

LONDON VOICES

Year Two EVALUATION REPORT

“As last year, my kids and me have really enjoyed the warm moments at the House or at School. We really feel we are doing and sharing something exceptional, with exceptional people”.



The evaluation is designed to capture and distil important learning, to measure changes and developments for the property staff and volunteers, and the families, to celebrate achievements and to name challenges. The findings of the evaluation will feed into volunteer and staff training, and will influence London-wide and national thinking and practice, with the aim of making National Trust properties more family friendly.

London Voices is a three-year project, funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund, to connect four National Trust Properties in London with their local communities.

At the heart of London Voices are creative projects with local families which explore their thoughts and feelings about these special places. The central art form in Year Two was puppetry, in many forms. In addition to the projects are programmes of training for staff and

volunteers, the use of new cultural research and additional events focusing on families. This all feeds into thinking about and realising ways to open up the property's resources to families, using creative methodologies.

In Year Two

5 creative projects were led at **4 properties** with **162 participants**

3 new artists joined the project

40 events were supported by London Voices

which reached **2074 adults** and **2977 children**

A total of **342 staff and volunteers** participated in the training programme

58 new volunteers were recruited

72 volunteers participated overall

2105 adults and **3650 children** were involved in the project overall

- The project continued to be characterised by dialogue and consultation.
- The exploration of creative ways of working was enhanced by new artists, working in a variety of ways.
- Specific skills, techniques and ways of working were used in other aspects of the properties' work and offers for families diversified and grew.
- Existing partnerships with schools and other organisations continued to develop.
- The outcomes of the creative projects were recorded and celebrated.
- Organisational changes that could enhance the experience of families continued to be identified and their viability tested.

Ham House & Gardens, working with Meadlands School

Osterley Park and House, working with Spring Grove School and Berkeley School

Morden Hall Park, working with Liberty School

Sutton House, working with Millfields Community School

Lead artists: Zannie Fraser, Diana Olutunmogun, Jane Porter, Estelle Rosenfeld

How did **training** help to influence change and development for staff and volunteers?

“The training builds goodwill, dialogue. If you let people in, give access and responsibility, they respond”

National Trust Volunteer

Staff and volunteers from all four properties participated in training in Diversity, a mainstream training event offered nationally, and in Family Audiences, based on the experience of London Voices and tailored to each property. Attendance was good and satisfaction levels generally high.

Added value: Volunteers commented that the training gave them opportunities not offered within their induction to the property.

Reflection and action: At the Family Audiences training, participants developed a Family Charter for each property, establishing generic and property specific guidelines. These are now being shared with whole staff and volunteer teams. Participants commented on the value of the process of doing this, as well as the outcome itself.

Exploring issues: The Diversity training offered more experienced staff and volunteers a chance to build on existing knowledge and experience and those less experienced to begin to increase knowledge and awareness. As a National Trust training package it also enabled London Voices to work within the organisation’s training objectives.

Ways of learning: Many respondents commented on the need for a balance between focused training events and learning from participating, observing and doing. Many identified contact with the London Voices project as a rich learning experience and source of ideas and skills.

Communicating Family Learning: Family Learning is sometimes understood to be synonymous with activities for children. The London Voices team were able to clearly articulate their ambition for family members to learn together, and to be able to include under-5s.

Contact with the project: Many respondents commented on the value of hearing directly from London Voices participants talking about their experiences through the filmed interviews.

From the feedback we have learned that...

- Training can be generic, but must address the particularities of the property.
- Training needs to include dialogue, practical activities and social time. Staff are seen to be extremely time pressured and there is a huge value in taking time to reflect and share practical experience with volunteers, who are the face of the property to visitors.
- Much important training happens through involvement and in observing good practice. These opportunities for action plus reflection must be offered.

