



MUSEUMS CHANGE LIVES

MA Museums
Association

Scotland

Accelerating positive change

This inspiring Scotland chapter of our Museums Change Lives series captures just how successfully the sector has adapted and developed its socially impactful practice at a very specific moment in time.

Since the coronavirus pandemic first started turning the world upside down, the four nations of the UK have had to live with restrictions and the various costs to human health, happiness and prosperity that they bring. But if Covid-19 is undoubtedly the disruptive and inescapable backdrop to the case

studies featured here, they illustrate too how it has accelerated positive change in museums, sparking for many a review of how they relate to their communities, and a refocus of direction and activity to change lives for the better.

The examples here demonstrate comprehensively how the global issues brought into sharp focus by the pandemic are experienced at local level, and the pivotal role that museums so often play in enabling, supporting and challenging their communities to navigate these issues collaboratively. From enhancing wellbeing and spotlighting social and racial inequality to providing learning, skills development and employment opportunities, the positive impacts museums can make on people's lives and the places where they live are clearly real - and significant. This is backed

up by research recently published by Museums Galleries Scotland showing that engagement with museums can lead to a range of measurable benefits to health and wellbeing, and education.

Themes of renewal and reinvention are touched upon repeatedly in the case studies here. As the sector starts to think about recovery, and how the needs of its communities might continue to evolve over the years to come, it is clearer than ever that the responsibility of museums to reflect current issues, and to meaningfully involve society's most vulnerable in those discussions, is one at which they excel.

Gillian Findlay

President, Museums Association

FOREWORD

**MUSEUMS
ASSOCIATION
INSPIRING
MUSEUMS TO
CHANGE LIVES**

01. Enhancing health and wellbeing

- Museums enhance our quality of life and improve our mental and physical health.
- Museums work in partnership with health and wellbeing organisations to support a range of people in society with different needs.
- Meaningful participation and volunteering promotes wellbeing and self-confidence and can broaden the horizons of participants, the museum and the public.

02. Creating better places to live and work

- Museums help us to value the places where we live, work and visit and help us to understand where we have come from.
- Museums create a sense of belonging by engaging with communities and encouraging active public participation in decision-making.
- Museums use engagement, learning and collections to generate understanding within and between different groups and communities in society.
- Museums generate partnerships with community groups, charities and third-sector organisations to create spaces that are open and accessible to all.

03. Inspiring engagement, reflection and debate

- Museums work with the public as active and creative participants in the life of the museum – using it as a space for exchanging opinions, experiences, ideas and knowledge.
- Museums help us to understand and negotiate the complex world around us, encouraging us to reflect on contemporary challenges such as discrimination, conflict, poverty and climate change.
- Museums use their research and collections to challenge assumptions, foster debate and motivate people to contribute to positive change in the world. They are not neutral spaces.
- Museums inspire learning and creativity for children and adults and work actively to ensure that a broad and diverse audience can access these opportunities at any stage in life.

01.

