

The Network Newsletter: tackling social exclusion in libraries, museums, archives and galleries

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The Network's Website is at www.seapn.org.uk and includes information on courses, good practice, specific socially excluded groups, as well as the newsletter archive.

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Did you see ...?

Museums Journal

The May/June 2024 issue includes:

- Hedley Swain “Is a revival of Renaissance in the Regions the solution for cash-strapped museums?” (“Comment” column), which sums up very briefly the current funding crisis facing local authority museums in particular, and calls for “[...] additional long-term central government investment [...], a new version of “Renaissance in the Regions”¹ [p12]
- ²Marijke Steedman “A radical vision for art will counter a reduced cultural infrastructure” [p13]³, which looks at the impact of “New Town Culture” on the arts in Barking & Dagenham (especially their work with young people and with women):

“New Town Culture, is curatorial project based within the operational heart of Barking and Dagenham Council, in east London. With a radical vision to connect contemporary art practice and the services of public life, New Town Culture has led to changes in how social work and youth justice is done in the Borough.

New Town Culture is a platform for radical new training including a new MA Creative Social Work, research and tools for social care practitioners, artists and cultural organisations.”⁴

As the article argues:

“This year, New Town Culture will direct its curatorial focus on youth justice and services for adolescents. Together with young people, workers and artists, this enquiry will create traces in the Women’s Museum – supporting young men as well as young women to be creative in the context of the museum.

Why would such a museum happen now, of all times, when local government is so limited in resources? Because coming together creatively against a growing trend of reduced cultural infrastructure and increasingly transactional, pared-back public services is vital. A radical vision for art and alliances across communities and services is exactly what is needed right now.” [p13]

¹ *Renaissance in the Regions: a new vision for England’s museums*. Re:source, 2001, https://archive-media.museumsassociation.org/policy_renaissanceintheregions.pdf.

² See: <https://www.museumsassociation.org/museums-journal/opinion/2024/05/is-a-revival-of-renaissance-in-the-regions-the-solution-for-cash-strapped-museums/>.

³ See: <https://www.museumsassociation.org/museums-journal/opinion/2024/05/a-radical-vision-for-art-will-counter-a-reduced-cultural-infrastructure/>.

⁴ Taken from: <https://www.newtownculture.org/about/>.

- Dorcas Taylor “Deploying a human rights-based lens may help museums address power imbalances”⁵, which argues that:

“A human rights approach – based on non-discrimination, participation and accountability – provides a framework. Those three principles need interrogating and negotiating by organisations, and with communities, to ensure there is shared understanding and agreement regarding what they mean in a specific context.” [p15]

and:

“Adopting an approach that recognises the institution is obligated to fulfil the needs of the individual, and can be held to account, has the potential to make room for greater power sharing, bypassing traditional concepts of institutional “do-gooding” or benevolent approaches to community engagement that perpetuate an unequal distribution of power.” [p15]

- Jamie Taylor “On the right track” [pp40-43], which is a review of the temporary exhibition, “Go as you Please”, at the National Railway Museum, York (the latest exhibition from Curating for Change⁶):

“An exploration of rail travel from the perspectives of people with lived experience of D/deafness, disability and neurodivergence.”⁷

- Niall Farrelly “Behind bars” [pp44-45, 47], a review of the temporary exhibition, “Juvenile in Justice”, National Justice Museum, Nottingham⁸

ARC Magazine

The May/June 2024 issue⁹ has just been published. It includes:

- Deborah Mason “Why a diverse record keeping workforce matters” [pp24-25], which looks briefly at the EDI report [see below] and raises a number of issues which need further exploration

Pen & Inc.

The latest issue¹⁰ includes:

⁵ See: <https://www.museumsassociation.org/museums-journal/opinion/2024/05/deploying-a-human-rights-based-lens-may-help-museums-address-power-imbalances/>.

⁶ “Curating for Change exists to create strong career pathways for d/Deaf, disabled and neurodiverse curators, currently seriously under-represented in museums. Our Trainees and Fellows are producing exhibitions, events and blogs, exploring disabled people’s histories – while gaining skills for careers in the sector.” [Taken from: <https://curatingforchange.org/>].

⁷ Taken from: <https://www.railwaymuseum.org.uk/whats-on/go-as-you-please>.

