

EPISODE 4

Quotes:

Jane Findlay: *Really what we're trying to do is with the programme is we support young people with both kind of sector specific, but also transferable skills.*

Phoebe Kanwieska: *We are nurturing people, but also I think it should be becoming like a basic standard for all organisations and all galleries.*

Intro:

HR: My name is Halina Rifai and I'm a podcast producer and mental health advocate. I was asked by The Baring Foundation to take a deeper dive into their work surrounding a report written by Director David Cutler titled '*Creatively Minded at the Museum*'.

The report was written to highlight targeted work by museums to engage people with mental health problems, especially using participatory arts.

In this podcast I'll be exploring a number of themes over the series which look at difficult pasts helping us understand collections, participatory arts work in hospital settings, partnerships, new generations of museum professionals, diversity and much much more.

I'll do this with the help of a number of people who work, run, volunteer and practice creative arts with museums spread over the length and breadth of the UK.

HR: We have reached our fourth episode and this week I explore the subject of training new museum professionals with the help of Dulwich Picture Gallery and also discussion around the importance of inclusion. This episode will focus particularly on the Together through Art project which trains young people with lived experience of mental ill-health to work as creative facilitators for the museum.

Dulwich Picture Gallery

HR: Based in South East London, Dulwich Picture Gallery is the world's first purpose-built public art gallery: it was founded in 1811 when Sir Francis Bourgeois RA bequeathed his collection of old masters "for the inspection of the public".

Today the Gallery is a vibrant cultural hub hosting some of the UK's leading exhibitions alongside its Permanent Collection of Baroque masterpieces while staging a wide-ranging programme of public events, practical art and community engagement.

Jane Findlay Head of Programme and Engagement at Dulwich we enter as Jane explains how Dulwich have worked with community partners to help deliver their work...

[INTERVIEW]

Jane Findlay: It's really, really important for us to work closely with community partners, um, and education settings and third sector organisations to kind of deliver our work. We find that's a really positive way of working and it really kind of connects us into our local area. So, um, for example, for our Together Through Art programme, which was, um, a kind of training and development program for young people with lived experience of mental health, um, who partnered with us, um, with artists to kind of work to become creative peer facilitators and to deliver creativity and wellbeing workshops in schools. Um, to run that programme, we partnered with the South London and Maudsley Recovery College. Um, they're a local organisation who have a really strong kind of experience in co-production and, um, empowering services to share their lived experiences. So, um, they were really great to work with. Um, and they also helped us to reach new audiences as well through that programme.

Halina Rifai: And the power of lived experience there. More and more people are kind of starting to recognise, especially those professional services and organisations. When it comes to mental health itself, what better than getting people to help facilitate? What considerations did you have to make in order to think about training a new generation of museum professionals? And what tools were the people equipped with?

Jane Findlay: Yes, I think with our approach, what we try and do is think of, um, kind of the person as a whole, um, and also think about arts in its kind of social context and not just in the void. Um, so really what we're trying to do is, um, with the programme as we support young people with both kind of sector specific, but also transferable skills, it's really for us about helping young people to thrive, to find value and purpose through our work. Um, so, for example, we might have looked at kind of very specific things around understanding different audiences or learning styles or practical things like how to invoice as a freelancer in an arts organisation. Um, but also broader skills like collaboration, kind of creative problem solving, boosting confidence, networking people, all these kind of things that help. I mean, it's a really complex world we're living in, and we're trying to help young people to be, um, equipped to manage in this kind of quite complex and difficult kind of circumstances we're in now.

Halina Rifai: Yeah, most definitely. So accessibility is constantly being talked about, it's constantly evolving. How important is accessibility to your projects? And have there been discussions and considerations around diversity when it comes to inclusion? So, for example, who may feel currently excluded? And there's things such as hierarchy, elitism, especially when it comes to that stereotypical view of museums, I think, what is your approach in that respect?

