

Exploring together

The aim of Open Minds is to explore local interests and issues that are of interest to museums as well as their community partners and also to build long lasting relationships and although this is not explicit I guess, it's also to get some more staff buy in.

Each group had an introductory session with me, where they learnt about the topic, and then they have three sessions with facilitators of visiting different venues.

Then we got together again and I facilitated a reflective meeting where I drew up what they'd learnt and then, next, they'll come together for a panel discussion with the Alternative Management Team and the senior management team.

One of the main features of the programme is to explore topics that are of mutual interest, without having the pressure to have a big outcome, like an exhibition, or an event, or a project.

But there is a formal feedback structure where we share with members of the Alternative Management Team and the senior management team and see how we can use the learning in the rest of the organisation.

We're now at the end of the first phase of the new programme and, although there was no pressure to have a big outcome, it would have been nice if there was, and, this time, there wasn't.

We wonder if that has something to do with the topic and although we're sure that everybody in the group found it interesting,

there maybe wasn't a burning need to explore it further.

That there should have been more involvement
by members of staff in the programme
and that they should have been supported
to come along to more of the sessions.

I feel there was definitely an issue
that we need to deal with internally.

How does someone go to their line manager and say,
"I'm going to go do this thing.

It's going to take five days.

I don't know what I'm going to get out of it."

So, what you want is a process that allows
some sort of exploratory and digressive thinking
but, at the end, somewhere down the line,
has an outcome which they can then sell
to their line management.

Another improvement would be to try
and get more people to come to the groups,
like community groups or outside, the general public.
Because it's like a bit standoffish.

Yeah, they're like upper class.

Where I live in Byker and people are different
and hardly anybody I know will ever come to a museum.
Because some people cannot afford to like go on courses.

I'm just sad that it's finished
because I've got nowt else to do.

I think, from the outset, the potential of the programme
has been to encourage new people
to come through the doors.

Myself, I wasn't particularly interested
in museums and art galleries
and I'm a mad keen advocate of them then
and it was just that stepping over the threshold.

This programme is part of the progress, I believe,
of ensuring that community groups actually set the agenda.

I think, in reflection though,

this process might be useful
when trailing ideas for exhibitions,
or events, or programmes, to see if they are viable,
but also to explore where they could go
and who could be involved with them.