

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