

# Effective Museums: Family Learning

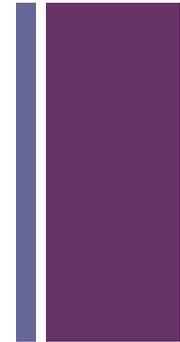


**SHARE Museums East**  
a network of know how

# + The Effective Museums Family Learning Programme

The process

- For museums expressing an interest in taking part, we had to have the support of museum managers and a commitment to make changes
- First workshop – gave us an overview of family learning in museums: the principles underlying good practice, how families learn and what they need. We also discussed aims and shared ideas
- Each museum did an honest SWOT analysis of their family learning provision, ahead of the site visit
- Each museum had a site visit with an experienced consultant to carry out an audit, giving constructive feedback. We each buddied-up with another museum so we helped audit each other's programmes and got to be creative at each others' sites
- After the audit, we set outcomes for families and then created a budget against those outcomes. The initial grant of £500 was increased to £1000 as the potential became clear
- Final workshop – was a chance for reflection, sharing experiences and inspiring us to take things forward



# + What do we think family friendly looks like?

Whilst buildings and facilities are important we think family friendly is more about ...



involving the whole family, not just the children

# + Family friendly is about ...



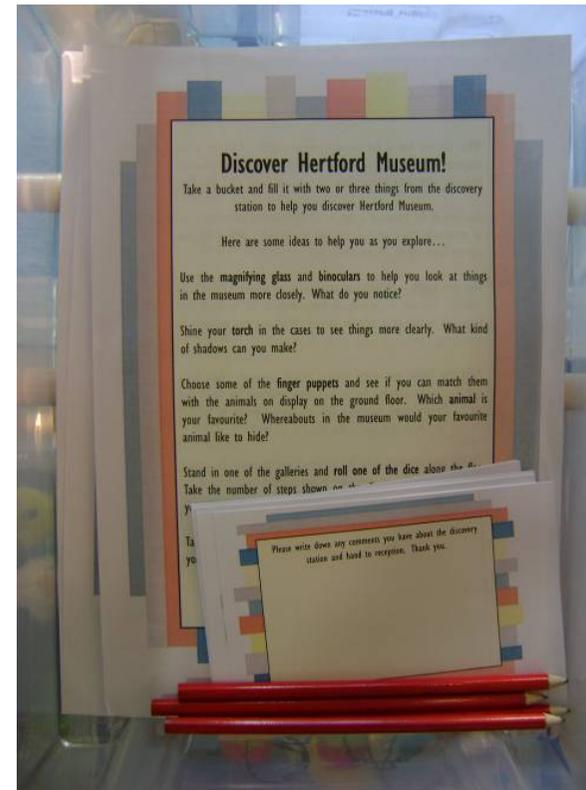
providing things to do that help families learn together: things that appeal to families, are relevant to them and that inspire conversations

# + Family friendly is about ...



creating places for families to be together, where they feel they belong

# + Family friendly is about ...



being welcoming and inviting

# + Family friendly is about ...



- giving clear and relevant information, so families can make decisions
- being accommodating and not afraid of purposeful noise and mess
- thinking through the whole visit so everyone can see that families matter

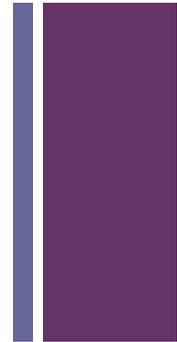
# + Who are our families?

- We think families come in all shapes and sizes
- Essentially they're just an inter-generational group
- They may not even be related, as long as they know each other and act like a family

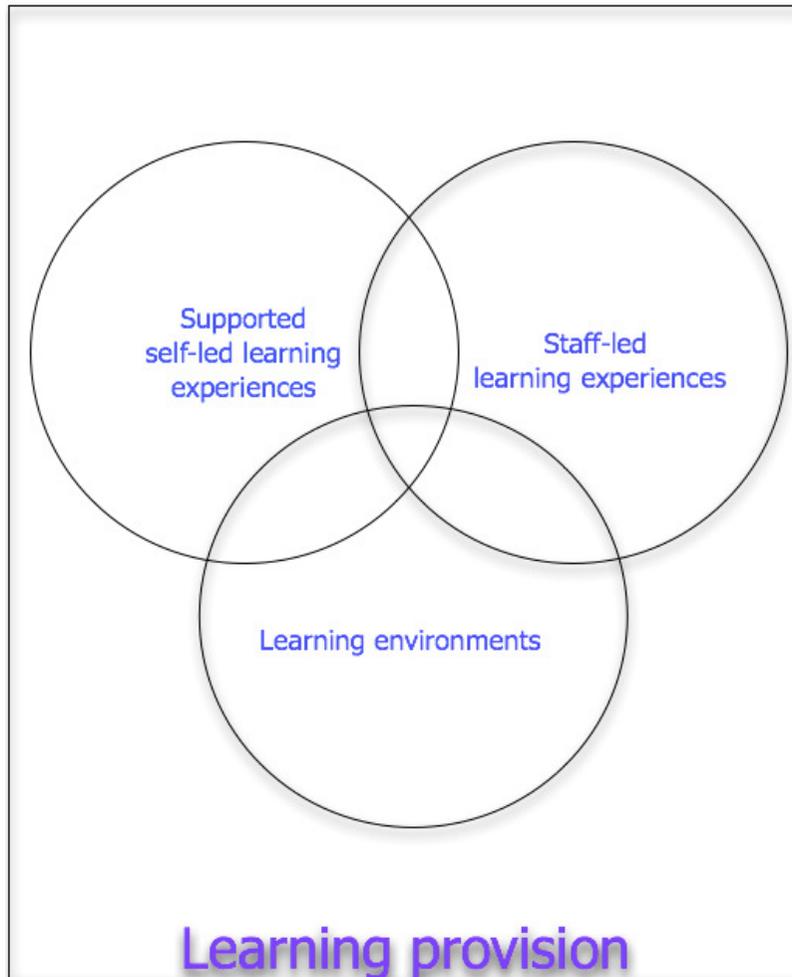
They may:

