

Case Study

'Baby Ashmoles Pilot'

ASHMOLEAN

MUSEUM OF ART AND ARCHAEOLOGY UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD

The project

In October 2017 the Ashmolean Museum piloted Baby Ashmoles, a new session, aimed at parents/carers with babies aged under 1. This project was made possible thanks to funding from Arts Council England.

Background

- Each year we welcome approximately 600 children to our preschool 'Little Ashmoles' sessions. However, we had no offer for babies under 1 and felt there was potential to create an opportunity for this audience. We decided that the session should include an opportunity for adult learning about the collection.
- Developing this offer for under 1s and their carers was timely in light of recent closures of local children centres, with fewer welcoming and inspiring venues for young families to spend time in.
- This kind of project is a rarity in UK museums and galleries. There are some examples of baby friendly tours for carers, but few which include activities aimed at babies and adults in one session. This was an opportunity to innovate and experiment.

Project aims

- To pilot a session for parents/carers with babies under 1, with learning opportunities for both babies and adults.
- To test out ways of working with this audience and develop our expertise.
- To raise the profile of the Ashmolean Museum as a venue which actively welcomes and values visits from young families.
- To grow and diversify our family audience.



What we did

- We formed local partnerships with South Oxford Family Room (formerly Grandpont Children's Centre) and Peeples, a national charity based in Oxford, who work directly with families to promote parents and children learning together.
- Our Visitor Experience team was briefed in advance to support and welcome visitors. The sessions prompted us to be more aware of our facilities for this audience, such as baby change, buggy storage, breastfeeding and lift access.
- We planned to run 4 weekly sessions in October 2017, but attendance was so high that we ran 8 sessions in total to accommodate visitor numbers.
- The session content included themed sensory play and singing for babies, story time, and a ten minute talk aimed at adults. As well as gathering feedback from participants, we also collected feedback from colleagues who observed the sessions, a session leader who delivered a session, and volunteers who assisted.
- The Learning Officer running the project attended a two day training session run by Peeples, focused on their approach to supporting families with early years learning. This helped build skills and knowledge for working with this audience.

Project outcomes

- Approx 25 adults, plus babies attended each of the 8 sessions we ran throughout October, which demonstrated an interest and appetite for a baby group at the Ashmolean.
- Evaluation collected was overwhelmingly positive. The favourite elements of the session were baby sensory play, and the ten minute talk for adults about an object.
- Some participants mentioned overcrowding in sessions, long wait for lifts, and having to wait for second session. While the gallery atmosphere was praised, lack of seating was commented on, so for future sessions seating will be offered if people need to breastfeed etc.
- 11% of participants who filled in an evaluation form were first time visitors, which suggests that the main uptake is from visitors already confident due to previous visits.

What we learnt

- The pilot demonstrated a demand for baby sessions at the Ashmolean. We plan to move to phase 2 of this pilot by offering weekly sessions in June and September 2018, continuing to evaluate with a view to adding these as a permanent fixture to the family programme.
- Overcrowding was an issue and affected the comfort and quality of session. This suggests that session needs to be bookable in advance.
- The combination of adult learning and themed baby sensory play and singing was well received. Almost all participants felt the session had improved their sense of wellbeing.
- Evaluation showed that we are not attracting many first time visitors to the Ashmolean. This challenges us to find ways to attract new visitors.
- Participants really appreciated being helped to find their way from door to session. Welcoming and orienting participants to find their way to the gallery smoothly is of key importance.



“Great combination of something for adults and babies. Wouldn’t otherwise have made time to visit Museum.”

‘It’s such a unique setting and great for babies and parents/carers. Thank you!’

Key contacts

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Photography is by Ian Wallman: <http://www.iwphotographic.com/>

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