

## **Learning together, staying connected**

What is exciting about the

Our Museum project was

it was an opportunity for Hackney Museum

to work in one geographical area

in the borough.

So rather than working

with lots of different communities

all over Hackney,

we tried to find a road

where all of those communities coexisted

and lived side by side on a daily basis.

And for that reason we chose Cazenove Road

to develop the Our Museum exhibition

which was installed in Hackney Museum.

Right from the very word go

I made a decision myself,

that I would stand back

and allow community partners

and people on the team

to make the decisions themselves,

so that it should be a truly democratic

decision-making process.

I felt excited

but slightly confused by the brief

or the lack of brief.

I know they wanted the community

to bring up the ideas of what to do,

but it remained too vague,

for too long, I think.

There was a lot of problems

with communication

of what people's roles

were going to be

and what kind of expectations there were

from one organisation to another.

It required a huge amount

of commitment, free time

and a lot of strategic thinking

to really help the museum.

My advice to anybody trying

to organise

something like this

is to try to get all the parties involved

at the very, very early stages

so it's much clearer

what people's expectations are.

One of the reasons

of process being difficult is

because senior management made decisions

from the word go,

excluding community partners

and excluding museum staff.

So that at some point,

everybody felt very disempowered.

There seemed to be a clash of ideas about how artists and organisations had to bid for their role in the project, but at the same time, they were also asked to work together as community partners towards the community project.

So that set up a kind of difficult process I think.

There wasn't really an overview about how those projects fitted together so they approached us in our role of running a gallery and as an arts organisation.

It was co-curated in the sense that all the contents and the components of the exhibition have been pre-commissioned previously, so our role was to find a way to make all those bits work together.

What was really successful working in collaboration was the pulling together of the team in creating the exhibition.

It was very well attended.

It was very impressive.

The people who were there  
came from very diverse backgrounds.

We did a lot of work in schools.

Harriet did several workshops,

which manifested

in quite a big piece of work

that was in the final exhibition

at the museum.

What was really amazing

was the standard

and the quality

of the children's work.

It was very clear that they worked

with a professional artist

to realise those installations

that were created.

Although the outcome

was very successful

I think the process was a challenging one.

Always the parameters must

be made very clear

from the start of setting up a project.

There was a lot of thing we wanted to do

and we couldn't do them all,

but we managed to do quite a lot of them.

What I would have done

differently is to make sure

that all community partners and groups  
came in to talk about their work  
and think about how they wanted  
to exhibit with others.

And to have a tighter co-curation team  
to really bring everything together.

We did that, but we did that  
in an incredibly tight period of time  
in order to make it all  
come together effectively.

Our relationship with the Hackney Museums  
since the Side by Side exhibition  
is that it's opened the doors  
a lot wider than they were.

At the moment I'm involved with  
the general presentation  
of the artefacts in the museum  
and especially with the World War I project.

We have got some ideas  
that we'd like to present  
to the museum for future exhibitions.

We have a really rooted understanding  
in what local communities,  
local organisations  
and our community partners want from us  
and what they expect of us  
and similarly we now have

a better understanding  
of how community partners want to develop.

Whether or not the museum  
can implement what they've learnt  
due to the funding cuts for staffing  
remains to be seen  
within the next two or three years.

Institutional memory is  
a very important thing,  
to be able to make sure  
that your staff and their contacts  
that they build up over time  
are embedded,  
not with that member of staff,  
but embedded within the organisation.

The resources with which  
Hackney Museum has to work  
are very limited and very tight.

But nevertheless  
they are doing a fantastic job.

As always with these projects  
it's actually about the people  
and the important  
connections you make  
and they're the things you take forward  
and they kind of become the legacy  
for the whole thing.