



Case studies: How can the arts and creativity support people who are shielding or vulnerable during Covid-19?

Project: Slavery Remembrance Day

Organisation: National Museums Liverpool

Region: North West England

Introduction

NML and the RESPECT group, following a commissioned piece by Nasra Elliott listening to members of Liverpool's Black communities through a series of community conversation workshops, aspired to achieve deeper, and more collaborative community participation. The project brought to the fore ongoing issues of racism and discrimination facing communities of diverse heritage, particularly BME, during the Covid-19 pandemic and the racist murder of George Floyd. Addressing the imbalance of power between the museum and the community the project was to follow an approach which identified key components of the event which had collaborative commissioned and co-curated outputs. The project enabled both the museum and the communities it wished to engage with further, to identify new ways of working, and facilitating dialogue around important issues and events.

The lockdown situation created a whole new set of unpredictable outcomes, and the move to a digital event meant new ways of engaging with audiences. This actually created opportunities for engaging with international communities as well as local audiences through the online approach, which was particularly pertinent given the global relevance of racism and health inequalities.

Funders

National Museums Liverpool

Liverpool City Council

Who is it for?

The programme aimed to reach young people and adults from diverse backgrounds, particularly communities from BAME backgrounds. The annual Slavery Remembrance Day is held on 23 August. On this day in 1791 an uprising of enslaved Africans on the island of Saint Domingue (modern Haiti) began. The date has been designated by UNESCO as Slavery Remembrance Day, a reminder that enslaved Africans were the main agents of their own liberation.

This year was of particular importance given the growing momentum of Black Lives Matter following the racist murder of George Floyd in the US, and the impact of Covid-19 on communities of BME heritage. The project was designed to explore and debate topics including how racial inequalities still persist for BME communities, and how the commemorations were of particular importance this year to acknowledge a major period of trauma and injustice in world history, which is too often forgotten. The community led focus of the project enabled communities and the museum to remember and reflect upon the millions of lives that were stolen through enslavement, and the lives still being lost as a result of racism and health inequalities.

What outcomes were/are you aiming for?

- Combatting isolation
- Combatting inequalities highlighted through Covid 19 risk for communities of diverse BME heritage.
- Personal experiences of healing and empowerment
- Greater trust between communities and NML
- Shared ownership and interpretation of Black history and traumatic histories.

Where is it happening?

Liverpool, Liverpool City Region, Northwest

Are you working in partnership?

The project is led by the International Slavery Museum (ISM), supported by external partners including local schools, youth groups, commissioned practitioners (Nasra Elliott), Culture Liverpool and the Respect group – an advisory group consisting of members of the Liverpool Black community and businesses, non-government agencies i.e. the Anthony Walker Foundation, Crawford House and Local Councillors championing community cohesion and city safe strategies. Other arts/cultural providers involved in the planning and delivery include local organisations such as Writing on the Wall (Respect group members) and Africa Oye.

Utilising feedback, insights and aspirations gathered from community conversation sessions held in January 2020, the programme was moved online with the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic and lockdown. With an aspiration to involve more community collaboration and co-production, the project aspired to learn from past programme challenges and successes and define a more authentic and embedded community led approach.

How many people took/are taking part?

Community conversations workshops led by Nasra Elliott – 37 participants
Expected participants for events running 21-23 August – 1,000+

For how long has it been happening?

Pre lockdown community conversations took place in January 2020. Following the onset of the Covid 19 pandemic and lockdown, and the growing realisation that diverse communities of BME heritage are at greater risk of health, social and economic inequality, the planning for the project to be delivered online began in March 2020 and is ongoing until implementation on 23 August 2020.

What were/are the main outputs?

Enhanced pre-Slavery Remembrance Day engagement with schools to generate interest with young people and share history relevant to the project (Understanding Transatlantic Slavery handling, Toussaint Louverture activist session)

Different methods and approaches to sharing information about the importance and significance of 23 August, empowerment through exploring the strength, resilience, resistance and experiences of enslaved people related to transatlantic slavery

Collaboration with community stakeholders to develop marketing materials that are embedded with information including a digital map which highlighted key sites in the Liverpool connected to slavery and its legacies. This was co-created with local historian – Laurence Westgaph.

Online lectures and Q&A with Professor Stephen Small and Zita Holbourne creating an online platform to have more community voices included.

Short film exploring historical and contextual information about a traditional Libation ceremony, co-created with local Chief Angus Chukeumeka, and young people from a local Comprehensive School.

Evaluation:

There is feedback from the community conversations which took place before the pandemic and lockdown. These findings highlight the importance of greater transparency and an equal balance of power between community stakeholders and the museum itself. These themes were even more importance once the pandemic took hold, and the racist murder of George Floyd, with the themes of ongoing racial inequality and racism very much coming to the fore of the project content and outcomes.

There is an evaluation methodology being developed to gather feedback on the events when they are live in August.

The community conversation key findings can be shared publicly and will be shared on the liverpoolmuseums.org.uk website.

What have been the challenges and successes for you?

The successes have been the increased visibility of the museum listening to communities, through the conversation workshops, and creative commissions to produce the event outputs.

The establishment of a Task force which included members of the community and museum colleagues, helped to create a more equal platform to plan and deliver the project outcomes.

Challenges have been the pressures facing both the museum and community organisations and partners involved in the planning due to the pandemic, financial pressures, and delivery teams being furloughed.

Further information

<https://www.liverpoolmuseums.org.uk/slavery-remembrance-day>

National Museums Liverpool is the only national museum service in England based outside London. We have played a pivotal role in the cultural, social and educational life of Liverpool and the North West for more than 150 years. Our venues include World Museum, Walker Art Gallery, Sudley House, Maritime Museum, Museum of Liverpool, International Slavery Museum and the Lady Lever Art Gallery.