



Ellen Fenton, Norton Priory Museum Trust Workforce Development Grant: Attended GEM Conference

Overview

A grant of £300 was provided to fund conference fees at the annual GEM conference 'Every Audience Matters' in September 2007.

Context

My previous role as Volunteer Development Officer had at its core a focus on social inclusion through the provision of outreach and volunteering opportunities in an area of high social and economic deprivation. Following an internal restructure, I have been appointed Learning and Community Manager, a move which has seen volunteering, education and outreach become integrated into one department.

My role is focussed on involving people in their heritage, through education sessions, courses, events, volunteering and an outreach programme. We work with diverse audiences, from very different age groups and with quite specific support needs. One of the challenges is looking at not only how to open up the organisation and facilitate learning through events, outreach, education, volunteering and training, but also how to incorporate all of these different viewpoints to become a more diverse organisation.

Activity

Over the three days I attended a number of talks, workshops and visits including:

- **Professor Eilean Hooper-Greenhill** *Measuring learning in museums: the research and its findings*
- **NIACE** – *Museums & adult learning*
- **Katy Archer**, NCCL Galleries of Justice *Engaging and inspiring the most hard-to-reach and challenging audiences e.g. young offenders and at-risk groups*
- **Dr Richard Sandell**, *How can museums shape the ways in which diverse audiences respond to, think and talk about different social and cultural groups?*
- **Deborah Cox**, Northampton Museum & Art Gallery *Engaging Audiences with Disabilities*
- **Dr Nick Winterbotham**, Director, Millennium Point Birmingham *Government's learning and social agendas and the sector's response.*
- **Nicky Morgan**, Senior Policy Adviser Museum Education, Museum, Libraries & Archives Council

Feedback

The conference provided an excellent opportunity to see what work was going on around the country and to network with colleagues. Some of the speakers, notably Dr Nick Winterbotham, provided an inspirational view of the potential of museums as learning organisations and the talk by Nicky Morgan provided a fascinating insight into the potential consequences for museums of a 'Brown' government.

Although the visits to sites around the region took a great deal of travel time, they did provide the opportunity to see first hand what other sites were doing. The visit to the Galleries of Justice in Nottingham was eye opening as they are delivering a really

innovative programme with young offenders, as well as adult offenders. Although the nature of their project is very different to what we deliver, it did provide some useful points and ideas that we will look to implement at Norton Priory.

Although the conference as a whole was very interesting and provided a great range of subjects and sessions, there were a number of sessions that were not as relevant and directly applicable as I had hoped. The sessions on engaging audiences with disability, and the Rethinking Disability Representation project, were interesting but the projects were more limited in scope than one we had recently undertaken. I thought they did not tackle how to engage people with disabilities in the process of representation, more how to represent people with disabilities. They also looked mainly at items directly connected with or showing people with disabilities, rather than looking at how people with disabilities can engage with the wider collection.

Organisational Learning Outcomes

- Increased knowledge of how to widen our existing work with young offenders, particularly looking to move beyond volunteering into 'outreach' and project work.
- Better awareness of government and national/regional agendas in terms of delivering learning – focussed our attention onto the Extended Schools agenda in particular.
- Developed a number of ideas for my organisation on how to become more of a 'learning organisation', including the importance of top level support.
- Attending the conference provided a number of ideas and motivations which helped me in restructuring our learning department, especially with looking at how we provide and approach harder to reach audiences in our general programmes.

Individual Learning Outcomes

- A key personal learning outcome was a wider network of contacts and a wider view of best practice work taking place around the country.
- I did also find that the three days was perhaps a little too much and would in future look to target specific talks on specific days.
- One of the most positive outcomes was perhaps a renewed sense of purpose in the work we were already doing. In addition, it confirmed to me that our engaging our audiences through consultation and involvement in exhibitions etc. was something that some other places were finding challenging as well, but that we were relatively successful at doing this.

Sharing Learning

As well as informal report back to the management team, learning outcomes from the conference formed an important part of the strategic review of the Learning department carried out Jan – March 2008. I reported back to my own learning team on the conference as part of a training session on sharing outcomes from training sessions and best practice visits.