library Service entitled Open Book.

Transported was keen to work in libraries as community hubs which offered opportunities beyond ordinary library use. Library Managers saw an opportunity to do something different at a difficult time for the library service itself.

The artist, Eric MacLennan, had just completed a piece for Birmingham Library. He had already developed some ideas, inspired by the philosophy of Xavier de Maistre - looking at the everyday so it's extraordinary and new, and even tiny journeys, with the outlook of a great explorer, are filled with discovery and surprise!

Objectives

- Engaging library service users in the arts
- Bringing new audiences into libraries through the arts
- Introducing the libraries as arts venues and community hubs
- Empowering the staff at the libraries to want to carry on bringing more arts experiences into the libraries
- Empowering the library users to want to carry on bringing more arts experiences into the libraries
- Offering one-to-one arts experiences to the public for free

Target Audience

- Library service users in Boston Borough and South Holland
- General public in Boston Borough and South Holland
- Library staff

The Journey

Transported appointed an artist who spent a week of research and development time in the libraries involved in the project.

Following that there were two weeks of performances in five libraries across two districts.

Visitors were taken in a 'warm and gentle way' to observe the performances before they decided whether they wanted to participate.

There were three different pieces visitors could choose to experience:

1. Suitcase - a chance for people to look at everyday objects chosen and/or offered by previous audience members
2. Journey to the Centre of your Heart - a 14 yard journey across the library involving different encounters and experiences along the way
3. A 'spoof' lecture - a short history of the fork inspired by the least borrowed book in Lincolnshire!

Library staff were particularly instrumental in supporting performances and in some cases also participating.

Outcomes

- The performances were actively welcomed by the library staff
- One-to-one experiences were offered to the public free of charge
- It offered something which is quite innovative and experimental to people who have no preconceptions
- The project offered the chance to connect for people, especially those who might be ignored in society like some older people
- From a library perspective, it helped provide an alternative focus at a time when the library service itself had been under great strain and disruption
- It also showed that the library can offer a wider service and support its customers in different ways

Conclusions

The project featured one-to-one pieces about depth rather than audience numbers.

Nevertheless, the numbers were very positive: 508 people attended the performances. This included a wide spread of ages but the majority were aged between 54 and 65.

For 80% of attendees this was a new activity. 83% would recommend it to others. The project's objectives were achieved.

Another library piece called BookWorms is scheduled to tour libraries in June 2015 and other events are also taking place in libraries between July and November 2015.

The artist has been commissioned (beyond Transported) to make an installation, A Voyage Around My Bedroom, as a result of this work. He has also taken the work that he developed for Transported to other audiences.

Challenges

- Travelling between libraries on one day was logistically difficult
- Where a library is volunteer run, it's harder for them to offer support since no one has authority to make decisions
- Some of the work was challenging for some library users, but Transported wanted to take this risk

Discoveries

- Time for research and development is important
- Knowledge of the support team on the practicalities of site specific work is important

Developments

- The project could have been extended to include school visits, as well as involving younger children with parents after school

Find out more

A Journey to the Centre of Your Heart is featured in Open Book film:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6qn24s4JjcU>

A full gallery showcasing pictures from the project is available at:

<http://www.transportedart.com/gallery/a-journey-to-the-centre-of-your-heart/>