“When we did the training day I hadn’t worked with London Voices yet and I wanted more ‘how to’ stuff. Now that I’ve worked with them I could do the thinking about it much better”

Volunteer

- In terms of the welcome of diverse audiences, including children and local families, clearly articulated standards may need to be created, which provide a benchmark for acceptable standards. Staff and volunteers can be encouraged to ‘own’ standards and to understand them when they are given time and an opportunity to explore them. Training days offer this.

What were the key benefits for the properties of using a **creative approach** when working with families?

“There’s no way you can deliver straight information to such a wide age range. The creative approach makes them feel excited about the place, want to come back, want to stay involved”

Project Artist

The creative projects, the family events and the consultations used participatory, creative approaches to engage families working together.

Staff at the properties identified¹ that a creative approach to the work with families could provide a unique and deep source of enjoyment; allow people to explore their values, meanings and dreams; increase people’s confidence and sense of self-worth. They also reported that the techniques used and the families’ responses refreshed and renewed their own understanding of the property and influenced other offers.

Families told us:

“I visited before but I just drifted through. Now I really look”

“A fantastic team who has gone all out to make history fun, enjoyable, tasty”

“We are doing and sharing something exceptional, with exceptional people”

“There is always something new to discover”

The project artists told us:

“There’s a craving among the parents to do something creative for themselves!”

“The families we worked with cannot really look at the house until they feel comfortable, relaxed and accepted”

“We can support them so that creating something themselves doesn’t produce pressure, but aspiration”

The teachers told us:

“The National Trust is a much more approachable and creative organisation than I had realised”

“The property has opened up to the school and parents alike – the families are aware of its significance and feel welcome”

“The encouragement of imagination is a great gift to a family”

We have learned that...

- A creative approach can engage the whole family together. It provides a playful approach within a secure structure of easily accessible creative skills, which all ages can access.
- This way of working invited a real dialogue with the property. Families could share their own experiences and interact imaginatively with their surroundings. This created deeper engagement and connection.
- A project, with regular sessions and a sense of direction, provided families with a sense of involvement, achievement and connection with the property.
- Even where there were concerns about the tension between conservation and enjoyment, creative activities were successful with the support of the staff.
- Staff and volunteers learned about the property (new ways of approaching and seeing the familiar), and about the family audience from the participants’ imaginative responses.

¹ Using the framework of Francois Matarasso’s investigation of the social impacts of participatory arts (*Use or Ornament? The Social Impact of Participation in the Arts* – London: Comedia, 1997).

How did the **cultural research** undertaken resource and inform the creative projects by providing a broader social and cultural understanding?

“New research and ideas about our properties are vital for our understanding of their ever-shifting histories”

London Voices Project Officer

In Year One of the project, research was carried out with the aim of expanding knowledge and understanding of the four properties by placing them in their world context. The findings were available to staff and artists to inform the Year Two projects.

Valuing process and outcome: Feedback from those involved in the research, including volunteers from each property, tells us that the process of research was as beneficial as the outcome. It reminded us that the stories of each site are not fixed, but that more can be revealed.

Informing the creative projects: Artists and property staff told us of the benefits of the new research, which opened up some less explored aspects of the properties. They were also clear that the research document needed to be mediated before it was presented to the families and described looking for key stories, particular objects or rooms which reflected the new stories and connections with the lives of the families.

Learning from the families: It proved important to listen to and follow the families' interests. For example, a list of the names of workers at the Snuff Mill in Morden Hall Park provided the basis for creative work and a sense of connection for local people, although the project team had not initially expected much response to it. This highlights the need to find a level of interpretation of material that allows families, or other visitors, to make choices about what interests them. The benefit of including this element in London Voices is that the research was immediately being interrogated and explored by the project team and the families.

The artist's eye: In all four properties, staff and volunteers valued the particular skills that the artists brought in terms of identifying the material that would best provide a creative arena for whole families to work on.

Continuing history: Projects provided opportunities for encounters with the contemporary history of the house, including hearing the personal experiences of staff, volunteers and families. These deepen a sense of connection between local families and the property.

We have learned that...

