

# **London Voices Evaluation Report**

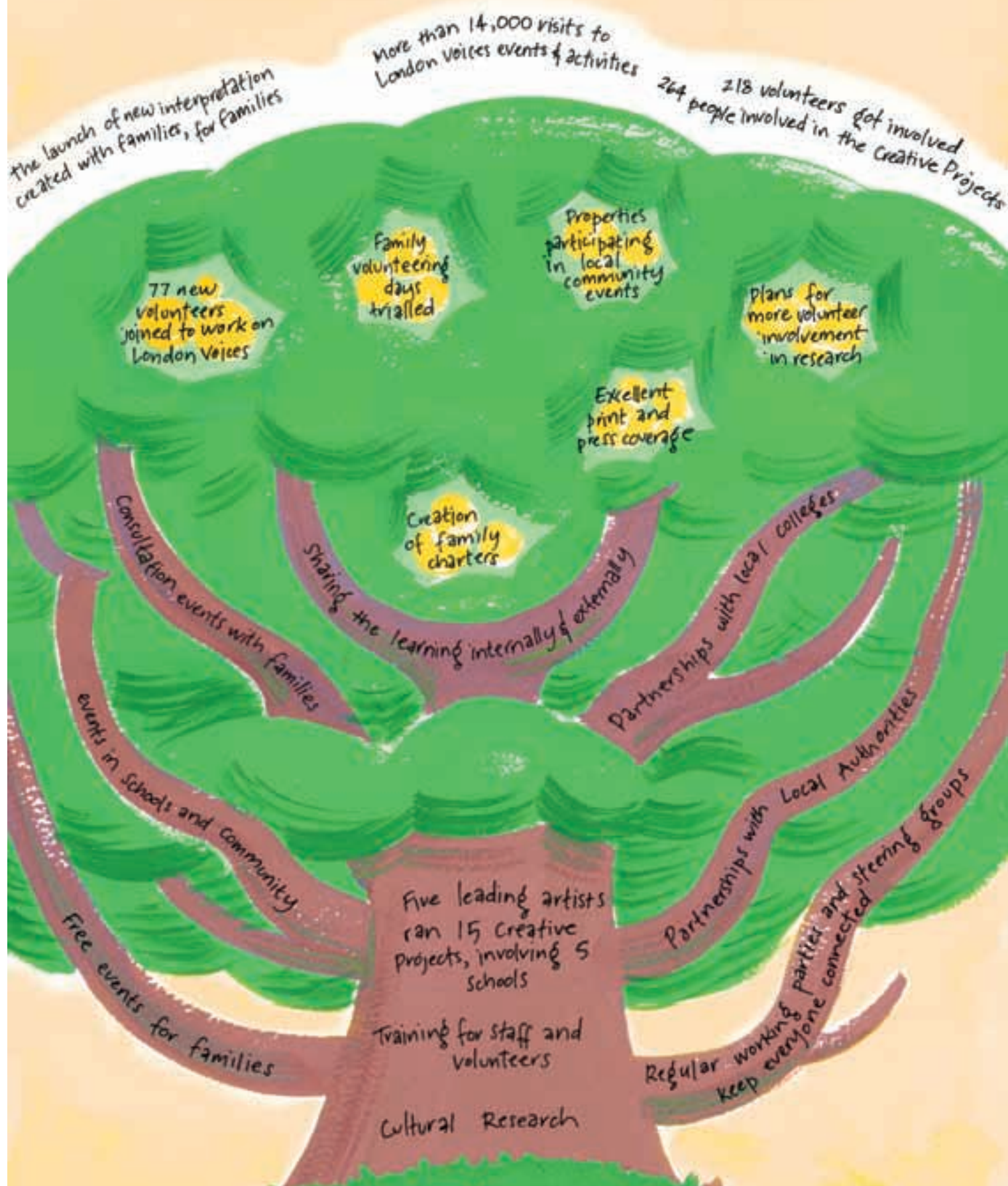
Developing Family Learning Practice  
at the National Trust in London

Sue Mayo

August 2009



THE NATIONAL TRUST



London Voices – three years of growth

# Introduction

London Voices has seen three years of sustained creative partnership between four National Trust properties in London, and five Primary Schools local to them. This partnership has been at the heart of a family learning action research project, which has used focussed arts activities, new cultural research, training, and the development of new interpretation, in order to discover the best of family learning practice in a heritage setting.

While finite in its current form, the project has aimed to build the long-term capacity of National Trust properties to be family friendly. Partner organisations were invited to a three year partnership, in order to develop relationships, increase understanding, and build the foundations of longer term collaboration.

Annual creative projects led by artists drove the project, with sessions held at the four sites and in the schools. An increase in opportunities for families to visit the properties without charge in between projects was provided in free Family events and Community days, supported by the London Voices Team, and family volunteering opportunities were trialled.

A programme of cultural research at each property expanded current understanding of the sites. This fed directly into the creative projects and themes for interpretation, and is ongoing. Training and experiential learning supported the desire to see change in the organisation.

A new model of volunteering was introduced, through student placements, and existing volunteers were given opportunities to broaden their own skills.

New property interpretation was launched, with the families acting as designers, makers, testers and consultants in its development

Chloë Bird, the Project Manager, and Rose Swindells, Project Officer, provided crucial structural and practical leadership and support, enabling the properties to expand their horizons. They ensured that learning was articulated in order to have impact strategically within the Trust, and maintained a clear vision and a commitment to dialogue.

This report aims to distil what has been learned about families learning together, the importance of the local connection for Trust properties, and the capacity of a three year project to initiate change and development within an organisation. The project has been marked by dialogue and participation, and the evaluation shares those values. As the external evaluator I have observed and participated in sessions; interviews and questionnaires have been used alongside reflection and conversation with all the stakeholders. Data collection and analysis have been illuminated by the reflections of the families, National Trust staff and volunteers, artists and placements, teachers and partners. Their views and their voices are present in the report.

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# Foreword

## ‘It’s a good thing, but not our thing...’

These are the words used to describe us. It rings true, but what does it mean? We do a job that people see as worthwhile, but not in a way that is relevant or interesting to them? What we do is good, but not very exciting perhaps?

Certainly, some of our places are imposing and formal. Many of them were designed to impress or even intimidate, rather than make people feel welcome. We perhaps shouldn’t then be surprised when visitors tell us this is how they feel.

We want our places to be somewhere that every visitor can enjoy, to be part of a local community and to be alive, not dead. Our research on what makes an enjoyable visit tells us again and again that we need to value our visitors, to relax.

This is easy to say but what does it mean in practice?

London Voices is a project that has started to explore how we can break down some of these perceptions by working in some different ways. We have asked our visitors what they think of us.

We have involved visitors in creating new ways of helping people to understand our properties. We have invested in local relationships with people. We have worked closely with artists to explore what places mean and we have found joy in asking questions rather than feeling the need to tell all the answers.

What you may see are treasure boxes at Sutton House, or a new carved boat at Morden. What you won’t see, but which perhaps you may sense, is a different approach to our properties, one that is more open and relaxed. You may not notice at all that we have a broader range of visitors. You won’t know that local people see this as ‘their place’, rather than a castle on the hill.

What we have learned at the London Voices properties will inform our work right across the country, but to me the strongest lesson is a reminder not to underestimate people, whatever their age or background. If you are willing to ask questions, then you open the possibility to rich and surprising answers.



**Andrew Beer**  
**National Trust Head of Learning**





# The Context

The lifespan of any project is not just that of the project itself, but rather the context within which it arose and the legacy it creates. For London Voices that context was the National Trust London area in the summer of 2005, a time when family audiences were not a priority, and engagement, at its best, consisted of family activity days.

For any idea or change to become a reality the right elements need to be in place, and when they do a moment is created when action is possible. For London Voices there were three such elements that came together that summer.

The first of these was the completion of the Heritage Lottery funded project 'The Untold Story'. This three year arts based initiative, enabled National Trust sites across the country to work with their local communities in the production of creative and original interpretation. The strategic legacy emerging for the Untold Story was the ambition to further employ the project's methodologies, with sustainable partnerships and tangible outputs being prioritised.

The second event was the development of the Community Learning Manager post at Sutton House (in Hackney) into a pan London role. This change represented an aspiration for the London sites to draw upon the innovative approaches developed at the house to engage with new and diverse local audiences.

And the third piece of the jigsaw was the identification of family audiences as a growth area for many of the London properties. This was coupled with an acknowledgement that research was needed to better understand the needs, aspirations and motivations of family visitors, and the barriers to access they experienced.

Combined, these three events formed the foundations of London Voices. Three years on, an enormous amount has been learnt about family audiences, learning that would not have been possible had the depth of engagement with partners and families not been in place. The legacy of the project is evident in the original and highly relevant interpretation created with participants, the confidence felt by staff and volunteers to welcome and support a real diversity of family audiences and by the enhanced quality of engagement being experienced by those family audiences.

The influence is also being seen at a national and strategic level especially in the areas of 'visitor enjoyment' a key policy area for the National Trust. Perhaps though, one of the greatest strategic achievements has been the work done to address the very real financial barriers to membership experienced by many families. This work has put in place principles and addressed many of the practicalities in the creation of an affordable membership offer, undoubtedly an important and significant development for the National Trust.



**Ruth Clarke Community Learning Manager, National Trust London, and Ian Wilson, Marketing and Supporter Development Manager, Thames & Solent Region, previously London Area Manager**

# Aims and Objectives

as articulated at the start of the project

## Aims

- To increase the capacity of London properties to engage meaningfully with family users who are either: black or from an ethnic minority; on low incomes; or have been disenfranchised from formal education.
- To encourage family visitors to make a connection with and celebrate our heritage.
- To influence cultural change within the National Trust, whereby diversity in all aspects of the organisation is valued.

## Objectives

### **Establish partnerships**

Establish sustainable, mutually beneficial relationships with learning providers local to the target London properties, specifically those whose users experience cultural, economic or intellectual barriers to accessing heritage. Each property will have one partnership with a local school in an area of need. The partnerships have been established during the development period of the bid. Additionally the local authority arts and heritage teams for each property have given their support and are keen to be strategically involved in the project.

### **Deliver interpretative creative projects**

Facilitate an annual programme of projects at each of the target properties that celebrate culture and creativity, with each project resulting in temporary interpretation materials to be experienced by property visitors and users.

### **Reveal the cultural breadth of the properties**

Undertake a research and audit programme at each of the properties that clearly defines the breadth of their cultural links.

### **Diversification of volunteers**

Diversify volunteer's roles, and open up opportunities to volunteer for groups not currently represented.

### **Develop new interpretation**

Drawing upon the cultural research and consultation with partner organisations and participants, create semi – permanent family interpretation activities bespoke to each property. For the activities to be hands on / interactive in their learning style and inclusive in the cultural stories that they open up.

### **Train staff and volunteers**

Facilitate an annual training programme for all London staff and volunteers to enable them to engage effectively with new family audiences.

### **Share lessons learned**

Establish mechanisms whereby the learning from the project can influence the National Trust and the wider heritage sector.

## Key findings of the evaluation

- Working with a small group of families over three years was crucial to the level of learning. Building a relationship with partner organisations and families allowed a much deeper level of engagement and responsiveness.
- The creative projects provided inspiring and supportive space for families to learn together.
- The London Voices team supported an experiential learning approach, which allowed property staff to experiment and take risks. New learning was applied and tested throughout the project.
- Reciprocal visits between the school and the sites brought the properties into the community and the community into the properties.
- Barriers to access were examined and tested. The core team worked strategically within the Trust in order to impact on issues such as the cost of membership for low income families.
- Training events, mentoring and experiential learning were embedded in the project. In all cases, learning by doing and witnessing was the most highly valued.
- New models of volunteering brought in a group of younger and more ethnically diverse volunteers. This was a good beginning, but more progress needs to be made regarding the representation of black and minority ethnic visitors, volunteers and staff.
- The research project, broadening the range and context of narratives at each site opened up a wide range of connections for visitors.
- The value of process was evident in many areas; in training, in consultation, in research, in creative work; and this resulted in a deep level of engagement. The need to pay attention to good and effective process must not be lost in a drive towards outcomes.
- The organisation of the project was meticulous, and the communication and celebration of what it was achieving was consistently of a high standard.
- New interpretation, created with families for families made the case very strongly for consultation with a small group to benefit the wider audience.



# Summary of learning outcomes

The learning outcomes are summarised using the framework of the Generic Learning Outcomes, identified in Inspiring Learning for All, (ILFA), an improvement framework for Museums, Libraries and Galleries. ILFA's definition of learning, 'an active engagement with experience' encapsulates the aspiration of London Voices.