- have a mixed age range of children
- be local or on a “day out”
- be frequent or first time visitors

All these things will influence their visit



# + How do we support families to learn?



We think the whole museum can be a learning experience for families.

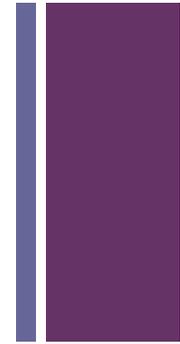
We are planning for families to learn together:

- in our events
- using extra resources
- through interpretation, seating and atmospheric spaces

# + How do we support families to learn?

We support families to learn together by:

- focusing on making our collections, buildings and stories relevant for families
- helping and encouraging family adults
- giving families freedom to interact as they want to and as much choice as possible
- providing resources, objects and stimuli to prompt exploration, play and fun
- making our spaces work for them, offering them a genuinely new learning environment
- ensuring staff are approachable, well-informed and engaging
- giving families all they need to take ownership of their own learning



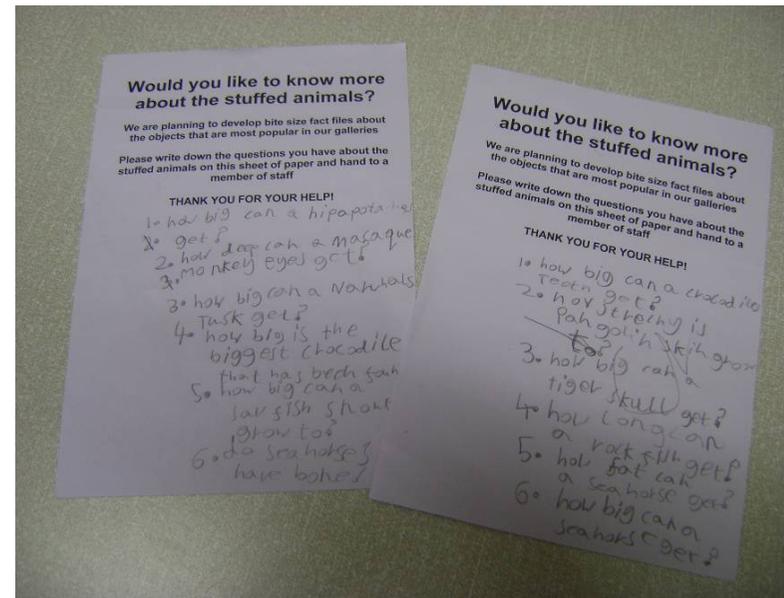
# + How has the programme changed what we offer families?



We've gone from:

- providing for children to providing for families
- providing activities to seeing the whole museum from a family perspective

# + How has the programme changed what we offer families?



We offer better information: clear orientation for families and meaningful information about our collections that can become part of family conversations

# + How has the programme changed what we offer families?

We offer better targeted activities: children under 5 can't always do the same thing as children of 12, but they are serious learners and can make or break a visit.



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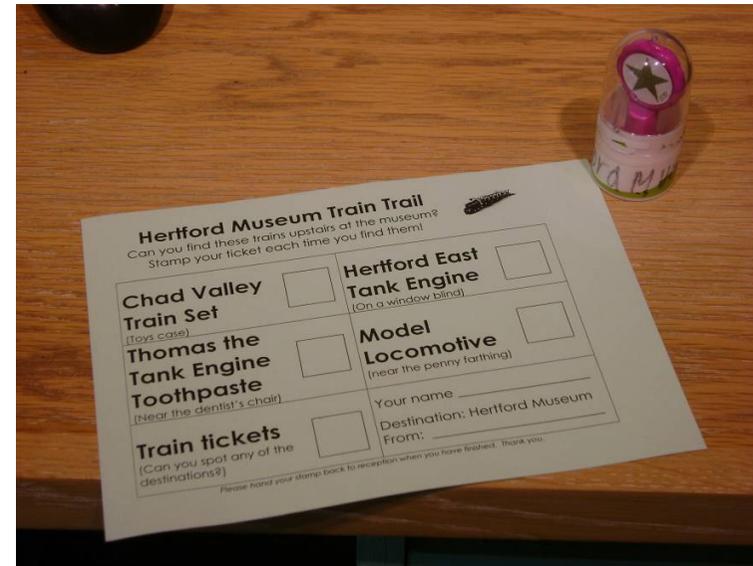
We offer a stronger focus on collections: families are interested in our collections, we just need to find the way in.