**ENHANCING
HEALTH
AND
WELLBEING**



SKYLARK IX RECOVERY PROJECT SCOTTISH MARITIME MUSEUM

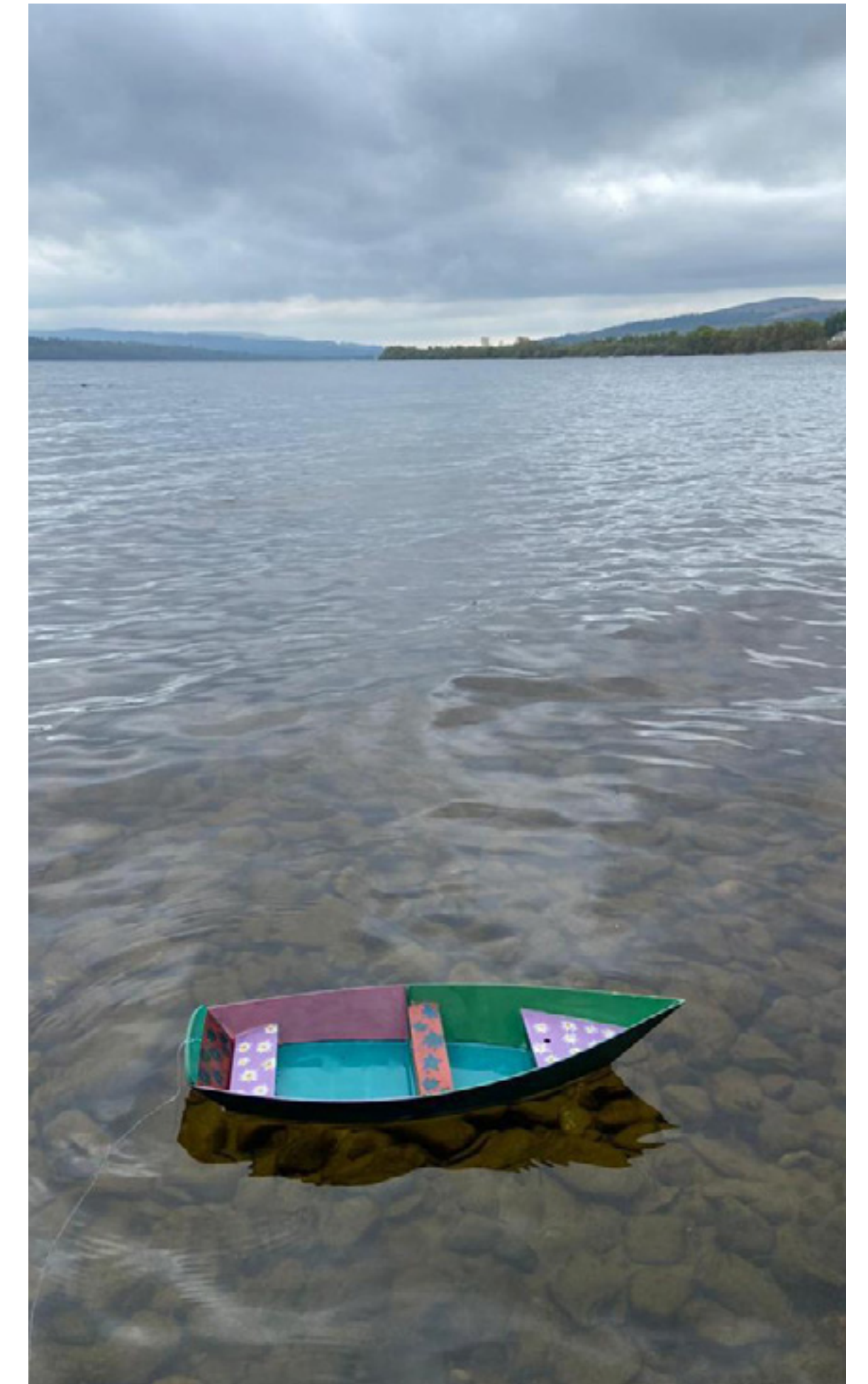
The project is centred on the restoration of the Skylark IX, a Dunkirk Little Ship that ended her working life as a pleasure craft on Loch Lomond before ultimately sinking. Her recovery and gradual restoration at the Scottish Maritime Museum in Dumbarton has inspired the creation of the Skylark IX Recovery Trust by Alternatives Community, an addiction recovery charity in West Dunbartonshire. The trust aims to help people on their

journey towards wholeness and citizenship by teaching them about the history of the Skylark IX and by training them in key woodworking and boat-building skills.

Part of the Skylark IX project involves teaching people from Alternatives to build 22 foot-long St Ayles coastal rowing skiffs. During lockdown in 2020 this work was delayed and the trust instead concentrated on remote teaching on how to build 1/8 scale models of Echo Bay Dory skiffs. From April to July 2020 and again from February to April 2021, the boat tutor from Archipelago Folk School ran weekly sessions. At the end of each lockdown period, the groups were taken to Loch Lomond to celebrate their work and float their boats.

Recently the model boat builders returned to the boat workshop in the museum's Denny Tank to resume building a full-size skiff. They aim to complete it by September 2021. The feedback from the small group of regular participants is powerful. People report the project is therapeutic and gives them structure, a sense of purpose and routine. One reported that he was proud to be part of the Skylark story as she saved a lot of lives in WW2 and it encouraged him to get up for something

worthwhile. The project has also impacted on the Scottish Maritime Museum, which is now business planning to include the Spirit of Skylark Centre at Dumbarton in its future sustainability plans.