## Knowledge and Understanding

*This is about taking away facts or information, making sense of knowledge, and deepening understanding.*

Knowledge of the properties was broadened through a programme of new cultural research, which fed into the creative projects, and paved the way for continued research.

Working with small groups of families over three years built a relationship that allowed everyone to move beyond generalisations and assumptions.

The action research embodied in the project provided a thorough knowledge of family learning which informed the high quality new interpretation.

Individuals in families who found formal education challenging were able to learn through the creative approaches offered.

The piloting of equal opportunities monitoring for volunteers meant that there will now be more information to support progress in the diversification of volunteers.

## Skills

*This is about learning new skills, including social, communication, physical and intellectual skills.*

Staff and volunteers learned engagement skills that are transferable. The formal training programme, and the informal opportunities to learn through practice increased skills for staff and volunteers that could be immediately applied and tested.

Families learned creative skills, many of which they could use at home, as well as experiencing increased literacy and communication skills.

Experienced artists and teachers extended their skills to working in the heritage sector, and shared their skills and expertise. Volunteers took advantage of the opportunity to learn how to get the best out of the new interpretation with visitors.

## Attitudes and Values

*This is about changes in feelings, perceptions and opinions, and an increased capacity for tolerance.*

Further Education providers and Local Authorities were surprised to discover ways of delivering their objectives through the National Trust.

Staff learned through experience that participatory ways of engaging and consulting can be a more effective way to get their job done, not an added burden.

Families who had never visited their local property before, and thought it was irrelevant to them, reported an increased sense of connection with the property. A few families became N.T. members, and many became involved in family volunteering opportunities.

The placement model of volunteering demonstrated that young people and a more ethnically diverse group of people will volunteer for the National Trust if approached with an appropriate offer.

One property recorded a drop in vandalism in the park following the building of relationships with local families.

## Enjoyment, Inspiration, Creativity

*This is about having fun, being inspired and surprised; exploration, creativity, experimentation*

Learning from the families about their collections was refreshing and energising for staff and volunteers.

Using an imaginative approach was a valid and liberating approach that broadened understanding and enjoyment for all involved.

The emphasis on learning from and with the families encouraged staff and volunteers to take risks and experiment.



The lessons learned will help properties achieve their target of 75% visitor enjoyment.

Consultations and evaluation used participatory and creative methodologies, which were both accessible and effective.

### Activity, Behaviour, Progression

*This is about what you do, intend to do, do differently. It's about the impact on you outside the project.*

Evidence of economic barriers to joining the National Trust is informing research into a reduced cost local membership scheme.

Properties have already introduced consultations with families for other aspects of their work.

All the properties increased their level of outreach during the project and saw the benefits in the qualities of the partnerships.

Parents who were isolated in the community, or disenfranchised from education, reported an increased sense of belonging and connection, which has resulted in them volunteering within school, or the properties.

Properties have developed new initiatives to enable more kinaesthetic learning opportunities for families.

Left A parent enjoys a creative workshop at Liberty School

“My kids and me have really enjoyed the warm moments at the house or at school. We feel we are doing and sharing something exceptional with exceptional people,” Parent from Millfields School





# Family Learning

Families are a key audience in the National Trust visitor profile. Knowledge about them is perhaps too generalised, and London Voices gave an opportunity for engagement with a small group of families to deepen understanding and knowledge. The way in which London Voices was set up and delivered drew together three key components around this theme of Family Learning.

**Firstly:** exploring ways of *working with the whole family together*. For the general visitor to National Trust properties there are a range of activities to help children to navigate, with one eye on helping them to get more from a visit, and another on keeping them occupied so that parents can get on with their visit and other visitors are not disturbed. It is a challenge to find ways for a family to be engaged together. In the creative projects, working with families in structured workshops over time, strategies for whole family involvement could be tested, and adults supported to be creative and playful. Schools know that a child's capacity to learn is enhanced by the parent or carer's involvement in and commitment to that learning, so for the partner schools this element was crucial.

**Secondly:** building a relationship with *local families*. Three of the properties were aware that they were not drawing many families from the local community as visitors. The fourth, Morden Hall Park, has many local visitors, but wanted to build a closer relationship with them. London Voices allowed the four sites to get to know their family audience and

through them the community in which they are located much better. Outreach work and participation in school and community events was built in, taking staff and volunteers out of the property and into the surrounding area. Families began to express a real sense of connection with the property.

**Thirdly:** families who were a *new audience*. Many of the families had had little or no contact with their local property or the National Trust, and many had discounted the property as a possible place for them to spend time. There were issues of confidence, of doubts about relevance, and the issue of the cost of a single visit or of membership. These barriers to access were not going to be challenged through a single free open day. Schools asked to become partners were schools with a high proportion of low income families, and were not schools with which the properties had an already established relationship. Two of the schools had a high proportion of children with English as an additional language, (EAL). The projects built a relationship; the families grew in confidence, and were able to bring their ideas and expertise to the table.





# The eight principles of family learning in the National Trust

Identified by property staff based on their experience over 3 years. They emerged from the experience of the projects, but are more widely relevant.

## **1. Invitation and welcome**

Inviting participants personally and consistently, and paying attention to details which make them feel welcome, create the right conditions for the activities to work well.

## **2. Using creative ways in**

Using the arts, and imaginative responses, as well as broadening the stories told about the property, can reveal a greater variety of contact points and a sense of discovery for all ages.

## **3. Involving the whole family**

Activities need to be designed so that all the family members can participate fully, allowing adults and children to be playful and creative in their learning. This can be supported by building in a variety of ways of participating that allow for different learning styles.

## **4. Multi-skilled approach**

A variety of skills are beneficial, including good communication, strong creative skills, team work, knowledge of the property, and a real interest in people. These won't all come from one person, and the presence of all the partners, (School, property, artist or facilitator), is important.

## **5. Building relationships and learning from them**

Working with a small group, who will bring with them diverse experiences, skills and knowledge, over an extended period of time, provides a rich source of learning for the property. This learning can then be extended to the general visitor.

## **6. Valuing volunteers**

New initiatives can bring in new volunteers and diversify the opportunities for existing ones. As well as bringing considerable skills, volunteers can benefit from well-targeted training, which allows them to learn, to question, and to exchange skills and ideas.

## **7. Building and maintaining partnerships**

Partnerships with Schools and other local organisations need to be mutually beneficial, and to include opportunities for dialogue and learning from one another, in order to be alive and meaningful. Sharing visits between the School and the property allows both partners to be host and guest, and strengthens the role of the property in the local community.

## **8. Interpretation and resources**

Interpretation activities and resources that have been created and tested with families will extend a property's ability to be family-friendly to all visitors.

**'Looking at these really helps me to see what has worked and not worked in other projects we've done. They've become to backbone of our work'**

Lisa Green, Learning & Community Manager, Morden Hall Park

# Whole family learning

In family learning the adults are not there as helpers for their children or grandchildren. Equally, the creative work is not there to occupy the children so that adults can get on with their learning. Both content and form needed careful planning so that full family involvement was possible.



It was successful both when activities encouraged all the family members to work together, and when all the individuals were working in their own way on a shared theme. The external stimuli in the property enabled families to interact with each other in an enjoyable and relaxed way. But with 26% of the children, (over the three years), under five years old, strategies were also needed for differentiated learning. Sometimes this meant that one of the London Voices team would help a younger child, in order to allow the adult to be able to spend time on their own creative work. Parents sometimes needed encouragement to be playful and creative themselves. A strong team of helpers enabled full participation.

Pride in each other's creative work was a strong element in the sessions, with parents able to appreciate their children in

a stress free environment, and children able to see what creativity their parents were capable of. Many families spoke about the pleasure of having a safe, creative space to be in with their children, without the responsibility of organising it. They also felt very special, because they were in special places, often at times when the general public were not allowed in.

For the teachers, the project offered an opportunity to see their students and parents in a different environment, to get to know them better, and to see what was unlocked by this way of learning. As the projects continued, relationships between families grew, and with it the sense of mutual support. One child was experiencing behavioural difficulties at school, as he approached the transition to secondary school:

**'I saw the family able to have some calm time together, and he participated in a way we just don't see at school. This could be the one little link into learning that could transform his transition to secondary school'**

**Class teacher**

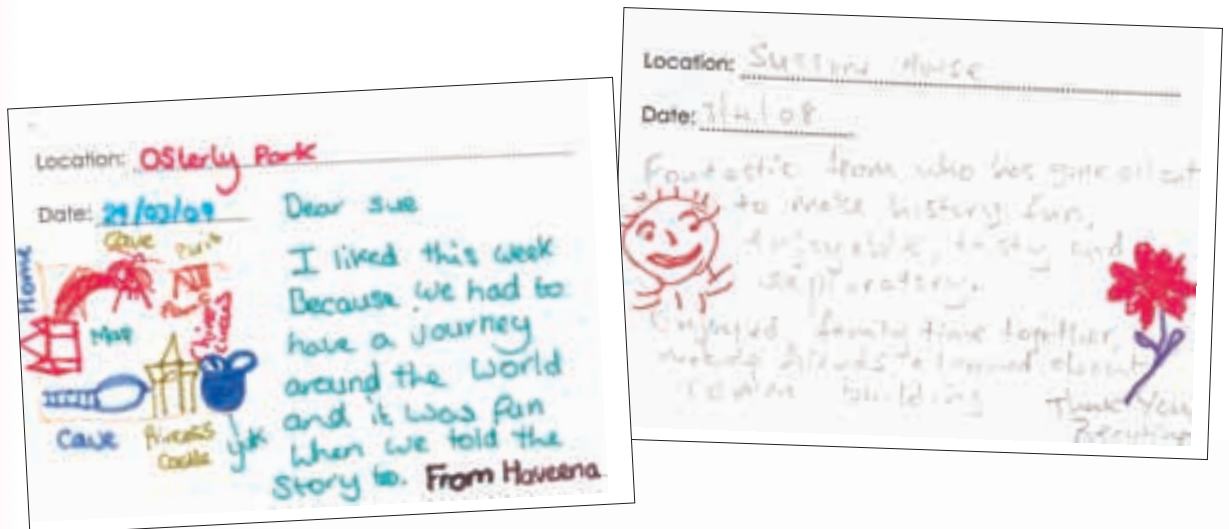
Above **A family making gingerbread in the historic kitchens at Osterley**

# Reflections from the Families

A group of the families who had participated in London Voices met together at the South Bank Centre to reflect on their experience. Here are some of their thoughts.

## London Voices for us...

- A chance to be amazed and find out new things.
- The discovery that what looks dull was actually shiny, fun and opulent!
- Osterley is very welcoming and explorable.
- Sutton House is a very royal place to be, with beautiful sunlight.
- Exciting, because Ham is full of colours and pretty portraits.
- I can always go back to my favourite place in Morden Hall Park.





### What makes a place family friendly?

- People who like children and let them make some noise.
- Looking at stuff.
- More things to touch.
- Special family picnic days.
- Playing outside.
- A cup of tea.
- Activities that are fun for families to do together.
- Exploring; seeing how big, how tiny, how dark, how bright, how expensive things are!



### What next for us and for other families?

- The same opportunities we have had, for other schools and other families.
- Projects for secondary age children and their parents and carers. They need time together too.
- New opportunities for us to join in and stay connected.
- Staying in contact across the four properties that participated.
- A website with live web-cam links to the properties, and films of people in costume, acting stories from the house, especially ones comparing the lives of a rich and a poor child.
- More activities and talks about food, in kitchens.
- Free downloads and pictures to colour of all the properties.
- Afternoon tea with music of the period of the house.
- Get younger people interested or it will be no use anymore.



# The creative approach

**‘I want for the families who have been a part of the project to feel they can go to National Trust properties and be playful and creative... and I want for the properties to feel they can be thought about and enjoyed in lots of different ways.’**

Chloë Bird, Project Manager

The creative approach delivered many of the successes of London Voices. The artists all brought a particular way of mediating the properties, through narrative, through theme, through the visual and the kinaesthetic. They were able to recognise which stories, which objects or people were going to provide a fruitful meeting place with the families, and a starting point for exploration.

They designed activities that were engaging and enlivening, that challenged everyone to be creative, but didn't intimidate.

**‘The projects need to have aspiration – not pressure. The building is already challenging, so you don't want to make it more so with difficult activities.’**

Zannie Fraser, artist

They created structures that allowed families to be creative together, to have fun and to learn about each other.

