



Family Arts Standards

with Family and Childcare Trust

The Family Arts Campaign and the Family & Childcare Trust have developed the Family Arts Standards to address a need for guidance on how best to welcome families to arts organisations. This case study is part of a series that supports the Family Arts Standards and accompanying guidance for arts organisations. To find out more about the Family Arts Standards and how to implement them visit familyarts.co.uk/family-arts-standards.



Delivering sessions for under-fives - Play Days at the Herbert Art Gallery & Museum

Play Days are part of the Herbert Art Gallery & Museum's award-winning family offer. They aim to encourage creativity in early years through play in a safe, stimulating and imaginative environment.

The Play Days workshops use our Studio space to create an informal play environment for children aged 1-3 years. The space is set up with provocations to stimulate play using multisensory and open-ended resources. These materials are familiar but presented in an unpredictable way to encourage new responses. We ask that the children lead their own play through exploration of the materials, with parents and museum staff helping to facilitate play rather than dictating it.

Throughout these sessions we aim to take the idea of play back to basics, demonstrating that high-cost complex toys are not always required as a source of learning. The activities show parents new and inexpensive ways of playing back at home, and suggest that the packaging that a toy comes in can offer more options and longevity for imagination to thrive.

Play Days are an adaptation of our previous early years Art Play sessions which, although successful, could be very time consuming to set up. The space we used also meant that numbers were limited. Through the new Play Days sessions we hoped to develop a more efficient way of working. A shorter set-up time and higher footfall would not only help us to achieve our core learning objectives in working with this audience, but would benefit the museum by attracting new visitors and encouraging them to engage with the building as a whole.



What went well...

- This session provided the perfect opportunity to engage quite a niche (but potentially huge) audience with the museum in a positive and rewarding way. The attendance was very high, showing the interest in this type of session.
- Marketing was key in attracting significant numbers of families to attend this first event. The event was featured in our Winter 'What's On' guide which was distributed to key postcodes regionally, as well as on our fortnightly email newsletters and a small piece in the local press, but the real impact came from the use of Facebook.



- We posted about the event on Facebook one week before it was due to happen – the post took the form of a representative photograph with some text about the event and a link to our website. We spent a grand total of £12 on 'boosting' the post, targeting 'fans and friends of fans' of the Herbert. At that time we had around 4,000 fans of our Facebook page. We found that parents shared the photo through their own Facebook pages (40 shares) as well as tagging their friends in comments to draw each others' attention to the event.
- In total the post reached 8,004 people – roughly double the amount of people who already 'liked' our page. We spoke to many of the parents who attended the events and 50% of them had either found out about the event through Facebook or 'word of mouth'. 33% of the attendees had never visited the Herbert before.
- The drop-in style of the workshops worked particularly well for this age group as it provides flexibility for the adults and children – accommodating the need to dash off and do a nappy change or leave when the child is ready. We have also found that bookable sessions can act as a barrier for parents, who feel the session will be too formal, or that they might have to cancel if something crops up on the day, which with early years it inevitably does!
- Other benefits include the secondary income created from the increased number of visitors, potentially spending in the shop and café or making donations. Furthermore the participants often act as advocates for the museum, bringing back family and friends on another visit and increasing footfall.





What didn't go so well...

- The drop-in nature of the workshops may create issues as it is hard to predict the attendance. In this instance it was very high, which may have resulted in a negative experience for some children and adults who prefer a less busy environment. To address this, in our next round of marketing we plan to highlight the quieter nature of the afternoon session.
- It was also harder to push for donations at the end of the session because it was quite hectic, so we intend to work on different incentives for spending such as giving out discount vouchers for the shop and café.

Key points when running this kind of event

- The following are key components of the session and help to show families that you value them as an audience.
- Safety is paramount in these sessions, and a risk assessment is an essential tool, not just a formality.
- Keep them informal/drop-in but have a plan B if numbers are high. For those who were asked to wait, we extended the session so that they still had the chance to take part. We are also clear in our marketing that this might be the case.
- Staffing is key - you don't need a large number of staff or volunteers to run the sessions but they do need to understand what you are trying to achieve. The staff must be intuitive, recognising when participants require a few more suggestions on how to play with the materials and providing support in understanding the offer. And also knowing when to stand back. We found it best to have an additional member of staff on the door to welcome and direct buggies.
- From our experience, social media is a vital tool in reaching out to parents, who seem keen to share these types of events within their networks of other parents and come along together as a group. We also found it very useful to have members of the marketing team available to speak to parents on their way in to the event, to find out how they had heard about it and sign them up to our email list.

Ultimately, Play Days show our family visitors that we are committed to them from the outset, which in turn ensures a loyal audience for the Herbert in the future.