

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