**‘My mind is often so tired. At home I can find it hard to be creative. Here some one else is bringing the ideas and I realise I know more than I thought I did.’**

Parent, Meadlands School

They supported the families to make connections with the places and the people they encountered at their particular site. They demonstrated that

starting with one small detail; one object, one person, one room, can lead to a rich and expansive creative journey.

**‘I didn't expect we'd learn the history. It's done in just the right way – taking a small detail and expanding from there. It helps us to understand that someone really lived here.’**

Parent, Millfields School

They helped the families to celebrate their creativity, to feel more confident and to believe in their own ability to contribute.

**‘Feeling proud of what you've done makes you feel positive about the property – involved and not a spectator.’**

Jane Porter, artist

The artists worked closely with the London Voices core team, property staff, teachers and volunteer placements; sharing skills and expertise, in order to tailor the creative work to the group and to the property. The learning generated fed into the ongoing visitor offers, and the artists were involved directly and indirectly in the new interpretation, which will benefit all visiting families.

For many staff and volunteers, witnessing and participating in the creative approaches convinced them of the need to place enjoyment at the heart of a family's visit.



# Case study: the creative sessions

## How did the artists unlock the connections between the families and the properties?

In school, the families heard about the Child Family. Diana talked about the symbols that the family used to represent themselves in their Coat of Arms. What do the symbols tell us about them? Before they went to Osterley to explore this more, the families chose their own symbols. Sharing them with each other meant sharing personal stories, feelings about identity and nationality, aspirations for the future. A volunteer present at the session said that it was the first time she felt she had really understood what it might mean to be newly arrived in Britain. When they came to the house their ability to read the symbols and understand them was much richer, informed by their own experience.

Jane invited the families at Morden Hall Park to look for leaves and other natural materials to use in a printing session. This encouraged them to really explore and look carefully around. When each one of them came to make jointed card puppets, the families created their character's clothes using these natural prints. When the puppets were finished, everyone had a photo taken of their favourite place in the Park, and then their puppet was pictured there, in the Park and wearing the Park! In this way the families placed themselves, through their puppets, at the heart of the property.

Families at Ham House got a special look at the exquisite cabinets, looking at the ways in which they were decorated, what was kept in them, how delicate they were to clean. Then Zannie gave each family a cardboard box, and quantities of collage materials. They were to design and decorate their own

cabinet. Doing this together meant negotiating and sharing ideas, but also thinking about the character of the cabinet. Every family's cabinet was different, just as the ones in the house are. The encounter with special objects inspired the families to do something special together.

After the families had visited the Victorian study in Sutton House they reflected on the use and the atmosphere of the room. It was a quiet, private room, where you could sew, or write letters. Diana got the families thinking about 'secrets, hopes, wishes and dreams', and showed them examples of amulets from around the world. Diana showed them how to make one, and invited them to write a secret wish to go inside. Each person made their own, with adults helping children not confident with writing. They were all really different and original. The atmosphere of the Victorian study had come into the school, and sewing and writing had been translated to a contemporary, reflective activity.

## Cultural research

The creative projects did not happen in isolation. The need to make connections with the ethnically and socially diverse communities in which the properties are sited was clear in the aims of the project, and it was understood that the cultural resonance of the properties needed to be expanded.

The creative projects brought the lives, experience and knowledge of the families into the National Trust. The programme of cultural research opened up new areas of research that brought to the foreground international connections, and significant local themes.

The Project Officer led on this aspect of the project. The research was carried out by a team of freelance researchers and volunteer placements with particular expertise, with staff support. At each property there was also the opportunity to join a volunteer research forum.

Making the cultural research one of the core activities of London Voices brought the curatorial interests of the properties into play:

**‘I was delighted that the project placed research at the heart of the engagement. This meant that more departments in the Trust have got more out of it.’**

Lucy Porten, Regional Curator, Thames & Solent Region

It provided a new area of involvement for volunteers, who responded enthusiastically. To facilitate future engagement a set of guidelines, to aid documentation and accurate referencing is being drawn up, and will be available nationally. The research itself is an outcome, but, significantly, the process demonstrated how much the experience of doing the research benefited people,

deepening their engagement and their sense of satisfaction.

**‘For the volunteers just them undertaking it was an outcome. The idea of cultural research that’s a tool for the person doing it has been a revelation for me.’**

Lucy Porten, Regional Curator, Thames & Solent Region

The research became a source book for the artists and influenced the projects. The creative work revealed that families connect to the properties in many different ways, through learning, through teaching, (the families brought knowledge on many occasions), and through imagination. Reading the research it is interesting to see that it is not a collection of facts, it is full of questions. This opens up the history, and allows the visitor to be part of searching for the answers.

Richard Webb, from West Thames College, draws an interesting comparison with his own work:

**‘Art and Design has generally been taught in a very linear, historically Eurocentric way. But this is challenged by working with students who might have roots in Afghanistan or Sri Lanka. It begs the question, ‘Whose history are you describing?’. The eclectic collections at Osterley need to be put into a participatory context to open them up’.**

# Local partnership

Partnerships were made with local primary schools, colleges, and the local authorities. The length of the project meant that establishing a partnership was realistic, there was time to negotiate the arrangements, learn what each partner needed and how that could best be fulfilled, and benefit from experience.

The Project Manager and Project Officer worked hard at these relationships, with a commitment to detailed planning and clear communication.

The families for the creative projects were all recruited through local schools. Given the original project aim 'to engage meaningfully with family users who are either: black or from an ethnic minority, (BME); on low incomes; or have been disenfranchised from formal education', local schools were chosen that would be able to target this particular demographic. However, the schools themselves chose how to invite and attract families, and they, on the whole, looked at the particular needs of particular families. For example, families were invited where there were issues of confidence, where a particular child would benefit from quality time with a parent, where either children or adults were learning English, where the families were struggling due to economic hardship.

Many of the families participated for all three years. One mother commented, 'My children have grown up with London Voices'. There were benefits for the schools too:

**'For the third year running the partnership forged between the School and the National Trust has been brilliant. In fact, because of the continuity of the last three years it has developed and become a really strong working**

**relationship that is now cherished by our parents and staff alike.'**

Paul Hyde, Deputy Head, Liberty School

Of families interviewed for the evaluation few had visited National Trust properties before, and of those that had the majority had been to Morden Hall Park, where there is no entry fee. With the participating Schools in Year 1 showing a 17% higher than average number of families on free school meals, (National School Meals Survey 2007), these were families who the Trust would normally find hard to reach. The partnership made it possible.

Partnerships established with Colleges provided placement opportunities within the projects. This attracted individuals who would not have considered working with the Trust, or even visiting Trust properties. This placement model offers the National Trust a way of supporting the ambition to diversify its volunteer force. Crucially, because it was set up as a partnership between property and college, the opportunity is there for ongoing relationship, beyond the life of the project.

Partnerships with Local Authorities worked best when there were clear benefits on both sides. In some cases the Authority could act as a conduit, signposting other connections, but in others the Authority became actively involved, supporting the work, but also challenging the Trust to become more actively involved with its local community.



# Reflections from teachers

Kim Price and Stephanie Collis were both involved throughout London Voices. Here they reflect on the benefits for their schools and the families.

## **Kim Price – Head of Millfields Children’s Centre and Extended Services, London Borough of Hackney**

We have a strong commitment to family and intergenerational learning at Millfields Community School. We have long since valued the special pride that occurs when a child watches his or her parent participate in a learning activity, and the sheer joy a child experiences working jointly with a parent or grandparent. The resulting benefits to the child’s confidence and esteem are usually enormous. The parent also benefits from the same successful outcomes... and more. We have watched very nervous parents just blossom as they develop a new awareness of their own skills, interests and abilities as independent learners and increase their understanding of how they too can be successful facilitators of their child’s learning too. The sessions open a shared dialogue between parent and child that extends beyond the family learning course and truly forms a good basis for success in the future – the dialogue that starts with, ‘what have you done today?’.

The National Trust ‘London Voices’ Project at Sutton House has delivered all of the above and much, much more. It explored history and heritage, cultures and identity in a way that took each person and each family on their own special journeys whilst showing how richly and how deeply we all connect. The quality of the activities and experiences planned for the project were totally absorbing and greatly appreciated by the participating families.

The wider links between the school community and our local NT property, Sutton House, have also strengthened and we see many more families visiting the house at weekends and participating in family learning events during school holidays.

We hope to preserve the legacy of the London Voices Project by planning and continuing a short family learning course across each setting that includes many of the successful elements from the original project.

## **Stephanie Collis, Berkeley School, London Borough of Hounslow. Community Learning Officer, Years 1, 2, and Volunteer in Year 3**

Berkeley Primary School is situated approximately two miles away from Osterley, and yet interestingly only two of the families involved had previously visited the Park and none had been inside the House. Many of the families

had not known about the property at all, but virtually all of them would have had difficulty in visiting either due to local transport difficulties or because entrance fees to the House would be prohibitive for families on low incomes.

The observable pleasure and growth within individuals and families on the project was clear to see. Parents and children grew in confidence as they participated in activities each week. The majority of the group spoke English as a second language and it was notable that spoken language skills improved with practice and growing confidence. Creative and social skills developed during the workshop sessions too as families shared materials, experimented with new techniques and materials, took turns, discussed what they were making and solved problems together. The parents supported their children in planning and telling stories and using puppets - they listened with respect to other family groups as they presented their work to the whole group. Many of the families returned to the property, when invited, to take part in various consultations that have helped to develop new resources for family use - they know that their opinions have been valued and that they have contributed to the enjoyment of other families in the future.

On a personal and professional level I have learnt so much from working with the artists, staff and volunteers, and have gained an insight into life and work in the heritage sector. I will never forget the dedication, hard work and enthusiasm of the London Voices Team. I have been impressed by the National Trust's willingness to look at new and exciting ways of working with families that will make family visits to properties meaningful and memorable in the future. The enthusiasm of staff and volunteers at Osterley has grown during the course of the Project, and there is now a real commitment to developing a family friendly ethos at the property.

How many children will become fascinated by history and work in the heritage sector, develop their story telling skills and become authors, extend their creative skills and become artists, or become parents who understand the enjoyment, satisfaction and value of supporting their children's learning? We must wait and see.



Above **Participants from Berkeley School explore shadow puppetry with Stephanie Collis**



## Case study: one family

When Gareth North got involved in the first year of London Voices at Morden Hall Park, his children were 7, 6 and 5 years old, and he was beginning life as a single parent. For him, the project provided a number of crucial opportunities at that time.

**'It gave me another avenue to spending time with my kids. It gave me a chance to get to know other parents, and it gave me a way in to the school, where I knew nobody. I needed to jump-start myself into my new life'**

He felt that his children had lacked opportunities to have fun and to interact, and that the project provided both. He noticed his children opening up, learning to be with other children, and to build better relationships with adults. The project provided a really positive environment to be together as a family. The Park, through the project, became a place they associated with fun and support, and

**'Three years later they are as enthusiastic about going to Morden Hall Park as they were at the start.'**

As a local person he is also keen to see how the Park can engage local families more.

**'It's just a walk through for lots of people. We need to get them to stay, to stop and have things to do. I would say that the danger for the National Trust is ageism. It doesn't cater enough for the young. The history's important, but you can include that in the fun. What happened here is great, but it needs to carry on developing, and I think that it will.'**

In Year two of the project Gareth joined the working group, helping to review the project and make plans for the future. He represented London Voices at the National Trust Community & Volunteering conference, and has become involved in School as a volunteer. He has lots of ideas, and wants to make sure that local families stay connected.

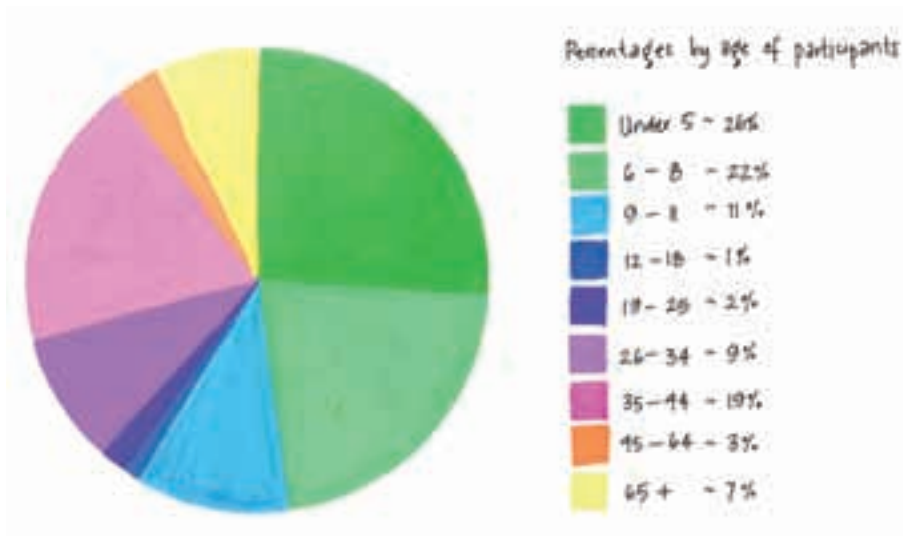
**'We are an important audience out there.'**



Above The North family at Morden Hall Park in 2007

# Opening out family learning to all visitors

One of the challenges of family learning illustrated by the experience of London Voices is the variety of age-groups participating at one time:



The information above, (gathered over three years from the session registers) reveals the age range that creative sessions were tailored to.