- Signalling ongoing research about a property creates energy and interest.
- There are facets of the properties that can enable new connections, locally and internationally.
- Artists can help us to unlock the potential in the stories of our properties.
- The value of the research for the properties goes beyond its application in London Voices.
- This initiative lays foundations for future 'hidden histories' work.

How did London Voices work together with families to develop **resources**?

“Come to my party! It is going to be in Osterley Park!”

Young Participant

Each property sought to further develop the ways in which it can be interpreted by families, through the creative projects, through input from teachers and partner organisations and through direct consultation with artists and families.

The project model offered contact with a small group of families over a fixed period of time. This gave an opportunity for a relationship to grow, between the people involved and between the families and the place, which provided a good foundation for dialogue.

The presence of National Trust staff in the sessions gave them direct access to observation of the ways in which the families interacted with the property, as well as opportunities for dialogue with the families. All the key property staff reported learning new things about the property and what interested people in it through participation in the sessions.

Some property staff expressed anxiety about managing the family's **expectations** following consultation.

Access to the properties remained an issue, particularly in relation to families for whom the cost of membership was a barrier. This issue is being explored within London Voices and centrally.

Our survey on **'family friendliness'** at the four properties, undertaken on both Family Days and ordinary open days, revealed a close association between the presence of activities and the sense of the house being family friendly. The top three signifiers of family friendliness were: activities for children; opportunities to touch, feel, taste and smell for all ages; entertainment, such as music, storytelling or puppets.

The same survey revealed that more than 50% of respondents preferred **talking to a person** when they wanted to find out more about the property. 25% liked to be able to read background information and 8% audio or video.

Direct consultation with families revealed a wealth of ideas, skills and openness to understanding the issues that impact on running a property. Some properties have consulted with the London Voices families for other aspects of their work.

We have learned that...

- Consulting the families we have got to know through the projects is valuable as a process and to achieve outcomes.
- There are many ways in which families can be involved in developing resources; they can steer, fabricate, observe, design, test, advise and disseminate – dependent on the property and the interpretation.
- Feedback and consultation should be captured in structured and unstructured ways.
- Consultation with families demands a level of transparency from properties about the workings of the organisation.
- Interpretation resources should be complementary to, but not replace, personal contact.

What, within the project, have we learned from new and existing volunteers about **developing and enriching volunteer roles**?

“London Voices has enriched my experience as a volunteer. I have loved the idea of interpreting the house to adults who have never been before and for children. It’s nice for them to learn together. It brought enthusiasm and fun, not talking down to people but talking with them”

National Trust Volunteer

Existing National Trust volunteers became involved in the projects – some as scribes, recording what happened in each session; others in support of the activities. In addition, volunteer placements were recruited from partner Further Education establishments, and other interested individuals also became involved.

Placements brought in new people, who told us they might not otherwise have considered volunteering for the National Trust. This modelled a new way of volunteering that can be mutually beneficial, and the partnerships established have the potential to continue longer term.

Existing volunteers told us that they had added to their skills, both through the training offered and through direct involvement on the creative projects and family days. They also told us they were able to show skills that had not previously been asked of them.

Volunteers involved in the creative projects all reported the value of building up a relationship with a group of people, very different to the experience of stewarding on an open day with a majority of one-off visits.

Volunteers participated in post-session **feedback** and on working parties, so were able to directly contribute to the development of the project.

Finding opportunities for **family volunteering** became a possibility, with family volunteering days at two properties and other options being explored.

Monitoring the diversity of the volunteer force remained problematic, as existing volunteers are not currently asked to supply information on age, gender, ethnicity or disability.

Reaching the large volunteer force poses a challenge and the benefits are likely to be the greatest for the volunteers with the most direct contact with the families.

We have learned...

- The importance of investing in the volunteer force.
- Without monitoring, the Trust will not be able to demonstrate diversification of its volunteer force.
- While many volunteers are open to change and development, there need to be clear guidelines (like the Family Charters) to indicate acceptable standards.
- The learning on London Voices can feed in to the Visitor Service Volunteers Project and to plans for the 2012 Cultural Olympiad youth volunteering initiative.

