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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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Cost of living crisis/poverty/NEET – Other Agencies

Giving young people a chance: a place-based exploration of barriers to employment for young people from Black, Pakistani and Bangladeshi backgrounds

This new report[1] from the Runnymede Trust and Work Foundation at Lancaster University, funded by Youth Futures Foundation:

> "[…] details qualitative research conducted across 2024 and 2025 in Bradford, Leeds, Brent and Walsall with employers, local stakeholders, and young people. The research explored the opportunities and challenges employers face in addressing the recruitment and retention of young people and tackling ethnic disparities, as well as the systemic challenges that young people face when trying to find employment.
>
> Some employers told the researchers that young people turn up unprepared for the world of work. But young people described a different story, identifying challenges including patchy and generic career advice and entry-level roles asking for a disproportionate amount of experience. Some young people were able to find routes into their desired profession through their networks and family connections, but people without such connections described struggling to get a foot in the door."[2]

The Conclusion is particularly helpful. It includes:

> "In this study, young people were able to talk freely about the possible implications they face for their different skin colour, hair type, or name. They were aware that their treatment in both the recruitment process and in the workplace could be less favourable than their white peers. They understood that racism can take very sophisticated and subtle 'dog whistle' forms, and they looked for diversity in the workplaces they sought to be a part of, as that was one way to judge if they could ultimately 'fit in'.
>
> There were discussions around what 'work ready' looks like. For young people, this entails closing the education-to-employment gap through better access to local services, programmes, and charities that can provide support. Some employers viewed young people as having 'poor levels of preparedness' and a 'lack of basic employment literacy'; however, we need to consider how young people can be better prepared

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[1] Serena Robinson, Carol Sidney, Emelia Williams and Asli Atay. *Giving young people a chance: a place-based exploration of barriers to employment for young people from Black, Pakistani and Bangladeshi backgrounds*. Youth Futures Foundation, 2026, https://cdn.prod.website-files.com/61488f992b58e687f1108c7c/6af5c964c98b41819ab17e34_Giving%20Young%20People%20a%20Chance%20-%20Runnymede%20and%20Work%20Foundation%20report.pdf.

[2] Taken from Press release, https://www.runnymedetrust.org/publications/giving-young-people-a-chance.

for the world of work and supported to navigate the transition from education to employment.

For fair hiring, the young people expressed concerns around local employers not investing in local young people. They want to see more long-term investment and community engagement. In addition to this, there was frequent reporting of discrimination both during the application process and in the workplace, which can be linked to structural and institutional racism. For the young people who took part in this research, fair hiring looks like community engagement, investment in hiring local young people, anonymising applications, and providing constructive feedback to applicants." [p43]

In terms of Solutions, these include:

"The findings from this research point towards opportunities for action across the employment system, including for employers, education providers, policymakers, funders, community organisations and other local partners." [p44]

Under the three headings, they include, for example:

<u>'Work readiness'</u>

- "Support voluntary and community sector organisations as core partners in youth employability, with multi-year funding that rewards collaboration across health, education, employers, and families rather than short competitive contracts." [p44]

<u>Fair hiring and employment</u>

- "Produce and promote practical guidance for local employers on inclusive, youth-friendly recruitment, co-designed with young people and voluntary sector partners […]

- Promote assessment methods that allow young people with limited experience to demonstrate potential, such as structured tasks, project-based assessments, short work trials, and group activities co-designed with local delivery partners.

- Encourage employers to monitor and review data on who applies, who is shortlisted, and who is hired, including by ethnicity and local residence, and to involve voluntary sector partners in interpreting patterns and identifying changes. This must include being transparent with young people about how the data is being used and why it is being collected.

- Embed explicit commitments around anti-discrimination in recruitment policies […]" [p44]

<u>Giving young people a chance</u>

- "Recognise third sector organisations as key enablers and cultural brokers between schools, young people from minority ethnic backgrounds, their families, and employers, and resource them to build long-term, trust-based relationships.

- Encourage employers to commit to engagement with local communities:

    - Regular, not one-off, engagement with schools and youth groups.
    - Co-created enrichment (projects, site visits, talks) that reflect local cultures and aspirations.
    - Open conversations about how businesses serve the local community, entry routes into their company/industry, and what progression routes exist.