PRESCRIBE CULTURE: HERITAGE FOR HEALTH & SOCIAL CARE

UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH MUSEUMS

Prescribe Culture is the University of Edinburgh's flagship heritage-based, non-clinical initiative supporting those with mental health and wellbeing challenges through cultural and social prescribing.

The development of Prescribe Culture has been led by the university's museum manager, Ruthanne Baxter. It began in 2018 with a steering group that included representation from the university's GPs, counselling service, student wellbeing and student's union, and a focus on the student community.

Today it supports student and community members of all ages, internationally. The current offer includes two online options, which provide access "visits" to cultural venues such as the National Museum of Scotland (pictured) and V&A Dundee, and one non-digital option. Take 30 Together Virtual is open to anyone over 18 seeking support for mental wellbeing; Programme 6 Online is open to postgraduate and early career researchers; and At Home with Heritage is a heritage engagement project for those in the local community living with health and social inequalities, for whom digital is not a solution.

Partnership working is vital to the success of Prescribe Culture. In addition to the university-based health and wellbeing partners, Prescribe Culture's external health and social care partners include Edinburgh Link Workers Network, Age Scotland, Voices of Carers Across the Lothians (VOCAL) and the Thera Trust.

To date Prescribe Culture has received funding from Museums Galleries Scotland (MGS) to underwrite the costs of an independent evaluation consultant for the pilot project in 2019 and this year it has secured further funding from MGS to appoint a community connector as part of the At Home with Heritage project.

The Prescribe Culture lead is working with Queen's University, Kingston and Algoma University, both in Ontario, Canada, and the NOVA University in Lisbon, Portugal, all of which intend to adopt the Prescribe Culture model for their campus and communities.

Next steps include getting a Programme 6 offer ready for delivery in-person, on-site for the next academic year in Edinburgh and developing robust evidence of the benefits of bringing heritage closer to support psychosocial challenges and mental ill health.





WEEKDAY WOW FACTOR DISCOS AND WALKS GLASGOW MUSEUMS

In April 2020, in response to the impact of Covid on the health and wellbeing of older people, the Open Museum teamed up with the Weekday Wow Factor to offer online weekly museum quizzes followed by a disco – with participants dancing together online – aimed at older people.

The discos were fun, but also offered an opportunity to make social connections, access peer support and to take part in physical activity at a time when many older people were increasingly isolated due to Covid restrictions and many were leading more sedentary lives.

In June 2020 we diversified to offer online walks. These consisted of a museum quiz plus a walk at home while viewing films from all over the world. We have walked everywhere from Fife to Japan!

The activities have now been running weekly for more than a year. The only costs of this work have been staffing; the activities have been supported by a range of student placements and volunteers in addition to museum staff.

Evaluation carried out by PhD researcher Cassandra Kist has shown that participants value the social connections gained, the positive impact on social isolation and the peer support offered, with some stating that online activities have had unexpected benefits such as breaking down cliques and improving digital literacies used to connect with family and friends.

Participants enjoyed the museum activities for the social aspects and for opportunities to learn and keep their minds active. They discussed the engagement with collections as being “inspiring” and “thought-provoking”.

The activities will continue online in the near future, but this may change as Covid restrictions ease. However we hope the bonds developed during this period will last longer than the restrictions and that we can meet the group in-person soon.

Links

[Weekday wow factor](#)
[Glasgow Life](#)

02.

CREATING

BETTER

PLACES TO

LIVE AND

WORK

PUTTING YOUNG PEOPLE AT THE HEART OF THE MUSEUM

DEVIL'S PORRIDGE MUSEUM

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Young people learn new skills, make new friends, grow in confidence and employability and the museum benefits too – what's not to love about that?

Judith Hewitt
Museum Manager

The Devil's Porridge Museum in Eastriggs, Dumfries and Galloway, has run an inspiring series of projects, workshops and activities in recent years. They all come under the umbrella of a project to “put young people at the heart of the museum”, which has been funded by Young Start, the Holywood Trust and Dumfries and Galloway Council's Coastal Communities Benefit Fund.

