# **Enquiring Minds**

### What is it?

Enquiring Minds brought together a group of 6 members of Tyne & Wear Archives & Museums (TWAM) staff, 5 volunteers and 8 community partners to participate in a 6-month action learning programme focussing on local partnership working and the conversations that can be part of that. The programme was inspired by the 'Staff Ambassadors' scheme at Glasgow Life (part of the Our Museum programme there).

## Why did we do it?

Enquiring Minds aimed to support TWAM staff and volunteers to feel more secure in unfamiliar (community) contexts, and to become more aware of local communities, and local issues and interests. The programme encouraged all participants to develop relationships through questioning and conversation, and urged them to explore - through reflection - how new ideas and different ways of working might influence their (working) lives.

## How did it work?

Programme participants took part in:

- Six facilitated sessions exploring what makes a meaningful conversation, and a meaningful response (including 'Non-Verbal Communication' and 'Asset-Based Approaches')
- Four monthly meetings reflecting on and sharing programme learning;
- Four field visits to a variety of local community organisations, as well as a trip to Glasgow Life to meet with participants of the Staff Ambassadors scheme.



Facilitated session 'The Politics of Participation: Knowing and Decision Making' – participant quote:

'More abstract thinking about something that is part of day-to-day life. Made me think about how [it] can be applied more in work and life in general.'

# How was Enquiring Minds different from usual practice?

- Programme participants valued the openness of Enquiring Minds meetings and the opportunity to get to know each other and each other's interests, viewpoints and opinions without pre-set topics or outcomes.
- Reflection was integral to the programme, and participants felt that sharing and reflecting as part of monthly meetings was valuable to their personal and professional development.

- Programme activities were designed to be relevant to all participants and did not focus on TWAM-specific topics only, so that everyone was able to take from it what they felt was valuable and useful to them personally / their organisation.
- Participants fed back that they had felt a sense of equality within programme groups, and had appreciated that everyone's voice and opinion were valued and listened to.



Facilitated session 'Yes And': using improvisational theatre techniques, this session worked to remove barriers to creative thinking and invention by applying a simple rule – YES AND!

#### What came out of it?

- A wider group of TWAM staff recognised how working in partnership with communities is critical to the organisation and specifically to their own work (e.g. a member of TWAM's development team identified how she might work differently, for example, framing funding bids to include meaningful community consultation from the start).
  Subject to approval of Year 3 proposals:
- We will be developing a 'conversation space' at Discovery Museum (TWAM venue), as a result of programme discussions about the quality of conversations and how this, and the relationships between the people participating in them, are influenced by the space they are held in.
- An 'Open Minds' programme (a development of Enquiring Minds) will bring together community partners, TWAM staff and volunteers to participate in debates on current issues faced by TWAM and local communities suggested by participants themselves. Open minds will act as a transition between the funded Our Museum programme and the ongoing habit of debate and reflection that the programme has promoted in the organisation.

## Quotes from programme participants:

- 'Challenging myself / showing another aspect of myself to the group'
- [To be] treated with no indifference
- 'Learning techniques I can apply at work (in conversations, meetings and in teaching situations)'
- 'Listening to others and other conversations'
- Offering my ideas based on my work / personal experiences
- 'Rare space to share with people that you build up trust with throughout the programme'
- 'How much fun it can be to do something different [it] gives you energy'