What emerged was that generalising about different age groups didn't always work. Sometimes it was the adults who wanted to explore and the children who wanted to be quiet. On more than one occasion a child showed visiting adults around. The evidence from London Voices is that the activities need to be varied, but they shouldn't be assumed to belong to certain age bands. The hands-on activity room in Osterley, created in Year 1 was designed for all ages, but preparation was needed to encourage volunteers to allow adults to use it, and to encourage adults to do so.

The interpretation that has come out of London Voices opens up ways of engaging families together. Because it was developed together with families it has real integrity as a tool to help families explore together.

What remains a challenge, both locally and nationally, is how to attract families to come who do not see themselves getting anything out of, or having anything to offer the National Trust. Free family days remain an important feature, but even these can fail to attract the kind of families who the National Trust needs to reach. The Project Manager has driven the issue of cost to families, making sure that it is considered strategically. Now, ways of diminishing financial barriers for local families are under consideration.

Outreach, in the shape of visits to or work in Schools does not attract an Education Group Membership credit. This affects income when these numbers are not taken into account. Without EGM credit, such visits could easily be relegated to the bottom of the list, and an important opportunity to improve the offer for **all** families will be lost.





“Cultural change is the most important of all the aims. We have started the journey and need to continue.”

Sian Harrington,  
Property Manager

# Building Capacity, Supporting Change

With learning for all the partners as an aspiration, there was also, for the properties, an expectation of structural change, in relation to engagement with the local community, working with families, interpretation, and a growth in skills and awareness for staff and volunteers.

Learning for all the partners was an aspiration. For the properties there was an expectation of structural change in relation to: engagement with the local community, working with families, interpretation and a growth in skills and awareness for staff and volunteers.

Alongside many inspiring initiatives throughout the Trust, there remain problems of low expectations of its interest and relevance to some audiences. All of the individuals in partner organisations interviewed for the evaluation reported that they would not, prior to the project, have imagined that working with their local property would be so fruitful, and mutually beneficial. Some individuals interviewed felt strongly about the National Trust's lack of ability to reach out to a more diverse audience.

**'How then can they aim for social inclusion if the excluded group is not adequately represented? Is the history of one group more relevant than that of another?'**

Michelle Hinkson, volunteer placement

The three years of work with a small core group was necessary to experiment, to make mistakes and to learn from them, and to enter into a real dialogue with families. Staff and volunteers were able to witness successful ways of working with families, and to understand the challenges. Fear could be assuaged:

**'It's all worked; there's been no damage, never any risk to them or the House. The families have taken ownership, across the cultural divide. It surprised me. I'm converted'.**

Alan Rideout, House Steward, Osterley

While many lessons have been learned, and all four properties report changes to the offer they make to all family visitors now, there are challenges to real change. Capacity is always under pressure

**'Without the focus of the project, I can see outreach visits and maintaining partnerships getting overlooked. There are so many demands at the property, and they will always seem more urgent than going out into the community, if we are not careful.'**

Christopher Cleeve, Learning Officer, Sutton House

There will also be individuals within properties who remain anxious about visits by families. But at Ham House, which many volunteers told us in Year one was not suitable for children under 9, new volunteers are now told simply to expect a lot of families. It has become part of the ethos of the House, not an add-on.



# The training programme

Training was offered at all the properties, and on some occasions was open to staff from other London sites.

Most of the training was designed specifically in relation to London Voices, (Family Learning, Interpretation and Creativity, and Family Audiences), while the Diversity training was part of a wider National Trust initiative.

The sessions were designed for staff and volunteers working together, and to include practical activities and social time. Staff are seen to be extremely time pressured and there was real value in taking time to reflect and share practical experience with volunteers, who are the face of the property to visitors. When the training had clear tasks, for example the creation of a family charter for each property, feedback indicated clearly that the process of creating this together was just as important to the participants as the outcome.

Training was also delivered through participating, watching, shadowing and being mentored.

**'Some of what we talked about in the training suddenly clicked into place when I was helping in a session. It was only then that I really understood.'**

**Volunteer, Ham House**

Crucially, training was highly valued as a chance for participants to learn from each other. Many volunteers spend little time together, particularly if they are room stewards, and often have limited contact with staff. Where the training allowed an exchange of ideas, collective problem solving, and an opportunity to bring skills and knowledge into the room, as well as to learn, capacity was added to the whole property team.

Below **Room Guides at Osterley try out their new compass**





# Diversifying volunteers

**‘It has undoubtedly changed my attitude to our non-traditional visitors. Difficult to quantify, but something like the difference between learning to drive and driving, something you do without needing to think about it first.’**

Pauline Davies, volunteer & project scribe

New opportunities for existing volunteers came in the shape of the chance to be a volunteer scribe for the creative sessions, and the scribes themselves reflect on this experience on the next page. Volunteers supported sessions practically, and one commented:

**‘I have never before had the opportunity to be with the same group of families more than once. It’s a completely different experience and very rewarding.’**

Joanna Young, education volunteer, Osterley

Other volunteers became involved in the research project which deepened their engagement and increased their skills. When that particular part of the project was complete some didn’t want to finish – they were determined to continue to follow the threads of their investigations.

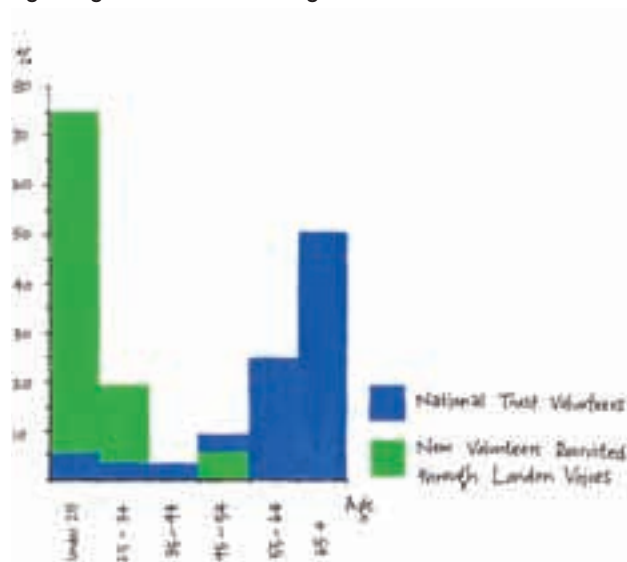
The Project Officer developed a model of placements, through brokering partnerships with colleges local to the properties. Their students gained an experience of working with the National Trust, and bringing their own skills and experience. These placements were, on average, younger than the average NT volunteer, (see chart), and more ethnically diverse. This way of bringing in new volunteers is a model worth pursuing. Some of the placements stayed beyond the project, and all the feedback clearly indicates a change in

attitude to the Trust, and the possibility of volunteering in the future.

Family volunteering was trialled, and will become a part of the general offer. This provided a great way for the families to continue their relationship with the properties, and to support them. In a virtuous circle local visitors would see themselves reflected in the people they meet at the properties. That would encourage them to volunteer, and some would progress to working for the Trust.

Baseline data was not available, as there was no equal opportunities monitoring for the volunteer force. The London Voices team have now piloted a form, and the data below is drawn from that. Without systematic collection of such data the Trust will not be able to evidence the changes that it is striving to make.

**Age range of new and existing volunteers:**



# Reflections from the volunteers

All the creative sessions had a National Trust volunteer who ‘scribed’ – took notes of what happened, of conversations and of responses. Here are their reflections:

## **Pauline Davies was a scribe for sessions at Osterley Park and House**

I am a long time supporter of Octavia Hill's vision for the National Trust as for everyone and for ever, and a passionate aficionado of Osterley Park House. In a small way I act as a voluntary advisor to disadvantaged people in my area. This project was therefore the perfect match with my own interests. It was genuinely rewarding to have the opportunity to work as a scribe, not just recording what happened but using my observational and drafting skills to try to bring the individual sessions to life on the page.

As a National Trust volunteer I have been able to apply much of the learning I

acquired on the project. The project has convincingly confirmed my long held belief that appreciation of beautiful things, understanding of history and the love of nature are universal; that there is no cultural divide when it comes to appreciating the National Trust offer. It also showed that it can be necessary and effective to put out a hand of welcome to overcome real or perceived barriers to our non traditional audiences. The families involved in the project continue their involvement with Osterley and are now keen advocates of the National Trust. It was really exciting to be part of this project.

## **Vickie Brookes was scribe for the Morden Hall Park sessions**

Personally, I found scribing for MHP fascinating and satisfying. I loved watching the families slowly relax, begin to trust and explore the National Trust environment, bond with the staff and with each other. Many who started off wary and shy became happy and outgoing as the project went on. Word got round after the first year and there was a rush to take part in the next two years' projects. It became a social, as well as instructive session, with people chatting and everyone and helping each other. The enthusiasm for creating a hands-on, permanent structure at the end was truly heart warming. The families obviously got a lot out of it and the project created warm

feelings about the Park for the future. The London Voices staff and artists worked hard to make it a fun and instructive time which staff, parents and children will hold as lovely memories in the future. So will I.



Right **Vickie Brookes scribing at Morden Hall Park**

### Alison Lyen scribed for the sessions at Ham House

Over the time I have been scribing the families have grown in confidence, becoming more outgoing as they became familiar with the House and the team and enjoyed returning to the House, - saying they were pleased to be back at Ham. One shy child and his Korean mother returned to the Long Gallery when I was stewarding this spring, proudly bringing her mother with them to show her round. A mother and father with sons finding it difficult to concentrate at school all became involved, absorbed and interested in the creative activities, with the younger son sitting down, taking

time to complete his painting of a monster and enjoy playing with the mask he had created. In a three-generation family the great-aunt enjoyed the stories of the old house and chatting with others.

Both children and parents appreciated having the time to work on something together and different families assisted each other and praised their achievements. They were sad at the end of project party as they felt part of the 'Ham House family' but planned to visit again.

### Jenny Malcolm scribed sessions at Sutton House

The beneficial effects of education have been stressed by bodies such as the Institute of Education, and research has proved time and time again that, family learning is a means of improving the educational prospects of low income groups. It is, however, one thing to read a report, study the bar charts and note the statistics, but quite another to observe it in action at close quarters. I have gained some very valuable insights, namely, the process of learning as a kin-group is cyclical, and reinforces itself

through a series of feedback circuits. The children in the project were the conduit, through which parents were able to overcome personal hurdles. The parents' own perceptions of themselves transformed, when they took part in activities. In turn, the children witnessing the latent talents of their parents were able to feel proud, and this fed back into their personal educational development. It was wonderful to observe the organic growth and blossoming of the participants.

Below **Jenny Malcolm scribing at Sutton House**



## Consulting with families

‘I think there has been a shift in the property and we have grown together over the three years. The team are now much more open to trying new ideas and working with a section of the community that have never been seen before as one that engages in the park in a constructive way. Everybody has seen how valuable it is to involve the community, and this will be part of our consultation process in the future, as although we have consulted in the past, it has not been with members of this part of the community.’  
Zoë Colbeck, Property Manager, Morden Hall Park

The London Voices core team have modelled consultation with the families throughout the three years. Because of this families have grown in their relationships with the properties, and can see their contributions reflected in them. Families who helped on the design of the hands on room at Osterley in Year one had their photographs up in the room, so that it was clear who had informed the design. Methodology has been used that has helped all age groups to participate, because it was accessible, creative and fun. It was understood that the act of asking the families’ opinions made them grow in confidence.

Giving families enough information to make informed choices helped them to become supporters, and not just visitors. In the early stages there was some anxiety from property staff about asking people what they would like because it might be impossible to fulfil their requests. However, the consultation process has shown that most families understand budget and practical restraints, and are interested in what influences decision making in the property.