Daily clubs for young people, takeover days, an activity every day of the school holidays, parties, visits to other museums, Duke of Edinburgh and Saltire Awards volunteers, a Youth Council and junior representatives on the board of trustees: the museum has done everything it can to work with and inspire the next generation.

Bettie: A Landgirl's Tale was an exciting part of the initiative. This oral history film project involved young people in the interviewing of Bettie, a 94-year-old who had been in the Women's Land Army in the second world war. The film was then edited and animated by young people in weekend workshops before being premiered to an audience of nearly 100 at the local cinema.

Links
[Landgirl film](#)
[Landgirl and Wikithon project](#)

Working with volunteers is at the core of everything the Devil's Porridge Museum does. This includes working with young people with special educational needs to offer supported, extended work placements and personal development volunteering opportunities. This has had a transformative effect on the lives of those involved.

Going forward, the museum is about to launch its volunteer awards programme and is working on a research project using Wikimedia to disseminate its findings. It is supporting three young people through an SVQ in Museums and Galleries Practice as well as a Modern Apprentice.





A NEW HUB FOR THE COMMUNITY GAIRLOCH MUSEUM

In 2019 Gairloch Museum in the north-west Highlands moved to a new building – a repurposed nuclear bunker. Through the journey of its redevelopment this museum has successfully won the support of the community, raised the profile of the area nationally and attracted enthusiastic new visitor audiences.



The museum's previous home was an increasingly decrepit farmstead. The lease was running out and the rain was running down the walls. With core funding slashed and limited opportunities for revenue generation in the confined premises, the museum needed a new home and a new business model in order to survive. The new Gairloch Museum consists of five galleries over two floors, telling the story of Gairloch and the surrounding area from its earliest geology to the modern day.

After being officially opened in July 2019, the museum more than doubled its visitor numbers over the

next six months. Plans for 2020 were unfortunately scuppered by Covid just as the visitor season was about to get underway.

The visual impact of the transformation of the building has been astounding. As one local donor wrote: "This project has transformed the ugliest and most neglected building in Gairloch into its greatest attraction."

Whereas the museum previous only had one full-time employee, it now provides employment for a further four part-time staff, in addition to the cafe staff.

PILOT APPRENTICESHIP SCHEME SCOTTISH CRANNOG CENTRE

Although it suffered a devastating fire in June 2021, the Scottish Crannog Centre by Loch Tay in Perthshire has not slowed down its work to increase employment opportunities and support vocational learning in the local area. The centre began its pilot apprenticeship scheme in August 2020, when it was joined by five full-time apprentices working towards their accredited Scottish Vocational Qualification (SVQ), as well as gaining knowledge and work experience for future employment.

The apprentices collectively engaged with all 6,500 visitors to the crannog during the autumn. They have taken on board a huge amount in terms of work, ethics, delivery and confidence in their ability to do the job set in front of them. They have also given back to the Crannog, as the new ideas and young voices have enlivened the museum interpretation and strengthened the roles of the museum within both the local and crannog community.

Visitors have regularly fed back that a highlight of their visit was being engaged and inspired by this group of young people. It has also highlighted new strengths in the existing staff members, and they are currently training to become verified Scottish Vocational Qualification (SVQ) assessors with the aim to make the museum an Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) centre. This will support the museum to increase employability in the local area by providing apprenticeship assessments both at the Scottish Crannog Centre and other businesses.

The apprentices are also undertaking sponsored activities to raise money for the museum following the fire in June 2021.

The apprenticeship scheme was made possible thanks to partners, Breadalbane Academy, and funding from Museums Galleries Scotland, the Gannochy Trust, SSE Renewables and Perth & Kinross Council.

The museum plans to relocate to a new facility in the next few years.



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It has been a privilege to watch [the apprentices] transform into confident, capable individuals who feel positive about their future, especially in this very challenging year.

Monica Young
Breadalbane Academy

03.

**INSPIRING
ENGAGEMENT,
REFLECTION
AND DEBATE**



RETHINKING DAVID LIVINGSTONE

DAVID LIVINGSTONE BIRTHPLACE

As part of a £9.1m refurbishment project at the David Livingstone Birthplace in Blantyre, South Lanarkshire, the museum has created a brand new exhibition that re-contextualises

Livingstone's story, bringing to the fore the voices previously unheard including those of his wife Mary and his African crew members. We have explored the complex questions inherent in these matters, Livingstone's role in these, and in particular what his legacy today actually is. We set up an expert advisory group (made up of scientist and human rights activist Geoff Palmer, author S I Martin, research associate Marenka Thompson-Odlum and digital media

lecturer Kate Simpson) to support us in developing our other activities related to Black and Scottish history.

