



Young participants relax before their exhibition opening.

RAMM + young people

“This project has completely changed my life and my relationship with my daughter; it’s really made me think.”

Participant

Case Study: Cabinets of Curiosity

RAMM + young people

Cabinets of Curiosity: Talking with young people about objects that represent our lives

The challenges

How does a museum appeal to young people and their parents who have never been inside one?

What impact can a museum have on the lives of young people who are considered to be at high risk of offending and anti-social behaviour?

How can a museum work alongside youth services?

The background

The Royal Albert Memorial Museum & Art Gallery (RAMM) has developed a good relationship with various public sector services for young people since 2010, including the local Youth Inclusion and Support Panel (YISP). YISP is one of around 220 multi-agency planning groups set up around the country to prevent anti-social behaviour by working with young people and their families. It is part of the Exeter East and Mid Devon Youth Offending Team (YOT), a team that works with young people aged from 8 to 18 to prevent offending and re-offending.

The museum presents itself as an adaptable tool which can help organisations in other sectors – such as youth, wellbeing and healthcare – to achieve their aims. RAMM is not a specialist youth service, but museum staff are passionate about the power of using objects and their stories to talk about life and our place in the world.

This project grew out of conversations started at a Think Big! event organised by RAMM in 2010 to invite alliances with new and interesting partners who support vulnerable people in and around Exeter.

The project

The project was inspired by 17th-century cabinets of curiosity, which displayed a collection of objects valued for their uniqueness and their close connection with the collector. Young people, parents and the YISP team spent time at the museum handling objects, sparking lively conversations about life experiences and things they liked, hated or desired. The participants made cabinets of their own, culminating in the Essentially Me! exhibition at RAMM in 2013. They selected and decorated cabinets, incorporating objects of their own with personal resonance and meaning. The group's choices represented their past, present and aspirations for the future.

What changed?

The outcomes were positively overwhelming, confirming that museums really can make a difference to people's lives, especially people dealing with transition and upheaval. At least one young man enrolled in Further Education as a result of the confidence gained during this project. The YISP was delighted, seeing positive change in people as individuals and in the group as a whole.

What did people say about it?

"Building the cabinet has helped me to think about what is important in my life."

"This project has completely changed my life and my relationship with my daughter; it's really made me think."

"It's the best thing I have ever done."

What next?

RAMM appreciated the value of working closely with its partners, as some of those making cabinets struggled to put their ideas into practice. Working as a team across institutions, project staff were able to offer support and relevant skills. YISP has incorporated the methodology into its work.

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