Feedback on the new interpretation shows that visitors are positively influenced by the knowledge that local families were involved in developing it.

**‘It’s nice to know local people have been involved. It encourages me to think about getting involved as well’.**

Visitor, Morden Hall Park

In many ways, the creative projects themselves were consultation. The property staff learned about the property, and about how families could best enjoy it from being closely involved with the projects. As families got to know the staff, and more about what they did, they entered into dialogue with them, which is the basis of consultation.

**‘Using families and visitors as consultants in creating your offer increases quality, and people’s enjoyment.’**

Ian Wilson, Marketing and Supporter Development Manager, Thames & Solent Region



## Case study: a consultation with families

A consultation led by Chloë Bird, Project Manager and Rose Swindells, Project Officer, on new interpretation for Ham House.

### The session shows the way in which:

- An existing relationship provided a secure foundation for the consultation.
- Families' expertise was recognised.
- All ages were catered for.
- The consultation used activities the families were familiar with from the project.
- There was a transparency about budgets, which allowed the families into the decision making.
- The families were encouraged to think about what would help other visitors.

The session began with Chloë telling the families that Ham House needed their help. As people who knew the House and Gardens through their involvement in London Voices, their ideas were needed to guide choices for new interpretation at the House.

Chloë explained that some money had become available, and that the property would like to have some dummy boards; life-size wooden painted figures, representing people who have lived and worked in the House. Rose asked the group to remember some of the characters they had learned about, and produced photographs of some faces, taken from paintings. There were nine in all, and when the group heard that there would only be enough money to make three dummy boards, they laughed; 'It's always the way!'

Rose showed the group a selection of objects, each one related to one of the characters. One by one people guessed to whom they might belong. The chaplain

had a book to read, and one of the servants, flowers for the lady of the house. These added another dimension to the characters, which was helpful when the families came to the next stage. In groups they took a large piece of paper, and drew around one person from the group, in the position their character would take up.

Having decorated the cut out figures, they added the photographs of the characters' faces and stuck the characters on the wall. The group clearly enjoyed seeing each other's work, and there was a real sense of the presence of the people from the House. They were then asked to choose which characters might best become dummy boards, and help other people to imagine who had lived and worked there before.

All of the group were then allotted three votes. After a clear vote for two characters, and a tie-break for the third, the group were satisfied with their choice. The dummy boards will be launched in autumn 2009.

# Change revealed in new initiatives

The depth of learning from the creative projects was always intended to have an impact on what was offered to the general visitor at properties, to influence practice, procedure, and future planning.

London Voices supported all the properties to put learning into practice throughout the project, influencing what happened at free family days, testing new interpretation methods from Year 1 onwards, and supporting the properties' presence in local school and community events. There is an awareness of the dangers of learning being shared, but not acted upon.

**'Also important is that lessons are cascaded, and not just advocacy, but embedding lessons. This is what supports cultural change.'**  
Jenny Blay, MLA, Steering Group member

In the properties, there is evidence that new approaches are already happening, and are being built in to future plans.

**'We want provision of more arts-based learning, and a more constant offer for families, not just on elected 'special days' such as family days, but all the time. We have been successful in getting funding to continue our relationship with Millfields. Families are a core part of our property management and learning plans, 2009-11.'**  
Naomi Hutchinson, Custodian at Sutton House

Zoë Colbeck, Property Manager at Morden Hall Park sees future engagement with local families as being a core part of their future plans. Engagement with the families has

included asking them for help in the design of posters and welcome information, and they plan to continue to work with families as consultants. The Park has a history of continuing engagement; it still runs activities for elders after its 'Untold Story' Project in 2005.

The team at Ham House is hoping to introduce an art cart, to encourage creative activities when families visit, and is seeking funding, with the partner school, to run an art club at Ham. The school's Art Week was based on the collections at Ham and was a huge success.

Sian Harrington, Property Manager at Osterley is planning to introduce 'interpretation guides' at weekends specifically to work with families, and is planning an arts based partnership for partner schools with Hounslow Family Learning Team

The core team have also been active at a more strategic level. For example, they sit on two 'innovate' groups within the National Trust, that look at family volunteering nationally, and that look at interpretation in the Thames & Solent area. They have shared the methodology for interpretation development within London Voices with central learning advisors within the Trust, and are involved in developing research guidelines for volunteers, as a result of the successful cultural research strand of London Voices. This connectivity should bear fruit, if there is support for the recommendations which come out of their input.

# The impact of welcome

In the creative projects the welcome of participants was seen to be absolutely crucial to their enjoyment.

The whole team quickly learned everyone's names, so that they felt personally welcome, and practical issues; places for coats, buggies, school bags etc were looked after. There was space because of the way the sessions were planned and because of the length of the relationship to have personal conversations, and families built a strong attachment to the people who they met each week, perhaps particularly to Chloë and to Rose, who were present over the three years.

Was this more important because these families were not the National Trust's usual audience? Certainly, a level of confidence needed to be built up, and some families spoke about the change in their own preconceptions about who the Trust is for. They needed to be shown clearly that they were welcome, and were valued. Once this was established, not just as an idea, but as practice, the families responded. Without losing any sense of the specialness of their surroundings, they became at home in them.

**'The highlight for Glen, (education volunteer), was the sense of ownership and pride around Ham House that the children from Meadlands exhibited on the picnic day. She felt they would be keen to be part of the house in future.'**

Extract from the minutes of the Ham House working group, July 8th 2009

The welcome encapsulated an important lesson about barriers to access. Many local families don't visit because of cost, and this is being addressed. But there is also the issue of what some of the properties represent. The larger houses, like Ham and Osterley, were intended by their architects to look important, special, different from the surrounding community.

**'The steps up to the House at Osterley were originally intended to have a massive impact, and they still do.'**

Lucy Porten, Regional Curator, Thames & Solent

Properties still carry messages about class and identity that can make them seem irrelevant, or even unwelcoming. Getting people to come in and to feel welcome is crucial, if the richness and complexity of their stories are to be revealed. One family, asked to describe a family friendly property said simply, 'A place where they like children.'



Right Families from Spring Grove School on the portico at Osterley



## Case study: bringing community in, going out into the community

Christopher Cleeve is Learning Officer at Sutton House. He identifies the impact of London Voices in connection with the local community.

**Outreach:** The creative projects had sessions in the school and at the property. Going to the school gave the property a profile there. Property staff were able to personally pass on a sense of excitement about what they were offering. 'Just walking from the property to the school gets you out of the world of the property. We saw where people lived, and we met on their territory. We need to know where our local visitors come from, go there, and come back to the property with them.' Property staff got to know a small group through the project, but gained access to a much wider group, by, for example, participating in a Community day at the school. '95% of the people there I would not have met in any other way. Being right in the local community I could communicate what we do in a way that other marketing cannot achieve.'

**Partnerships:** The project helped the property to communicate to the Local Authority what it does, through a project with a clear identity, with a relatively long commitment and a strong brand. They provided connections to other services, advice on funding streams and shared marketing opportunities. And the local authority like having meetings at Sutton House, they find it a welcoming place. The partnership with local colleges

provided an opportunity to bring in volunteers in a different way, as placements with specific skills. This brought in a younger, and more ethnically diverse group of volunteers.

**Knowing your audience:** Knowing from the start that the project would build a relationship with a group of families made a difference. The opportunity to get to know them had an impact on working practices. It led to diversification of the themes used for family events. It meant making sure that sitting and talking with people, helping with activities, listening to and learning from families is a priority. Discovering that letting them get to know staff and volunteers, (and not just those directly involved), the things that they do, and how they work, makes them feel more involved.

**Press and Marketing:** London Voices demonstrated how to treat the local press as partners. 'Since April 2008 we've had at least 12 articles including 2 front covers and I'm sure a great deal of that is about how London Voices made that initial contact.' The quality of the print, the thought that went into the newsletters and the calendars produced, communicated the spirit, energy and quality of the project in a really effective way.



Left Participants dancing in the Great Chamber at Sutton House



# Connecting locally

The National Trust's focus on engaging supporters includes the desire to 'reach out more strongly to the neighbourhoods in which our properties are situated' (N.T. Annual report 07/08)

What London Voices has provoked over three years is a reciprocal movement, of the local community into the property, and the property into the local community.

There are many actual and potential benefits:

- In the current economic climate, National Trust properties need to relate more closely to their local communities.
- Visitors are not travelling as much or as far. Local audiences will not necessarily yield large numbers of new members, for economic reasons, but the experience of London Voices evidences potential support;
- Families might become members if creative ways forward are found, both through growing family volunteering opportunities, and through a reduced cost membership scheme.

The four London Voices properties were situated in areas with local populations who are ethnically and economically diverse. The project made new connections with local audiences that need to be sustained.

**'There is a very important question to be answered about who comes here. After all, we are in London, one of the world's most multi-cultural cities. And yet we only attract a very narrow band. This can't be sustainable.'**

Jorge Ferreira, Visitor Services Manager

The project has done a great deal to counteract assumptions.

**'It's not just a fusty old place people don't ever come to.'**  
(Visitor, Osterley Park)

The properties need to continue to demonstrate that they are accessible, and interested in local people.

Successful partnerships with local organisations will help the properties to know about and access funding, and to communicate what they do. Most properties will continue to run some free activities for families in the summer, and maintain relationships with their partner schools.

**'The extra free days for families has made a real difference. It's put this place on their list of regular activities.'**

Victoria Bradley, House & Collections Manager

The challenge is, how to maintain this momentum? A longitudinal study has been proposed. The result of research into ways of making local membership affordable will also have an impact. It is hoped that the local partner organisations and the families contribute to this improved local connection, by refusing to go away.

# Learning about your collection

London Voices demonstrated the mutual benefit of dialogue with visitors around collections. Staff and volunteers acquired new insights and knowledge from working with the families.

- **Following the families:** In all four sites the key property staff were able to discover what the families found interesting and exciting, by literally following them. On more than one occasion, walking to look at a particular object, or room, or tree, staff would find that everyone had stopped somewhere else. Looking afresh through the family's eyes created new ideas for work with them, and for the general visitor.
  - **Opening up the working world:** Families always enjoyed finding out about what staff did, where they worked, and where they lived. I watched a session in which Gwen Thomas, House Steward at Ham House showed a group of families a cabinet. She told them it was the first thing she had been allowed to clean, and described the special brush she used. The families were fascinated. They understood the cabinet in a new way, they understood Gwen's job in a new way. On this occasion it wasn't the historical but the contemporary context that opened it up for them.
  - **Learning from the families:** The families often brought knowledge and expertise with them. I heard a mother at Sutton House talk about her Huguenot ancestor, and families at Osterley reveal detailed knowledge of the cotton industry. I heard mothers describe how to walk in floor length silk, and families bring local knowledge in to contextualise a property story. Women who knew how to draw Mehndi, Henna patterns, were experts with particular art materials, and families with their roots in many countries brought insights and knowledge to international connections at the properties.
  - **The imaginative approach:** The artists encouraged an imaginative as well as a fact based approach. This was valid in several ways. Sometimes not much is known about something, and information is open to interpretation. To hear what everyone imagines opens up and enriches the historical understanding. Imagination also allows an exploration of feelings and values. When the families heard stories of people in the sites, those named and those not, imagining around and beyond what was known was a way of connecting to, and comparing experience. And the imagination allowed families to have fun with mythical creatures, adventures and fiction; the property as a site for creativity and exploration.
- 'The staff are sharing their passion. It's brilliant when they just chat to people – share their passion. They were enthusiastic and helpful, and it wouldn't have been possible without them.'**  
Zannie Fraser, artist

**'I've learned so much about the House from the way the staff have talked about it to the families, and what has come from the families in the sessions.'** Pauline Davies, volunteer, Osterley

# What is the impact on the general visitor?

‘London Voices has taught us that there is no such thing as a ‘difficult’ audience.’

Ian Wilson, Marketing and Supporter

Development Manager, Thames & Solent Region

Stephanie Collis, from Berkeley School, who has been a partner, but also a member of a working group and the steering group always emphasises the idea of a ‘family friendly ethos’ at properties. This means an emphasis on how a family would be welcomed and how they would enjoy a visit any day, not just when there is special provision.

The special nature of the relationship fostered through a project cannot be replicated with a general visitor, but there is much that is transferable.