We have worked with a variety of organisations involving the Scottish African diaspora – the Association of Malawians in Scotland, Glasgow Women's Library, the global learning centre WOSDEC, the Scotland Zambia Partnership and the Scotland Malawi Partnership. Zimbabwean author Petina Gappah has helped us to develop a new animation that gives voice to Livingstone's companions whose voices have previously been hidden.

We want the museum and parkland to be a hub for the Scottish African diaspora, and to develop further partnerships with organisations in Zambia, Zimbabwe and Malawi as well as working with our more local communities in South Lanarkshire. Going forward we will look into repatriation, and conduct further research on our African Collection with our counterparts in the countries Livingstone visited.

With funding from the National Lottery Heritage Fund we are developing a learning programme that we will trial with local schools to support them in delivery of Black Scottish history. We are also looking into furthering our

understanding of the relationship between colonisation and climate change. These are all activities that are already funded and will be rolled out from late 2021 onwards, following a period of consultation with our partner organisations to identify their needs and how the David Livingstone Birthplace can realistically support them.



Links

[About Us - David Livingstone Birthplace](#)
[Learning Programme: Global Citizenship](#)

ANCIENT EGYPT AND EAST ASIA NATIONAL PROGRAMME

NATIONAL MUSEUMS SCOTLAND

The Ancient Egypt and East Asia National Programme, funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund, was a partnership project working with museums across Scotland to uncover new and interesting stories about their ancient Egyptian, Chinese, Japanese and Korean collections.

The project included the touring exhibition *Discovering Ancient Egypt*, which travelled to Hawick Museum, Montrose Museum, the Baird Institute, Cumnock, Perth Museum & Art Gallery and the John Gray Centre, Haddington between March 2019 and April 2021. The exhibition attracted 19,132 visits to the first four venues, with an uplift of more than 40% in visitor figures from 2015/16 achieved at two venues.

With additional support from the Museums Association's Esmée Fairbairn Collections Fund, *Revealing Stories* provided opportunities to engage with ancient Egyptian and East Asian collections across Scotland with



a focus on breaking down barriers to access and inclusion. We worked with touring partners to develop sensory backpacks for children and young people with autism and their families visiting the exhibition.

Loans of East Asian collections to Perth Museum & Art Gallery, the University of Aberdeen, Kirkcudbright Galleries and Dunfermline Carnegie Library and Galleries received a total of 54,973 visitors across the four partner museums and more than 3,000 people were reached through audience engagement programmes at these museums.

Perth Museum & Art Gallery focused its activity programme around the creation

of a Community Robe inspired by the East Asian collections at Culture Perth and Kinross. Local community groups and schools were invited to work in collaboration with independent artist Jill Skulina and the learning team at Perth Museum and Art Gallery to decorate panels of a robe with designs inspired by the exhibition, *Dress to Impress*. The panels created by each group were then sewn together by the artist to create the Community Robe.

Revealing Stories also enabled two national collection reviews to be undertaken: Ancient Egyptian Collections in Scottish Museums and East Asian Collections in Scottish Museums revealed detailed insights

into collections held in museums across Scotland, identifying significant objects and connections between collections.

We piloted a framework for measuring social impact of audience engagement with ancient Egyptian and East Asian collections. We developed this framework based on the feedback from colleagues at our Social Impact Symposium in November 2018, the Museums Association's Measuring Social Impact Toolkit and the Scottish Government's National Performance Framework. The toolkit was piloted by partner museums, who engaged with autistic children and young people and their families.

The project also supported skills development for local museum staff and volunteers, which aimed to increase confidence in working with these collections and delivering programming to new audiences, particularly audiences with additional support needs. A total of 14 workshops provided 99 training experiences to 71 museum staff and volunteers from 25 organisations across Scotland, enabling them to discover new information about their ancient Egyptian and East Asian collections and promote wider engagement with local audiences.