Jane Findlay: Yes, absolutely. It is really important for us. I, um, think what we try and do is kind of embed kind of inclusive practice from the start when we're looking at projects. And I think you're right that historically, routes into kind of working in museums have been really narrow. So we've been really trying to work hard to open that up and think about all the different ways that we can do that. Um, so particularly our kind of recruitment policies and approaches, but also how we design and develop programmes. And I think working with local organisations and community can help to do that as well if we're working right from the start together. Um, but for example, we try and think about the ways that people can apply for things, how we can make adjustments. We're really proactive about this. We think about even the language we use, what we're asking for. In a recent project we ran, open activity days, um, for recruitment. So it's much less intimidating than a formal interview. Um, we think

about contextual recruitment as well. So really making sure that we're, um, kind of promoting opportunities in kind of underrepresented, um, groups in our community, places where people are looking for those kind of opportunities. So really kind of not just going to the sort of standard places where you might put kind of a job ad or a training opportunity, but really thinking carefully with our local partners about where best to place those, um, kind of opportunities. We're constantly learning, we're constantly finding out um, ways that we can do this and improving that.

Halina Rifai: I suppose the themes of accessibility and engagement and these communities that we're talking about, but also with health and well being and mental health being very much at the focus. What are some of the positive takeaways that have come out of your work within the museum that you think would benefit wellbeing for the next generation?

Jane Findlay: Oh yeah, we've been learning a lot from the part in our project, but also the young people who took part in the kind of school sessions too. And we've really found that in terms of support and wellbeing, there's a whole range of ways that the museum and gallery sector can support young people. And for us specifically, we found that people were able to find new connections, um, help them to be social, to be active, to kind of think mindfully, uh, to kind of destigmatise, um, that kind of mental health, and to really validate that lived experience. Um, I think you'll probably hear from Phoebe a lot, um, later as well, but I think you can get a lot from art being part of your life. And so I think for us, we're kind of recognising that people in terms of their own practice or their own interests, it's nice to be close to art, but also it can support your kind of employability or your uh, personal resilience as well. On a border level, um, I think for a lot of young people took part in the programme as well. It was a good confidence booster, um, it helped them to experience audiences, uh, and to see other ways of artists kind of responding to the collection that was really nourishing for their um, kind of artistic practice and developing their artistic practice, which again, supports towards wellbeing, so it's kind of a virtual circle. Um, but yeah, there's lots of different ways that I think it can support um, health and wellbeing on a whole spectrum. And for us, that's it, we work from working across that kind of general wellbeing, too much, to working with people with kind of um, diagnosed conditions as well and mental health, and recognize that there's a whole range that the gallery can do across that spectrum.

HR: I was also lucky enough to be able to speak to Phoebe Kanwieska who joined Dulwich picture gallery in September 2021 through their Together Through Arts project and was one of five creative facilitators recruited with lived experience of mental health problems. She has also has experience as an artist and learning facilitator with the gallery and continues to work with them. Here we enter as she gives more information about her role...

[INTERVIEW]

Phoebe Kanwieska: My role as a facilitator, um, is to provide workshops for a multitude of people in the Together Through Art projects, we focused on children of both primary and secondary ages. And, um, yeah, as a facilitator, I suppose my job is to provide a safe and warm environment, to allow people to create in whatever way they feel they can, and to provide a structure where they're able to express themselves in new and exciting mediums and ways. Maybe teaching techniques that they've never heard before, or maybe giving

them ideas that they might not have thought of before. Yeah, in that role, I've been able to sort of learn how to plan effectively order materials, um, set up equipment and then facilitate and run workshops in that session, make sure that I am giving them the best opportunity, basically, that they can have to have a brilliant time and, um, focus on creating in a mindful and exciting way. So, not necessarily finishing on the finished product, but about the process.

Halina Rifai: Amazing. Now that you've got the experience and you've gone through this process, why do you feel it's important that a new generation of museum professionals are nurtured?