⁸ See: <https://www.nationaljusticemuseum.org.uk/museum/events/juvenile-in-justice>.

⁹ *ARC Magazine*, 398, May/June 2024.

¹⁰ Spring/Summer 2024.

- Jake Hope interviews Joshua Seigal¹¹ “Poetry in motion – changing attitudes with engagement, empathy and love” [pp16-19]
- Elle McNicoll “Lighting a fire”, which looks at her work as an author and screenwriter, drawing on her neurodivergent experience¹² [pp20-23]
- Lizzie Huxley-Jones “Vivi Conway: folklore inspiring hope”, which looks at her writing, drawing on Welsh folklore and inspired by her own life as someone who is autistic and disabled¹³ [pp24-26]

Books for Keeps

The May 2024 issue¹⁴ includes:

- Darren Chetty and Karen Sands-O’Connor “Beyond the Secret Garden: how to write children’s books about Africa”, which looks at some recent titles that reflect a more realistic picture of the continent [pp12-13]

Equality, Equity, Diversity & Inclusion – Libraries, Museums, Archives and Cultural and Heritage Organisations

Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Strategic Direction

Apologies – I had intended to include this in an earlier issue ...

The ARA has recently published this commitment¹⁵:

“Despite many well-intentioned initiatives over several decades, the diversity of the record-keeping sector in terms of workforce, audiences, collections and outreach has not changed significantly.

During this period our society both locally and globally has substantially altered and it is clear that people working in our sector and those who wish to join it want to see a commitment to a better, faster pace of change and practical steps to a more diverse, equal and inclusive profession.

As a sector leader, the Archives and Records Association (ARA) makes that commitment.” [p2]

¹¹ See: <https://www.joshuaseigal.co.uk/>.

¹² See: <https://ellemcnicoll.com/>.

¹³ See: <https://lizziehuxleyjones.com/>.

¹⁴ *Books for Keeps*, 266, May 2024, <https://booksforkeeps.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/BfK-266-May-2024-1.pdf>.

¹⁵ *Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Strategic Direction*. ARA, no date [2024], <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/60773266d31a1f2f300e02ef/t/658161035b61133c528efee0/1702977796135/>.

It starts by briefly defining EDI, then gives some policy background, before setting out what the ARA's aims are:

- “To be the calm and confident leader the sector needs.
- To develop a plan in which equity, diversity and inclusion can be seen in all our activities and throughout our nations, regions and sections.
- To use our resources to encourage an inclusive, welcoming and diverse sector in which everyone can be themselves and achieve their potential.
- To empower and resource individual members, and our nations, regions and sections to undertake practical steps towards making this a reality.
- To review our aims and this plan on an ongoing basis.” [p6]

It then outlines ways in which they intend to do this, including:

- Supporting and developing Diversity Allies¹⁶
- Training
- Via the Conference (which will be reassessed)
- Publications
- Membership and Professional Development
- Entry Routes and Career Progression
- Administration and Policies: “[...] we must ensure that our policies, procedures and forms reflect our stated aims and are fair, inclusive and non-discriminatory.” [p6]
- Advocacy
- Productive Partnerships
- Set Priorities: “[...] establish priorities that are based on discussions with members, feedback from meetings and the sector.” [p6]

Equality, Equity, Diversity & Inclusion – Other Agencies

“How should managers role-model inclusion in their workplaces”

There is an important article¹⁷ on the CMI website¹⁸, which is well worth reading if you are a member and can gain access – if not, here are some key messages:

¹⁶ “The Diversity Allies group was set up in 2020 by ARA, intended to act as critical friends and to help deliver strategic aims by providing expertise, assisting with commissioning or directly working on particular initiatives.” [p6]

“Inclusivity in the workplace is about creating an environment where all employees feel valued, respected and supported, regardless of their backgrounds, identities or perspectives. It’s about equal opportunities, eradicating discrimination and embracing diversity.

‘Inclusion isn’t about being straight or gay or bi, Hindu, Sikh or Buddhist,’ says Catherine Myszka [...] deputy chair and diversity and inclusion lead for CMI’s East Midlands and Eastern regional board. ‘It’s about being yourself.’ [...]

Matt Haworth agrees. He is co-founder of Manchester-based Reason Digital.

‘Leaders need to start with authenticity,’ he says. ‘If they don’t have a personal grasp of the subject, then they need to educate themselves. It can be confusing, yes – just look at the acronym: LGBTQIA+! But understand that no one can be all those letters, so no one knows it all.’”