COLLECTING BLACK LIVES MATTER MUSEUMS & GALLERIES EDINBURGH

For some years, Museums & Galleries Edinburgh has undertaken contemporary collecting work to reflect current events and changes in the city. This work took on extra meaning in 2020 when, in the live environment of a pandemic, we collected hundreds of placards from a protest, part of the Black Lives Matter movement.

As a local authority museum service, it is important for us to represent our community, and to reflect on global issues at a local level. This collecting project allows us to reckon with the former – addressing the failures in our practice to date – and continue to deliver the latter.

Collecting a significant quantity of activist material during a lockdown posed many challenges, and it was only through the support of the activist donors – the protest organisers themselves – that we were able to collect such a wealth of valuable material. The project was delivered using core budget and existing staff time.

We believe collections like these placards are critical tools in Edinburgh's social life. They provide us with the means to engage in debate and inspire discussion among our local audiences, contributing to discourse around Edinburgh's past involvement in slavery and its ramifications for the city today. The collection also demonstrates the long history and continuing important role of protest and activism in the city.

Our focus with this project has been on engagement. Despite changing Covid restrictions, we have been able to share and celebrate these important objects



in real time as we continue to curate them. We've had to change how we work to facilitate this but it has meant our work is all the better for it.

Links

[A selection of the placards can be viewed here](#)

CAPTURING LIVES IN SCOTLAND'S COMMUNITIES

FIVE UNIVERSITY MUSEUMS IN SCOTLAND

During summer 2020, 119 young people from across Scotland participated in Capturing Lives in Scotland's Communities, a partnership project between five university museums in Scotland (UMIS): the universities of Aberdeen, Dundee, Edinburgh, Stirling and the Glasgow School of Art.

Aimed at young people aged 11-18 from across Scotland and particularly targeted at those from underrepresented backgrounds, the six-week online programme encouraged participants to work towards an Arts Award Explore qualification utilising a wide range of museum objects from university collections as inspiration. The young people explored their local communities through different art media including photography and landscape painting, supported by a current university student as a mentor.



Eighty-six participants completed the Arts Award Explore qualification.

Feedback from the project was overwhelmingly positive; 93.5% of participants said they had learnt new skills through taking part in the programme, 90.3% felt more confident in their creative skills and 88.2% felt

more confident in their communication skills. Fifty-seven percent of the young people said they'd be more likely to apply to study at participating institutions in future.

The live online sessions were enjoyed by all. In spring 2021, building on the success of Capturing Lives, we created

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I didn't expect to have such interesting and deep conversations with my team which helped my confidence in the way they did.

Participant

a new project, The Power of Public Art, where 80 participants (including 25 who had completed the Capturing Lives project) worked towards a Bronze Arts Award. The Power of Public Art was a partnership between the universities of Stirling, Edinburgh and the Edinburgh Art Festival, with contributions from the University of Dundee. The eight-week online programme once again used university museum collections as the stimulus to encourage young people to consider the many uses of public art and its power to inspire change.

Links

[View the work of the young people from the Capturing Lives programme](#)

[View the work from The Power of Public Art Programme](#)

[Find out more about the Arts Award](#)

Image credits

Cover: Young musicians taking part in an event at Gairloch Museum; A participant on the Skylark IX Recovery Programme / a model boat on Loch Lomond, images courtesy of Scottish Maritime Museum; Participants in Prescribe Culture can access collections at cultural venues such as the National Museum of Scotland (NMS), image courtesy of NMS; Weekly Wow Discos helped older people stay active during lockdown, image Pixabay; Children outside the Devil's Porridge Museum, image courtesy of the museum; The Fresnel lens / young musicians, images courtesy of Gairloch Museum; Young apprentices at the Scottish Crannog Centre (pictured prior to the June 2021 fire), image courtesy of the museum; The lion sculpture / African objects at David Livingstone Birthplace, images by Kat Gollock; Local school groups helped to decorate panels of a kimono at Culture Perth and Kinross, image courtesy of NMS; A Black Lives Matter placard collected during the 2020 protests, image courtesy of Museums & Galleries Edinburgh; A photo by Laia Pettit, one of the young people who contributed to #CapturingLives2020, image courtesy of UMIS.

MUSEUMS CHANGE LIVES

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#MuseumsChangeLives

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