Phoebe Kanwieska: I suppose I think it's very important because our new generation are facing challenges that we've never faced before. It's an interesting time. We are encountering problems that are, uh, brand new, that aren't solved yet, and are, uh, completely ongoing, uh, including the mental health crisis, basically, that is happening amongst young people. And it's very, very real and it is growing. Unfortunately, opening up a conversation in a workplace means that people feel nurtured and heard and, um, appreciated. I think it's important that we curate a relationship between galleries and organisations and, um, the people that work there, especially when it's around art and creativity, because we know that that harvest creativity. That means that it's, you know, everything is improved. Relationships in the workplace are improved. That means that they can excel in their creative routine and therefore their work. So it's a win win for everyone, um, and um, at a time that is really quite strange, post pandemic, especially, it's something that we need to all think about and be very conscious about. And I don't think that we can afford to not ask these questions anymore, because I think we are nurturing people. But also, I think it should be becoming like a basic standard for all organizations and all galleries. Because without it, we miss so many people that are encountering problems, for example, myself, who have lived with mental health problems for a long time. I miss out on a lot of opportunities for kids of that. And this approach to things has enabled me to have opportunities that I wouldn't have had otherwise, and to enable myself to show everyone the potential that I do have, along with the amazing other four other people involved in the project as facilitators support each other through a shared network. So if you nurture the people that you are employing, they nurture you. So it's a win win for everyone.

Halina Rifai: I'm so happy to hear that. How would you like to see what you have been doing and your work with the museum move forward in the future?

Phoebe Kanwieska: It's really exciting that the Together Through Art project is happening all over again. Which means that there are fresh spaces, um of children and young people that will benefit from the project as well as new people being recruited and I would love to be involved with that in any way that I can. And I've learnt so many skills through the Together Through Art project and through being with the gallery. I've learned so many co production skills I've learned and how to incorporate a ah, conversation, an open conversation about mental health in all of my workshops, even if it's not directly related. Um, which I think is hugely important because I want that dialogue throughout my life, not just in my work but in my personal life as well. And the gallery have been kind enough to enable opportunities after the project. So in the future, I would really, really like to continue to work with the gallery in a way that enables open conversation about, uh, mental health, about mental wellbeing, and create a safe space in all of my workshops and support everyone in the workplace to also

have these sorts of conversations, not just in my workshops, but with my colleagues, whether that be sort of other creative facilitators that I've been working with, um, over together through art projects or, um, people that I know in the gallery that I haven't worked with directly. I think it's so important to have that conversation throughout these organisations to the very top. So it's not just me delivering them in the workshops. Uh, it's an opportunity for everyone to have these conversations, everyone to incorporate these so that it's not just these one and a half hour sessions that we focus on mindfulness but it's a constant rhetoric and it's a constant idea that we can talk about mental health. And, um, we benefit so much from talking about mental health, especially creativity. We know creativity is the antithesis of so many things that come into ill mental health, whether that be black and white thinking or unhelpful thought spirals and things like that. Creativity is the antidote to so many of those things. So I feel very lucky to be in an organisation that both promote creativity and also are willing to have this open conversation about mental health.

HR: There's a lot of work being done here through partnerships and also to create a legacy. . The strong theme of providing transferable skills, confidence and placing people with lived experience within working roles is really encouraging. The approach of paying it forward in a way that not only normalises conversations around often complex subjects but removing the stigma in a way through the aid of workshops, creativity and the museum's other resources could be argued as enabling a more natural evolution in progress. If rolled out on a wider scale, elements like this could not only promote the wellbeing of people but also contribute to society as a whole. It's also positive to hear about the approach in terms of inclusivity, particular around marginalised groups and those underrepresented. The act of demystifying and breaking down barrier through a more accessible way for people to be recruited but also understand and experience museums is something that Dulwich seem to be moving forward and still acknowledging the amount of learning that still has to be done.

Outro

HR: We are at the end of our penultimate episode of this series, thank you for taking the time to listen and to my guests you will find out more information about Dulwich Picture Gallery in the notes to accompany these episodes. Next time, in our last episode of the series I speak with Glasgow Museums about the art of co-curation.