Catherine Myszka continues:

“‘It’s OK for leaders to say that they don’t have all the answers,’ she says. ‘Leaders must be comfortable with what they know and what they don’t know. If they are open and honest, it develops a sense of psychological safety that others can relate to. It creates an environment where people can ask questions and can be themselves.

‘Even role-modelling a minor difference can be an important signal to employees that they can be different and that ‘different’ is OK.’”

Migration issues – Other Agencies

Child migrant voices in modern Britain: oral histories 1930s-present day

This terrific new book¹⁹ draws together 16 oral histories, starting with two children who arrived from Austria in 1938 and concluding with a child who arrived from Ukraine in 2022²⁰.

“The initial inspiration for this work was research by Dr Eithne Nightingale into the experiences of children who migrated to east London from 1930 as part of a collaborative PhD between V&A Museum of Childhood (now Young V&A) and Queen Mary University of London (2011- 2019) funded

¹⁷ Jamie Oliver “How should managers role-model inclusion in their workplaces”. Jun 2024.

¹⁸ Access to CMI members only.

¹⁹ Eithne Nightingale. *Child migrant voices in modern Britain: oral histories 1930s-present day*. Bloomsbury Academic, 2024.

²⁰ There are photos of key people interviewed, plus synopses of each chapter, at: <https://childmigrantstories.com/voices/chapters>.

by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC). This research, supported by child migrants, refugee and migrant organisations, Mitchell Harris, film producer, and others has since expanded through the collection of child migrants' experiences beyond east London, events, film screenings and performances across the UK."²¹

Eithne's PhD had itself grown out of some of her previous work at the V&A:

"As V&A's Head of Equality and Diversity I was asked to develop the World in the End East gallery at the V&A Museum of Childhood (now Young V&A) as part of the Museum's strategy to reflect the diversity of the local area. Researchers from Bengali, Turkish, Caribbean, Somali, Rwandan, East European Jewish, Traveller and white East End working class communities were employed to collect tangible and intangible heritage on journeys, arrivals, play, education, leisure, festivals and work. Visitors peered into cases of Vietnamese water puppets and Galatasaray football shirts with object labels, highlighting their personal significance. They watched a moving film about a Rwandan refugee; listened to a podcast on the racism experienced by different communities and admired artwork based on multi-lingual playground rhymes."²²

There is also a series of short films ("Co-produced with child migrants, drawing on their artistic and creative skills, with ideas on how these can be used to inspire debate and promote awareness of child migrants' experiences."²³) and learning resources available:

"These short films, co-produced with those who have migrated to the UK under the age of 18, draw on initial oral history interviews supplemented by additional filming, for example on return visits to child migrants' first home, refugee camp or school in the UK. They use photographs, artwork and music, often created by child migrants who have become artists or musicians. The films have been screened in cinemas, museums, community and art centres, religious institutions, schools, colleges, universities and at open air festivals."²⁴

The oral histories on their own are well worth reading.

However, Eithne has also added a conclusion where she sets all this in historical and current context – and this too is really important, setting out why it is vital to get beyond the lazy stereotypes of who new arrivals are to learn about and understand something of what they have experienced, both getting to the UK and settling here, and also what they have left behind.

Highly recommended.

NB charged-for publication.

²¹ See: <https://childmigrantstories.com/>.

²² See: <https://www.ohs.org.uk/uncategorised/child-migrant-voices-in-modern-britain/>.

²³ Taken from: <https://childmigrantstories.com/>.

²⁴ See: <https://childmigrantstories.com/films>.

Broader issues – Libraries, Museums, Archives and Cultural and Heritage Organisations

Pre-General Election issues

It's important to recognise the role that we need to play in this "sensitive" time, but, according to reports²⁵, there are library services that are stopping LGBTQ+ Pride activities and even Refugee Week events, under the 'banner' that they are too political to go ahead pre-Election.

This is something that needs to be investigated further, as, in my opinion, it's the beginning of a dangerous path ...

Abbreviations and acronyms

ARA = Archives and Records Association
CMI = Chartered Management Institute
EDI = equality/equity, diversity and inclusion
V&A = Victoria & Albert Museum

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²⁵ For example in *Public Libraries News*.