# + How has the programme changed what we offer families?

We've changed our offer through:

- reviewing and evaluating our existing offer
- tweaking and re-purposing existing resources as much as buying in new ones

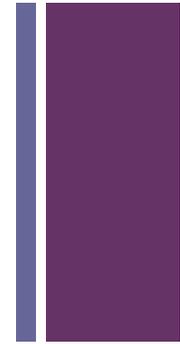


# + How has the programme changed how we think about families?

- Families are one of our key audiences
- Families are not just about the children – the parents experience is important
- Family learning is all about families interacting
- Spaces and activities can be created that support and encourage family interactions
- We see the potential of our collections to engage families
- Thinking about families has given us a chance to influence how our museums think and highlighted the expertise of education staff

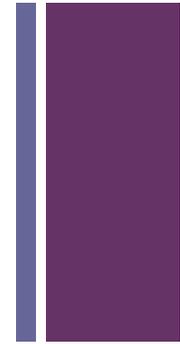
# + 12 tips for supporting families to learn together in museums

- Invite a fresh pair of eyes to evaluate what you offer
- Audit your museum experience through a family's eyes
- Consult and/or observe your audiences
- Start from your collections when you're thinking about what you would like families to explore or find out about
- Be welcoming and encouraging
- Provide the right information in the right form in the right place



# + 12 tips for supporting families to learn together in museums

- Involve all your staff – all staff are important especially front of house
- Give families lots they can do: this doesn't have to be new resources, some of your existing resources just need tweaking with families in mind
- Don't be disheartened by your building: do the best you can with the space you have
- Don't get carried away: do a bit at a time, watch what happens and plan future changes
- Feel confident and build everyone else's confidence
- Learn from other museums experience: there are great ideas out there that might work with your collections



# + Our biggest insights



■ I thought we were doing quite well, but realised how much more we could be doing!

■ Good provision inside needs to be balanced with clear information outside

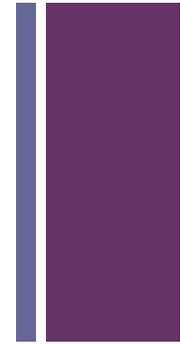
■ Becoming more family friendly has reinvigorated the museum and really helped to start embedding us in the community

■ The museum has become a more lively engaging place for everyone

■ Offer missions and choices

■ Create navigational pathways

■ Small interventions can be transformative



# + Our biggest insights



- Planning: you need to think about families and how they learn when you create a learning activity

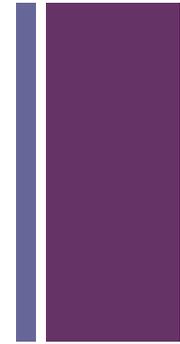
- Training: colleagues may need training to build on their intuitive understanding of how families learn together

- Build it in! Families want to learn from your core museum offer, so avoid bolt on extras

- Don't take it for granted: keep trying things, listening to families, making changes

- See it through their eyes

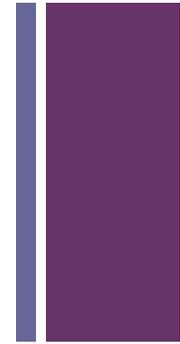
- That we can work with what we have and with a little imagination and a few changes we can make the museum extra family friendly



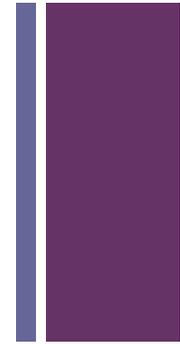
## + Our biggest insights



- The potential of our Museum has increased by understanding our families more
- You need a flexible attitude to how the Museum can be used and shared
- We thought it was the physical building that was limiting our family friendliness, but we discovered it was our attitudes
- That family learning doesn't happen overnight, and that's OK!



## + The best bits



- Being given the opportunity to explore different ways of making our Museum fabulous
- Being inspired by working with a more experienced practitioner
- Sharing ideas and developing activities in partnership with visitors
- Engaging with visitors and organisations: forging new partnerships and strengthening existing ones





### **The museums involved were:**

Epping Forest District Museum, Farmland Museum & Denny Abbey, First Garden City Heritage Museum, Hertford Museum, Museum of East Anglian Life, North Herts Museum Service, Polar Museum and St Edmundsbury Heritage Service.

These museums were supported by Jo Graham, Learning Unlimited, who acted as mentor and advisor throughout the project.

The programme ran between January and March 2012 and was managed by Hazel Courtley, Museum Development Projects Manager on behalf of Norfolk Museums and Archaeology Service.

The programme was part of the East of England museum development programme for 2011-12, 'Effective Museums', which was funded by Renaissance.