On one of the London Voices training days, staff and volunteers worked together to draw up a Family Charter for each property. They were able to tailor the charter to their property, indicating to all staff and volunteers a clear set of standards when dealing with families. These have been shared across the Trust, and the model is being explored more widely within the National Trust. Feedback suggested that the process of creating these was very valuable and it is important that the charters do not gather dust, but are dynamic documents that can be reappraised and rewritten, collectively.

At the start of year one, each property listed what they would like to know from doing London Voices that they did not already know. Their lists included practical questions: Is the current entrance the best one for families?

Do our current trails/tracker packs meet the needs of a family learning together, or are they aimed only at children? Will families return in between projects? All these questions could be answered over three years and all will benefit the general visitor.

London Voices modelled the benefits of clear invitations and good welcome.

The schools and the other partners will continue to provide useful hubs for the dissemination of information about what is going on at the properties, but properties need to continue outreach work in order to engage their local community, and to be visible locally. Welcoming visitors is a priority for all audiences, and there is a growing understanding that some visitors do appreciate a chance to talk informally with the volunteers who greet them. Clearly some visitors want to be left alone, so this is not a question of applying one rule for all, but rather of being sensitive to the different needs of visitors.

In all the properties there remained a sense that some volunteers, and occasionally staff, found some visitors challenging, or doubted that they would enjoy a visit. This could be on the basis of age, appearance or ethnicity. London Voices has helped to counter some preconceptions, and make meaning of the National Trust’s assertion that it is ‘For ever, for everyone’.





“What’s great about partnership working is that you don’t duplicate the skill set. You can each do what you are best at, and complement each other,”

Alison Archibald, London Borough of Richmond upon Thames



# Working in Partnership

The local partnerships have been crucial to the success of London Voices. Not only have they facilitated the development of the project, they are an important part of the legacy.

- For schools the project delivered on the creative curriculum, family learning, extended provision and learning outside the classroom.
- For the local authority the project delivered learning activities for hard to reach groups who would benefit from family learning.
- For local colleges volunteer placements offered a valuable and creative opportunity for students.
- For the National Trust properties raised their profile locally, and they became part of a wider network, in a sustainable way.

There was a lot of ground work to set up the partnerships, and it was important that the London Voices Team went out to visit partners, as well as inviting them in. Partner organisations were part of the working groups, and were sometimes present at Family and Community Days, and at project celebrations. Not all the partnerships were close working relationships, but properties found it useful to be able to access networks available through other learning providers or find out about funding streams.

Working in partnerships brought the benefit of the gathering together of

different skills and connections. It supported the properties in raising their profile in the locality, and helped to disseminate the project.

Local Authorities and other learning providers spoke about their surprise that the National Trust could and would provide creative work that targeted families who needed support and encouragement. They recognised that there were many significant developments for adults and children who took part, developments which had an impact on their school and social life.

The length of the project meant that relationships could grow and develop. One partner spoke about the benefit of knowing staff at a property, and therefore being able to direct colleagues to exactly the right person.

Partnerships need care and maintenance. They are only really live when there is a joint interest or initiative. The partner organisations interviewed had every intention of maintaining what was for them a mutually beneficial relationship. The pressure on this for the properties may be their sense of capacity, and it is important to hold onto the value of partnership working, which should, when working well, give rise to a better, more efficient way of working.

# Three years of development

‘Three years gives you a chance to learn, and to put into practice what you’ve learned.’

Ruth Clarke, Community Learning Manager

All the creative projects encountered challenges along the way. These included difficulties with transport, refining the structure of workshops, supporting families to attend, dealing with health and safety issues, meeting the needs of volunteer placements, and helping families to work together. The regular working parties provided an opportunity to reflect and adjust, and the knowledge that the partnerships were over three years gave permission to try out solutions, and learn from practice.

For example, at Morden Hall Park, the year one project experienced uneven attendance from families, and the school were able to review their recruitment policy, and target participants much more successfully. The workshops in school meant that the whole school community became aware of the project, and valued it.

Some of the families were unconfident, not just about visiting the properties, but also in their engagement with school and their local community. The long term engagement allowed them time to grow in confidence, to discover their own creative skills, and then to become more involved. Staff reported seeing families showing friends around the property on an independent visit, and families became involved in consultation outside London Voices.

The length of the project also meant greater impact on the wider staff group at the properties. Staff not directly involved in the projects came to sessions, helped with particular tasks, (like finding an awning for the sculptor with a chain saw when it rained at

Morden Hall Park), and of course, began to recognise the families if they visited independently, thus building on the relationship. Staff and volunteers who were able to become involved in this way also learned engagement skills, and understood the project first hand.

The outreach included sessions in the schools, visits to assemblies, parent’s evenings and community events. These could continue beyond the life of the project. They raise the profile of the property, and help property staff and volunteers get to know their local audience much better. This needs to be formally recognised as valuable by the National Trust, so that staff feel empowered to continue.

# Meeting partners' needs

None of the partners would have stayed involved if the project did not meet their needs. For the local colleges whose students joined the project as volunteer placements there were clear benefits.

**'In certain areas of education, like hairdressing, or music technology, there's a clear vocational setting. For art and design students it's harder to find opportunities to work with others on a real project. In the past this has just proved too complex to organise. This means that all their work happens within college, in relation to staff and to their peers. This was a perfect opportunity.'**

Richard Webb, West Thames College

For this college, the placements delivered exactly what they needed, and gave their students a contact with the local community that they do not otherwise have.

For schools, the project not only helped them to deliver family learning, extended provision, and learning outside the classroom, it gave staff an opportunity to be with their students and families, not leading the activity, but able to listen to them, support them, and observe how they learned.

**'I was saying to the other staff today, how seldom we actually get to really talk to the children, and really listen to them, to their experience and knowledge. That conversation about the cotton trade – it opened up so much and helped them to see their place in things.'**

Stephanie Collis, Berkeley School

Teachers were able to feed back to other staff, sometimes providing helpful advice about ways to work with particular

children, and sometimes to help staff see someone differently.

**'Staff warned me about taking one child. They thought he would be impossible. But in the sessions he is able to settle, he can be himself. This has helped us to think about what we could be doing at school to support him.'**

Teacher

With the five schools involved, we tracked over three years the elements that they identified as underlying the success of the partnership in meeting their needs. Their chosen elements would support the key principles identified by property staff.

## The seven ingredients for success from the school's perspectives were:

1. Participatory arts activities.
2. A warm welcome from staff and volunteers.
3. An artist who can be responsive to the needs of a wide age range.
4. The presence at sessions of property staff as well as volunteers.
5. Careful choice of relevant themes and stories.
6. The opportunity for participants to share their experiences.
7. Other opportunities to visit the property.

## Reflections from the partners

**Alison Archibald is Community Learning & Training Manager, London Borough of Richmond upon Thames, and worked with Ham House & Gardens**

The Local Authority was interested in London Voices because of its commitment to Family Learning, and because Ham is an area where there are high levels of deprivation alongside affluence. We know from other Family Learning programmes in the Borough that participants often go on to be involved in more courses and activities elsewhere, and that children and adults benefit from time spent together, sharing an experience. We were also aware that many local families would have seen Ham House as inaccessible to them. However, the project has shown what an excellent learning environment it can be. It's got its own intimidations, but it doesn't feel like school. There's this wonderful conjunction of history and the modern world. A window into the past that can be provide opportunities for a contemporary arts experience.

From the start, the project was very collaborative. There was a lot of dialogue and discussion, and the staff at Ham were always interested and helpful. We were able to reassure them at the start when they expressed anxieties about how children might behave in the House and Gardens. We participated in the Family days at Ham, and saw a lot of the Meadlands families there, as well as others who might not otherwise have visited. Meadlands is a School with a high intake of families with English as an additional language, (EAL), and participation in a project like this, particularly over three years, has been really beneficial. In our usual way of working there is a particular methodology for assessing the families' experience. After discussion we could all see that it was a step too far in this

particular project, and the families would have struggled with an individual learning plan at the start. So we agreed to leave it aside, and to think of this as a stepped process, where this project might be the beginning for many families of more involvement.

What's great about partnership working is that you don't duplicate the skill set. You can each do what you are best at, and complement each other. I would like to see Ham continue to work on partnership, and build on its engagement with the local community. I'd like to see them take the example of that beautiful kitchen garden out into the community, and then bring people back in with them – making the connections literal and physical, and making it a two-way thing. I feel we now have a relationship, and the team are so engaged it won't fall apart. I would hate to see Ham revert to a place that is not for the Community.

**Below Alison Archibald at the Ham House Family Day in 2007**





Richard Webb is Curriculum Team Manager: Creative Arts, at West Thames College. The college worked with Osterley Park and House, where London Voices provided volunteering placements for art and design students.

The placements with London Voices have provided students with an excellent opportunity to apply their skills within another organisation. They have had to learn about how to collaborate with the lead artist on the project, how to work with families. They have had to learn about organisation and deadlines, and about communication skills, within a professional environment. They saw the importance of documenting work and evaluating it, first hand. These are essential skills for a Degree student.

For those who want to work as community artists, or in education, this has provided hands-on, experiential learning. They could get their hand in and learn on the job, which is invaluable. Meeting the families also gave them new knowledge of the community local to College.

There are limitations for us in creating exercises to teach these skills. The placements have helped us to deliver elements of professional development, work with external agencies, and workshop skills. Because the property is local, there are opportunities for continued links. Getting Educational Group membership for the College will really help in the future, as otherwise the cost of entry would be prohibitive. Some students would now consider volunteering for the Trust, something they would not have done before.

Prior to the partnership, few of the students would have known what the National Trust was, and those who did tended to think of it as an 'English Historical Society'. It was seen as remote and unsympathetic in comparison to

where they would go usually for leisure or for learning. There is a barrier to getting our predominantly black and Asian students in through the door, initially. Placements like this make the connection real. Although the primary aim of the National Trust is to conserve, it needs to have a living connection to its local community too. Is it a fly stuck in amber, or is it open to collecting continuing histories?

Overall the project has been manna from heaven for us. We are often overloaded, and aware that great ideas can mean a lot of additional work. But this project was so well organised and managed, it did not place any burdens on us, and we have had no problems to deal with. We wouldn't have built such a good relationship with the property through, say, running a stall at a Craft Fair. It's because it's been an ongoing project that we've been able to do so. Now perhaps, through the partnership, we can help the property in terms of developing new audiences, and thinking outside the box.

## The face of the project



For the families, the project was seen through the prism of the people who delivered it. While the families identified clearly with London Voices, and knew that they were part of something bigger, the main relationship was with the people who they met, and the property.

Important to the design of the project, was the presence in the session of people from all the partner organisations, working alongside the artist. From the beginning families met property staff, staff got to know teachers, volunteers got to

know the families, and the artist led activities in which everyone participated. This had a clear value in terms of the expertise that was being brought into the sessions, but it also meant that teachers had a chance to get to see the families working together, that property staff witnessed first hand the families' responses to the property, that the artist could call in the knowledge of property staff, that the families could hear directly about what it meant to work in the property. The 'face' of the project was true to all the constituent parts.

# The wider context

The core team of Chloë Bird, Project Manager and Rose Swindells, Project Officer have been exemplary in being able to see the bigger picture, and look for ways to support change and share learning at every level within the National Trust, as well as being sensitive to the small details that can make a creative session work and a family feel welcome.

This connectedness, between the realities of practice, and contextual circumstances and movements within the Trust has been a hallmark of the project. Responsibility for continuing to drive the progress made will now go to the Community Learning Manager for London, although restructuring may have an impact on this post.

The project has connections with many current National Trust initiatives: Families are the number one theme for Supporter Services teams in 2009. The “Going Local” agenda, and the Key Performance Indicator for properties, looking for 75% visitor enjoyment both have synergies with London Voices.

The Market Segmentation approach, developed for the National Trust in 2006, identifies supporters through their interests and motivations, and identifies families as a top priority audience to be marketing to and serving well. These connections will help keep the momentum going, but it is crucial that the staff and volunteers who now possess such expertise, acquired through a rich experience, are supported to continue this work in the properties, and to share their skills more widely.

In the wider context, lifelong learning has become an even more acute need in the light of rising unemployment. The government’s significant new aspiration

that schools provide pupils with five hours of cultural activity a week, backed by a £25m pilot scheme in 10 areas, could be an opportunity for the Trust to continue to foreground creative, participatory activity.

**‘Beyond the classroom, increasing public interest in learning as a social or family activity is likely to create rising demand for learning activities and programmes across the cultural sector.’**

John Holden, Culture & Learning,  
Towards a new agenda, Demos 2008

Partnership may hold the key to maintaining the energy and disseminating what has been learned. The strong local partnerships that have been established, if continued with the dialogue and reciprocity that have characterised them up to now, should indicate some ways forward. Partnerships within the Trust with other initiatives like ‘Whose Story?’ in the West Midlands, and with properties looking to work better with families, may enable the continued exploration of engagement, arts and learning that have characterised London Voices.

