

## **Confidence to challenge**

Lyndsey, in your experience,

how do participants, groups

or individuals get to a stage

where they feel like they

can challenge the institution?

I think the groups like the volunteer events team

or people that we've worked with

would be more likely to come say,

"I dislike that," but that's quite a specific group

because they've got a real attachment

to the Mungo Museum now

because that's where they've met

and they've had their events.

I think they would be very happy

to pull us up on something

or to complain or ask to change

something about that museum.

I'm not sure they would do it in any other museum.

I think there needs to be a certain amount of trust

and that people need to feel a bit of ownership.

But not all groups require support in order to challenge.

Claire, tell me about how the Museum of Liverpool

reacted to an unsolicited challenge

from a community organisation.

We're working with a group at the moment

called Wicked Fish,

and they're a theatre company of adults  
who have learning disabilities and difficulties,  
because they came into the museum  
and they actually audited  
the Museum of Liverpool  
and they really struggled to find their story  
in terms of where they're  
represented in the collections.

The whole premise of that museum  
is that it's telling people stories.

It's co-curated on every level.

It's absolutely developed  
with the audience programmes  
where we've engaged with communities,  
of again, diverse racial heritage,  
we've engaged with disaffected young people.

We do a lot of work with groups who have disabilities  
and we were able to demonstrate...

we had tried to include and involve  
their voice when we were doing  
the consultation period for the museum,  
but inevitably, day one opening,  
you're not going to include everybody's voice,  
so what we have done again is  
we've been very open as a museum service.

We want to work with them  
and we've developed a programme

where we're actually going to be adding

to our contemporary collection policy.

Where we're going to be collecting

oral histories, objects of people with disabilities

and we're also going to have

a wonderful exhibition, fingers crossed.

Fair call to that group,

they challenged us and we,

instead of being defensive about it,

we've said, "Yes, you're right.

We want to involve you and we want to give you

a platform to tell the history of people with disabilities

and share your contributions."

Arwen, as a community partner yourself,

what advice would you give other community partners?

I think community partners

often need more confidence

in the expertise they've got,

because we're not used to being involved this closely,

especially tiny charities (laughter) like mine.

Recognising the expertise that we have got

and that that is valuable and that

other people really want it.

So what is the museum's role

in building the confidence

of community partners?

We are a supported employment

organisation that works primarily  
with people with learning difficulties.

The sorts of skills and expertise

I bring to the Our Museums project

are things like specific knowledge

of people with learning disabilities

and the sorts of barriers they face.

Increasing expertise with people with autism as well.

Obviously, skills working with employers

and what's required from employers.

My background is actually...

I've got a very varied background.

I trained as a librarian

and I've worked in the health sector

and the higher education sector

and various others as well.

So I've got quite a varied

set of skills from that background.

I think sometimes we lose sight

of the value of the whole person

and not just their job title,

and I think that's really important

for community partners to recognise.