- Explicitly address power dynamics in employer–youth engagement by involving young people and community partners in co-designing activities, setting expectations, and shaping what 'work readiness' means in ways that reflect lived experience as well as employer needs." [p45]

The case studies then follow and pin down a lot of these broader issues into their local context.

This is an important, practical report – recommended.[3]

Tackling social and digital exclusion – Libraries, Museums, Archives and Cultural and Heritage Organisations

Museums Change Lives Awards 2026

The 2026 winners and finalists have just been announced.[4]

Best Museums Change Lives Project

Winner: Whitworth Art Gallery – "Recoverist Curators, Re-imagining the World We Live In" [5]

> "Driven by the lived experience of substance use and recovery, the **Recoverist Curators** project is an activist-based process, developing inclusive ways for working with people and communities in recovery. The **Recoverist Curators: Re-imagining the World We Live In** exhibition has led to the development of new knowledge and increased cultural

[3] Source: email from the Runnymede Trust, 13 Nov 2026.
[4] See: https://www.museumsassociation.org/museums-journal/news/2026/11/winners-of-the-museums-change-lives-awards-2026-announced/#msdynmkt_trackingcontext=646d9fea-b49f-4f72-b297-ecbfb2060300.
[5] See: https://www.whitworth.manchester.ac.uk/whats-on/exhibitions/pastexhibitions/recoverist-curators/.

confidence for successful creative Recoverist engagement." [emphases theirs]

Finalists:

Linen Hall Library – Ending Violence Against Women and Girls

> "This powerful exhibition not only gives insights into the lived history of Violence Against Women and Girls in Northern Ireland, it also uses work by artists, writers and young people as an imaginative springboard to help us understand the profound impact of that violence on women and girls and the urgent need for it to stop."[6]

The Hunterian Museum, University of Glasgow – Museum of Things

> "Museum of Things was a creative programme and co-produced interdisciplinary exhibition developed in partnership between Maryhill Integration Network (MIN), a grassroots charity in northwest Glasgow combating social isolation and barriers to equality for asylum seekers, refugees and migrants, and the Hunterian. The project inspired engagement, reflection and debate by foregrounding marginalised perspectives and themes including migration, representation, embedded white supremacy, and inequality.
>
> Through weekly sessions, people with lived experience of migration engaged directly with collections, displays and curatorial processes. Participants explored themes of heritage, identity and belonging, using storytelling and diverse media to reinterpret objects and challenge the narratives embedded in museum displays. Producing a range of sculptural, 2D and AV work, the participants co-curated an intervention which embedded these works into the permanent galleries.
>
> Museum of Things made a significant difference to both participants and audiences by improving wellbeing, fostering belonging, and reshaping how the museum engages with marginalised and disempowered communities. Participants were positioned as active contributors with agency over narratives, supporting confidence, belonging and wellbeing while reducing isolation and inequality, while audiences reported increased understanding of cultural diversity and a desire for more inclusive programming and displays."[7]

<u>Best Small Museum Project Award</u>

Winner: Museum of Transology – Transcestry: 10 Years of the Museum of Transology[8]

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[6] See: https://linenhall.com/event/ending-violence-against-women-and-girls-exhibition/.
[7] See: https://www.museumsassociation.org/campaigns/museums-change-lives/awards-2026/.
[8] See: https://www.arts.ac.uk/colleges/central-saint-martins/whats-on/lethaby-gallery/transcestry-10-years-of-the-museum-of-transology.

> "This groundbreaking exhibition marks a decade of community collecting by the Museum of Transology – home to the world's biggest collection of objects and stories celebrating trans, non-binary, and intersex lives.
>
> Driven by community collaboration, this milestone exhibition is the largest exhibition of its kind showcasing over 1,000 personal artefacts donated by more than 1,000 members of the community from across the UK and Ireland."

Finalists:

Brent Museum and Archives – Becoming Brent: Decolonising Heritage Through Community Empowerment[9]

> "*Becoming Brent* was a groundbreaking heritage initiative that empowered Brent's diverse communities to explore their histories through a decolonial lens.
>
> The Brent Museum & Archive team set up this project to commemorate the centenary of The British Empire Exhibition of 1924-25; one of the most visited attractions of the 20th century that transformed Wembley from a village into what it is today.
>
> Rooted in the British Empire Exhibition collections, *Becoming Brent* delivered exhibitions, events, and 18 community-led projects, engaging over 61,000 people."