## Reflections from key property staff

### **Perfect Partners:** Christopher Cleeve, Learning Officer at Sutton House

Before London Voices I didn't trust how useful mutually beneficial partnerships could be. I felt unsure about the best way into the school hierarchy, I had the haziest sense of how the nebulous Local Authority operated and what artists I should work with, and I saw families as visitors.

The project team helped me out of that. We made contact with senior management at the school, a selection of people in the local authority and some recommended artists. We met with potential partners on their territory, listened to what mattered to them and showed them how our work at the National Trust links up.

Even the property staff became partners; with a decent preamble and invitations to planning meetings, the creative project and celebration events the team made great efforts to be involved. They added their own expertise and formed on-going personal relationships with the families. All of this has supported the project with valuable knock-on benefits to the property.

Seeing the families as partners took some imagination but in reality they have great things to offer; as volunteers, consultants, advocates and much more besides!

### **Take time:** Lisa Green, Learning & Community Manager at Morden Hall Park

When London Voices arrived I saw it as another brilliant opportunity to improve what we have on offer for our family audience. I expected the project to bring with it significantly more work and constant juggling of priorities. What I discovered however was that taking time and slowing down would be far more

important to the success of the project than running around trying to fit everything in.

One of the most significant impacts on our experiences in life is the people we meet. At our properties we are those people and it is us personally that affect

Below **Christopher Cleeve** explores tea drinking with participants





how families engage with our sites and our stories. I discovered that the more time I put aside to wait for the families arrival, sit and chat and 'hang around' until they had gone - the more I got to know them, what they wanted, thought and needed. This fed into our offer that we made to them. In a very task focused organisation where a lot of value

is put on results, it was very hard to put aside all of the things I really should be getting on with and do nothing. This doing nothing however meant that I was actually taking time to build sustainable relationships. Now I don't see families as our visitors that I need to plan for but as my friends who I look forward to seeing next time they visit the park.

### **Cultural change: Jorge Ferreira, Visitor Services Manager at Ham House & Garden**

National Trust houses might sometimes have been perceived as an unlikely choice for families looking for quality time together. Small and 'cluttered' show rooms, albeit full of precious yet untouchable objects, steep staircases and narrow corridors, children's trails that often fail to stimulate or engage, rising stress levels as families with young children enter a more confined room.

This is however fast becoming an outdated stereotype. It is now widely acknowledged that our future is closely linked to the future of the younger generations that visit us now with their families, and who will surely become our most engaged future supporters.

Naturally change can be a painfully slow and daunting process and external input

is often essential in changing perceptions and expanding 'comfort zones'.

Frequently, property motivation and 'can do' attitude levels are high but, due to lack of resources and specialist support, staff find themselves unsure about how to proceed. London Voices became the essential tool for delivery by providing expertise that enabled the property to identify objectively the needs and expectations of family audiences.

London Voices has provided the resources for family focused staff and volunteer training and the support in sowing the seeds of those cultural and behavioural adaptations that, in the short term, have ensured the deepening of our relationship and engagement with families. Through London Voices cultural change was welcomed and encouraged!

### **Families as partners: Rhian Morris, Audience and Community Development Manager at Osterley Park & House**

During the three years of the London Voices project we developed a close relationship with the participating families. Throughout the project we asked families to act as consultants for Osterley, and help us to develop new and improved interpretation for the property. In the first year the families attended consultation sessions to inform the development of a variety of things including a hands-on Children's Corner in the Tea Room, kinaesthetic activities in three new exhibition rooms, an interactive guide for families and new interpretation to use in the historic rooms for younger children.

In 2008 we went further with some of the families, asking them to feature in new interpretation. Some of the families came to a film session and now appear in a 'trailer' film for the property, located in the Stables. They were delighted to see themselves in the final film! In 2009 the families then helped to trial and assess new interpretation that London Voices worked to develop for launch this season. They also acted as consultants in evaluating all of the interpretation that has been introduced at the property over the past three years. Without their advice it would be less appropriate for the needs of families. We have learnt a lot from each other - and had fun along the way!



“There are families out there who are the most amazing advocates and staff and volunteers with new skills. We have to honour that by continuing to change,” Rose Swindells, Project Officer



# The Legacy

In all the four properties there has been both anxiety and excitement about what happens after London Voices. The project added capacity. A complex piece of work has been achieved, with time to distil the learning, implement it, and test it. The sense of achievement, for all involved, is merited. The legacy of the project lies in four interconnected areas:

- **Partnership:** building on the partnerships established through London Voices, but not necessarily through the same activities. Each property will now need to broker their own ways of working with partners and continue a dialogue that will lead to new initiatives.
- **New interpretation:** designed with families, for families. The new interpretation has been developed with a real understanding of what the London Voices families wanted and needed in order to be able to fully enjoy the properties. It is too early to say what the long term benefits to other family visitors will be, but early responses have been very positive. This is not just in the useability of the interpretation, but visitors are responding positively to the knowledge that local families were involved in its development.
- **Dissemination:** Many opportunities have been taken to share the learning emerging from London Voices. The core team have mentored and advised nationally, have presented at conferences, and been successful with press coverage. This report will be shared at events at all four properties. The quality of print has been high, and a film maker has been commissioned to make three short films that will support dissemination and training in the future, bringing the families' voices and experiences directly to the audience.
- **Embedded learning:** Experiential learning has been highly valued throughout the project by staff and volunteers within the National Trust. As key property staff demonstrate in the previous pages, they have learned in ways that cannot be forgotten. There are already changes in all the properties which are part of the way they work, not a special offer. Volunteers have been involved in, or seen at work, successful family learning, with families who were a new audience, what one staff member called 'Conversion by exposure'. Developments in the roles of room stewards will mean a stronger focus on the public, and the project has provided practical and thoughtful ways in.

**The legacy is not just the responsibility of the properties who participated. The learning needs to continue to be absorbed and acted upon at a national and regional level within the National Trust.**



# What does a project leave behind?

Since the vast majority of National Trust visitors come on a general visit what does the project model offer?

A project provides a focussed, time limited engagement, where trust and confidence can be built up, both for providers and for participants. It does not have to try to do everything; the chosen focus gives it parameters that encourage deeper rather than wider learning. It provides an excellent opportunity to get to know a group of participants, and therefore a sector of potential visitors well, and to move beyond generalisations and assumptions. The time limited nature means that risks can be taken, and ambitious aims set, that would not be manageable over a longer period of time.

Existing skills and experience can be brought into a project, but it can also provide an opportunity to extend skills, learn by doing, and make discoveries. For participants who are unfamiliar with the Trust, the regular visits, and in this case, the commitment over three years enabled a growth in confidence and a sense of belonging, which facilitated learning opportunities.

But a project is not isolated from the properties' other offers. The London Voices project team and the artists supported other events offered by the properties, and property staff reported changes in their general offer to families because of the project work. A network of other offers, some specifically for families and others not, provide a way for the families to keep connected and involved. These have included free family and community days, family volunteering opportunities, and ways to be involved in other initiatives. This network of occasional, drop-in or volunteering opportunities improve and develop because of the learning from the project, but don't seek to replicate it.

The focussed project and the ongoing opportunities need to be seen in relation to one another, mutually beneficial, and offering a progression in learning.



# Ways of engaging

One of the lessons learned from the project was about ways of engaging. Working with five lead artists on thirteen creative projects over three years provided the opportunity to understand much more about the ways families might engage.

Crucially, the creative projects revealed the need to accommodate a variety of learning styles within one session. As well as the wide age range, there were different approaches and interests to be catered for, differences that did not simply equate to age bands. One individual might approach their learning and enjoyment in many different ways during the lifetime of a project.

The property was encountered in a variety of ways: all these ways were appropriate to different people at different times; all are valid.



**Diving in:** wanting to know all about the place and its stories, wanting to be immersed in it physically and through the acquiring of

knowledge. *Families meet a volunteer who remembers the parties Mr Hatfeild held at Morden Hall Park. They want to know where the punts were, what they had for tea, and where Fred climbed over the wall. They want to re-create the parties.*



**Bouncing off:** picking up on details or characters, and relating them immediately to the here and now. *A dad walks around the Entrance Hall at Osterley, imagining the party he would hold there, and who he'd invite.*



**Exploring:** wanting to learn more, relate this to your own experiences and interests, and feed your own creativity. *Families look at some objects*

*in Ham House that were very special to their owners. They explore why these objects held a special significance, and then think about their own special objects from home, incorporating them into puppet plays.*



**Dialogue:** the visitor's own experience and the stimulus in the property shed light on each other. *Families look at the family tree of a family who*

*lived in Sutton House. They make their own family trees, and some discover links to the family at Sutton House, and share local knowledge. This brings a greater understanding of the Huguenots, and throws light on their own situations.*

# Reflections from the lead artists

**Diana Olutunmogan was the lead artist at all four properties in year one and at Sutton House in the subsequent years**

I soon realised that unless the families felt comfortable, relaxed and accepted they couldn't really look at the property. They needed to feel really welcome. They need to be able to tell their stories, their experiences. Telling stories to them created a bridge between them and the place. Because I was new to the National Trust I felt as though I was on an adventure with them. I have been on a real journey over the three years, and it's been an opportunity to do something new, unique, profound and risky.

We are all storytellers, regardless of age

and circumstance. Through sharing stories wonderful things happened. In Sutton House there is a wooden baby's cradle. I asked all the families to think about childhood lullabies. One of the mothers began to remember songs she was sung as a child that she had never shared with her children. Sharing them meant also sharing her language and culture of origin with them, and this began a whole new chapter in their experience as a family. The families' stories become part of the history of the House. Who is to say that these families are not going to make history one day?

**Zannie Fraser worked at Ham House and Osterley**

*Excitement*, opening doors to let people in and reveal hidden places & secrets;

*Gratitude* at the enthusiasm with which all the families embraced my ideas.





## Jane Porter was lead artist at Morden Hall Park for two years



The design for the boats the families made, and later raced in the final week, evolved gradually after testing different variations in the bath. I thought the families could tell their own stories by collaging the boat base and decorating the sails. It wasn't easy getting it to float steadily and upright – this earlier version had a terrible list to one side, so I had to go back to the drawing board. I remember everyone rushing outside and cheering at a spontaneous testing of the demonstration boat on the river, and volunteer Fred's enthusiasm, which led to not wanting to go home at the end.

## Eileen Ramsay was lead artist at Ham House in year three

The most important aspect to me was to create the right balance between the factual and the imaginative in the sessions. To connect to information about each object, then, the less

documented and unknown elements provide a space in which to imagine, filling in the gaps, engaging with the object on a deeper level.

### Session plan

Ham House/Meadlands School  
June 3rd 2009  
Voyages to Ham House

Object: Javanese Tea table Origin: Java/Indonesia

*\*concentrate on factual info, technique and materials. What it was used for in Circa Java? The link to tea drinking - exotic then, but ordinary now.*

Journey: The tea table started its journey on a small raft on the Cibanteau river that brought it from the island's interior to the busy port of Banten. This was a major trading city in the 17th Century with high mountains on every side that were inhabited by Rhino and Leopards and other wild and exotic animals. The port was filled with large ships from all over the world and it was put on a boat bound for England. The journey took many months.

*\*In this section concentrate on imaginative element. How the object may have travelled, its adventures/journey. This worked well last week. The combination of the factual and the imagination. They really engaged with the object*

Story: Told through music and sounds. Pictures of animals at the port and instruments for them to use in telling the story

Activity: Animal masks: Everyone needs to make one, and practice their sounds

# Developing the interpretation

## What is the interpretation for?

- It provides a route map, a way of navigating.
- It signals that the property is enjoyable, fun, and that a playful approach is valid.
- It facilitates a sense of connection with the property.
- It provides a way for families to explore together.
- It mediates elements of the property that may be hard to 'unlock' for the visitor.
- It provides ways for room guides to connect with visitors.

The development of the interpretation has been a negotiation. In year one, temporary interpretation began a conversation between families, property staff, curators and artists.

Trying out the year one interpretation materials enabled the properties to see how and why it worked, and how it was for them to have it and use it. It allowed them to see, in practice, the impact new interpretation might have on their family audience.

Working with the families over three years gave ample opportunity to really ground the designs in an understanding of the ways in which they best enjoyed the properties. Families' presence in working groups and in consultation groups made this a very real involvement.