“You want a volunteer base that represents the community. You want them to be able to engage, understand, anticipate people’s need. That then encourages more people to be volunteers. How do you get that started?”

National Trust Volunteer

What have we found most effective in **sharing lessons learned**?

“What you show to the public, the art work or the interpretation materials, they show the quality of the project, the quality of the experience”

Learning & Community Manager

Identifying lessons learned is a vital strand of the external evaluation. Importantly, the learning identified is fed back and discussed within properties and with the London Voices team to ensure its part in the development of the project and to maximise its impact on the Trust London-wide and nationally. Dissemination of the lessons takes place through training, through working parties, through press and print. It is shared at London-wide and national meetings and also at outside events.

Action plus reflection are proving to be key in order to embed learning (e.g. participation in sessions plus a chance to reflect and name learning)

An understanding of the creative projects as a piece of **action research** has helped the properties to extract learning from successes and from challenges and to be more experimental.

All the key property staff reported ways in which **lessons learned** had influenced other work (e.g. incorporating visits by property staff to a school, as well as receiving visits from the school; consulting London Voices families in the development of a play area, feeding lessons learned into the development of a piece of new interpretation).

The high quality of print produced by the London Voices team demonstrates the value being accorded to the work.

Banners promoting family visits and volunteering opportunities have been created for each London property. In addition to acting as wider publicity, these commit the properties to implementing lessons learned.

Media contacts have been developed both internally and externally, although care needs to be taken that the project is represented authentically (family learning shouldn't just be represented by pictures of children).

An exit strategy has been created, and has been considered with a group of senior National Trust staff, in order that ways of sharing lessons learned can be embedded and taken up more widely where appropriate.

We have learned...

- Staff need to be present and involved in the projects in order to maximise the learning.
- Embedding the learning in each property can be supported by training and experiential learning.
- Key property staff recognised that the high level of reflection about this project had yielded dividends in terms of extracting learning and effecting change.
- Models of engagement need to be developed in order to communicate the learning to other properties.
- Both the intensive project model and a range of other ways of connecting to the property (one-off events, volunteering etc.) are needed to engage local families.

Participation, collaboration, self-determination

As a three-year project, London Voices is intended to be a process through which the core team gradually hand over responsibility to the properties. We have identified this as a journey from participation, to collaboration through to self-determination.

To enable this process, the London Voices team have...

- Written a clear and practical exit strategy.
- Identified all the key tasks involved in the project management and met with properties to identify which aspects can be handed over.
- Consulted with working parties at each property to identify the ways in which the learning from the project can be embedded.
- Met with senior National Trust staff to share lessons learned and to plan strategy for the remaining year.

All four properties considered themselves to have reached the collaborative phase in Year Two. However, not all were confident of moving forward to self-determination, for reasons of capacity and changes in personnel in the properties and in partner organisations. Year Three will give properties the opportunity to take on more responsibility for project management tasks and also to reflect on the legacy of the project in terms of their own permanent offer for families.

Property staff, artists, teachers and families were unanimous in their praise for the expertise, enthusiasm and creativity of the core team, and of the development and management of the programme, which allowed adequate time and resources to prioritise reflection and learning.

Looking ahead ...

In Year Three, five new creative projects with the same partner schools are currently in preparation, alongside other events for families.

Permanent interpretation is being developed, with the families as consultants, designers, makers and testers. Training will be offered to staff and volunteers to allow for full understanding of the potential of the interpretation.

The principles of participatory family learning will be identified, through a refining of the principles identified in Year One, in order to be shared.

Models of engagement will be clearly articulated, capturing the most successful ways of working that have been tried and tested.

The project will be featured in The National Trust magazine in 2009, taking it out to a much wider audience of Trust supporters.

A programme of dissemination is planned, both during the project and following the production of the final evaluation report.