Their involvement was as:

This allowed flexibility, both for the families and for each property. Their sense of ownership and pride is immense.

Staff held both the overview of the property, and were also able to realise some of their ambitions for new ways to attract and benefit a family audience. Staff involvement was across departments and specialisms, for example, curatorial staff helped with research, and provided a sense of the integrity of the interpretation within the four sites. Artists provided many of the sparks of creativity that fuelled the development, and three of the project's lead artists also designed the final interpretation, equipped with a very rich knowledge of the families.

**Consultants**



**Makers**



**Designers**



**Testers**



# Sneak previews for staff and volunteers

The Project Manager & Project Officer reflect on preparations for the launch of the new interpretation.

The sneak previews were an opportunity for staff and volunteers to explore, experiment and feedback on the new resources created through London Voices before they were launched with visitors. Over 250 people attended. These events felt like the culmination of all the hard work and the collaboration with artists, volunteers, staff and families at properties.

On reflection, we feel that there are many elements of them that are transferable and we'd like to share some of the key factors of success with you:

## ■ Artist/ Makers presence at the event

At Morden Hall Park, the sneak preview centred on a discussion with illustrator Jane Porter about how families developed their designs for the Storyboat and a carving demonstration by sculptor Simon Kent. What we saw was staff and volunteers getting enthused about the making process and as a result excited about the end product and the prospect of families using it.

## ■ Being open to feedback

Part of the sneak preview at Osterley involved a 25 minute open question and answer session about the new

compass and counter resources. We observed that this opportunity was really appreciated by volunteers and staff and the feedback we got was incredibly useful in terms of influencing how we implemented the new resources at the property.

## ■ Creating a facilitated opportunity to try new resources

At Sutton House the designers of the treasure chests and the property Custodian led staff and volunteers in a guided exploration where they got to use the new interpretation just as a family might. We saw that by giving people a chance to 'have a go'; they understood and could empathise with how families would use the resources.

## ■ Involving the whole property team

At Ham House's sneak preview for interpretation inside the house, every member of the property team got involved – from the Gardeners to the Property Manager. We felt that this huge show of support and unity paid dividends: helping volunteers to feel they are part of the wider property team and ensuring visitors get consistently enthusiastic and informed recommendations during a visit.

Right A volunteer tries out the new interpretation at Sutton House



## The new interpretation

**At Sutton House in Hackney**, three *interactive treasure chests* have been created for historic rooms throughout the house. Each chest focuses on a key character from the house's 500 year history and signifies aspects of their lives: including their families, jobs, obsessions and hobbies. The boxes contain games, puzzles, soft sculptures, costume, sound and tactile handling objects for families to play with and enjoy together.

**'There's so much variety here now!'**  
Visitor, Sutton House

**'It's really great when people come to the house now to have something of such quality to offer them.'**  
Assistant Custodian, Sutton House



**At Morden Hall Park in Merton**, a *15ft carved wooden story boat* has been created. The boat forms the centre piece of a refurbished family friendly play area in the park. The carvings on the boat and other smaller wooden sculptures around it tell stories from the fascinating industrial and natural history of the River Wandle that runs through the Park. The wooden sculptures around the boat form the basis of a game, 'Eels out' that anyone can play.

**'It's great. We've all really enjoyed ourselves. It made for a relaxed and easy visit – we can be in the park in a different way here – the game around the boat is brilliant!'**  
Visitor, Morden Hall Park

**'A highlight of the whole project for me is the development of the Story Boat.'**  
Property Manager, Morden Hall Park





**At Osterley Park and House in**

**Hounslow**, a *tactile compass* has been created so that families can navigate the historic rooms. Osterley's interior features extravagant 18th century designs, and, using the compass, families can discover mythical beasts hiding in the least likely places.

**'We talked about what we had to find each time and looked together. It helps the kids get around the house when there's something exciting to look for.'**

Visitor, Osterley Park & House



**'Isn't this compass fantastic? I want one! I think every house should have one!'**

Volunteer, Osterley Park & House



**At Ham House and Garden in**

**Richmond**, a new *Discovery Room* has been created containing a range of hands on exhibits. These include an interactive merchant ship and a magnetic house. A *voyages map* has also been created for families to hunt for treasured items in the collection that come from all over the world. Families can plot historic voyages on the map with stickers and discover the excitement and dangers of sea faring in the 17th century.

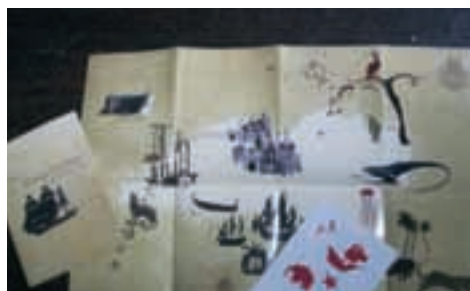
**'It helps get parents talking to the kids and interacting during a visit.'**

Visitor, Ham House



**'A lovely and very interesting Discovery Map. I will love handing it out at the desk ,'**

Volunteer Ham House



# Sharing lessons learned

## Dissemination of the learning took place at many different levels of the project.

The grassroots dissemination was crucial, as well as that which took the project out to the local community, to the wider National Trust, and to the sector. The project needed to be understood, and communicated well internally in order to effect change more widely. It also needed to be communicated well, and the high quality of print, (newsletters, calendars, invitations), helped to demonstrate the value placed on the project by the Trust.

Internally, discussion and reflection continually informed the development of the project, so that those involved were learning, and passing that on. The structure of regular working parties at each property, and well attended steering group meetings three times a year, created opportunities for the distillation and sharing of learning. Evaluation findings were passed on and discussed throughout the project, and all learning was ploughed back into the project.

There will be events at all the four London Voices properties to look at the findings of the Evaluation report, and to discuss and reflect on future plans.

A series of short films of London Voices families and properties has been commissioned to support the development of effective engagement with family audiences, and sound pieces, recorded in 2007, featuring the voices of

the participants, have proved highly effective in communicating the project. These are important tools, which bring the voices and faces of the participants into the dissemination. Since the families have never been simply recipients of the project, but rather collaborators, this aspect of the dissemination needs to be kept in the foreground.

All the properties succeeded in getting local press coverage, and attendance at local events also brought the project to the community's attention. In January, 2009, the project had a double page feature in the National Trust magazine, which has a readership of 3.5 million, and there have been articles in internal publications for Trust staff and volunteers.

Another important audience has been the wider heritage sector. The project has been represented at English Heritage and Museums, Libraries & Archives, (MLA) conferences, and in sector publications. Sharing across the sector is crucial, not just to publicise, but also to allow the learning from London Voices to be discussed and debated, and to be seen in the light of wider developments.

To return to the four properties, it must not be forgotten that a kind of dissemination takes place there, implicitly, in their new approaches to families, their innovative interpretation, and their strengthened local relationships.

# The project structure

## Dialogue and democracy were at the heart of the project.

The groundwork for the project structure was laid by Ruth Clarke, Community Learning Manager, whose experience with community engagement projects at Sutton House, and her London-wide work with the Trust informed the planning and the aspirations of the project. Her understanding that the creative projects needed to be supported by research and training were key to the successes of the work.

Chloë Bird, Project Manager and Rose Swindells, Project Officer then developed a programme of work that would provide relationships that would open up the maximum possibilities for working with and learning about local families. The complexity of the project was revealed in a document outlining the tasks necessary to make the project happen. This was produced in order to make more transparent the mechanics of the work, at a time when properties were taking on more responsibility themselves. Its clarity reflects the level of detail that the core team were aware of, and is a record of their excellent organisational capacity. It is important to note that this fine network of actions and communications resulted in projects and general offers that were characterised by fun and enjoyment. The complexity resulted in simplicity.

At the working groups property staff, school staff, artists, volunteers, family representatives and the London Voices

core team, met to look at both the practical and structural issues of the projects, but also to think about future plans, to share information about opportunities and challenges, and to make decisions about changes. In the working parties I attended I saw a lot of important business being dealt with, but I also saw the partners growing in understanding of each other's language and priorities, and I heard people articulate what they were learning from the project.

The steering group was well attended by interested and committed members, representing the Trust but also associated fields. It actively engaged with challenges and concerns, sharing expertise and taking on responsibilities.

An exit strategy was presented midway through the project, allowing time for discussion and adjustment, but with no scramble for forward planning at the last moment.

All the properties needed the capacity added by the London Voices core team. This came in the shape of time, expertise, mentoring and support, but also energy and drive. There was a level of tenacity in Chloë's approach which was needed in order to be able keep the momentum going, not just at the properties, but also at the regional and national level.

# Reflections from the core team

At the end of three years working on the project we have seen many examples of things that have really worked; places where we've tried new ideas and made

mistakes; and many opportunities for the future. We assess here some of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of the project and its legacy:

## Strengths – the successes of London Voices

- Being able to be outward looking and build a network of external partnerships.
- Involving volunteers in every part of the project.
- Being informal, light-hearted and playful in our approach.
- Being responsive to feedback and changing ideas.
- Building close long term relationships with local people.
- Being brave enough to experiment openly with new ideas.
- Combining traditional understanding of properties with imaginative and creative responses.

## Weaknesses – challenges we've found along the way

- Continuity of opportunities for families taking part where cost is a barrier to access.
- Lack of time for staff at properties to work as a team to develop ideas.
- Convincing some volunteers and staff that the London Voices approach is one that will benefit properties.
- Understanding as an organisation we need to value quality of experience as well as quantity of achievement.

## Opportunities – aspirations for the future

- National Trust properties in London have the potential to target families that other family learning providers cannot attract.
- The track record of good quality family learning work at London Voices properties enables funding to be available from Local Authorities for Wider Family Learning Programmes.
- Family volunteering enables families to be involved at all levels the property, not just as visitors.
- The goodwill of families involved in the project is ripe to be harnessed!

## Threats – barriers to the continuation of the work

- How developing new audiences through the project is recognised and valued by The National Trust as a whole.
- The London Voices approach being something seen as needing to be externally funded rather than a part of internally financed work.
- Lack of prioritisation of a relationship with visitors that is not a transactional one.
- Relationships transferring from the project team to the property staff.

Right **Chloë Bird, Project Manager** and **Rose Swindells, Project Officer**





# Conclusion

## London Voices...

Added capacity to four properties and facilitated an intensive period of engagement and learning. The level of enjoyment and creativity was high.

Demonstrated that the history of the properties is not over, and demonstrated how much families had to offer and to gain.

Demonstrated that turning towards the visitor does not mean turning away from the property.

Helped properties to become more a part of the local community and the local community to become more a part of them.

Brought new audiences and new volunteers into the properties, with mutual benefit.

Supported new property initiatives, which will keep participating families connected, and increase the accessibility and enjoyment of what is on offer for all families.

## The challenges lie in...

Capacity, within the properties, and the priority accorded locally, regionally and nationally to outreach and local partnerships.

The need to develop a volunteer and work force that is more reflective of London's ethnic and social diversity, which is closely linked to developing a more diverse membership and audience.

The sharing of learning from London Voices, which will be restricted if the outcomes are commodified. Other properties who are interested in the approach need to embrace the process and not just the product, which means long term engagement

Supporting the now experienced staff and volunteers from London Voices properties to pass on what they have learned to other properties, and the wider field

Strategic recognition, demonstrated in policy, of outreach, of the need to address financial barriers, of family volunteering, and of the audience as consultants

The four London Voices properties should be celebrated, and supported to continue their partnerships, their local connections, and their family friendliness.

# Credits

## The properties and their partner schools were:

Ham House & Garden with Meadlands School, London Borough of Richmond

Morden Hall Park with Liberty School, London Borough of Merton

Osterley Park & House with Berkeley School and Spring Grove School, London Borough of Hounslow

Sutton House with Millfields School, London Borough of Hackney

## Lead artists:

Diana Olutunmogun, Jane Porter, Zannie Fraser, Estelle Rosenfeld, Eileen Ramsay. With Tom G. Adriani, Simon Kent, Theresa & Griff Davies

## Thanks to

All the families, artists, staff and volunteers involved in London Voices. To my colleague, Dr Caoimhe McAvinchey. To Elizabeth Vile, Fay Blanchard and Joel Stanley, evaluation placements. And particularly to Ruth Clarke, Chloë Bird, and Rose Swindells

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[www.nationaltrust.org.uk](http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk)

The 21st Century Learning Initiative  
<http://www.21learn.org/index.html>

Creative Partnerships  
<http://www.creative-partnerships.com/>

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Participation Works  
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