Headstone Manor and Museum – Stories of Harrow

> "Stories of Harrow is an 18-month community heritage project led by Headstone Manor and Museum in partnership with Voluntary Action Harrow, working with 16 community groups across one of London's most diverse boroughs. Funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund, the project was created to help communities research, preserve and share their own heritage while fundamentally reshaping how the museum collects, interprets and represents Harrow's history.
>
> Working collaboratively, the museum delivered training in oral history, collections care, research and exhibition development, while participating in a grant-making process that distributed £150,000 directly to community organisations. This enabled groups not simply to participate, but to design and lead their own heritage projects with professional support from the museum.
>
> Participants explored themes including migration, identity, faith, work and belonging, creating oral histories, archives, photographs and object collections."[10]

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[9] See: https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/archives-sector/our-archives-sector-role/celebrating-archives/a-year-in-archives/a-year-in-archives-2025/case-studies/openness/.

[10] See: https://www.museumsassociation.org/campaigns/museums-change-lives/awards-2026/.

Inclusive Spaces Award

Winner: Showtown – Through Our Eyes: Little People Beyond the Circus[11]

> "Showtown, Blackpool's award-winning museum, is proud to announce a powerful new community-led temporary exhibition, **Through Our Eyes: Little People Beyond the Circus,** opening on 12 February and running until 31 May 2026.
>
> This immersive exhibition explores the history of little people in Blackpool, placing their lived experience and perspectives at the centre of the story. Developed through a six-month co-production project with people of short stature and their families, the exhibition draws on Showtown's internationally significant **Blackpool Tower Circus Collection** and new community-led research to reframe how these histories are told.
>
> *Through Our* Eyes goes beyond traditional museum interpretation. The gallery has been designed at the height of little people, with display cases, interactives and sightlines lowered to challenge assumptions about accessibility and to highlight how the world is usually built for people of average height. By physically changing the environment, the exhibition invites average height visitors to consider the inaccessibility of everyday spaces for little people." [emphases theirs]

Finalists:

Glasgow Women's Library – We Make Museums[12]

> "The We Make Museums project was developed by Glasgow Women's Library to initiate crucial discussions about museum processes, empowering communities to think about acquisitions made by museums, and helping to shape the GWL collection into the future. The group includes 17 women with lived experiences of racism, sexism, classism, poverty, ableism, neuro-diversity, health inequalities and trauma who have worked together, supported by GWL staff, for the last two years."

National Football Museum – Black in the Game[13]

> "Black in the Game, our new Score Gallery exhibition, showcases the cultural impact, unique achievements and untold stories of African and Caribbean communities within the English game.
>
> The exhibition champions the historical pioneers, the Three Lions ground-breakers, and those changing the game on and off the pitch, from Premier League clubs and grassroots communities to backroom staff, match officials and administrators behind the scenes."

[11] See: https://www.showtownblackpool.co.uk/whats-on/exhibitions/through-our-eyes-little-people-beyond-the-circus.
[12] See: https://womenslibrary.org.uk/discover-our-projects/we-make-museums/.
[13] See: https://nationalfootballmuseum.com/blackinthegame/.

Radical Changemaker Award

Winner: Marie Kennedy, University of Cambridge Museums

> "This year's Radical Changemaker Award went to Marie Kennedy, the learning associate for young people at the University of Cambridge Museums. Kennedy specialises in SEND inclusion and supporting underserved teenagers, and her work is focused on creating welcoming, accessible and creative spaces for people who have historically faced barriers to cultural participation.
>
> Kennedy leads the Disability Friendly Openings programme, which enables disabled visitors and their families to experience museums in environments designed around their needs. Her wider work includes the Young Parents Art Awards and Arts Pioneers."[14]

Finalists:

Naomi Zaragoza, Design Museum

> "As assistant curator of public practice, Naomi has shaped the Growing Together programme into a deeply impactful, socially driven initiative that redefines how museums use green spaces to serve their communities. Over the past three years she has built and sustained an intergenerational, multicultural cohort of volunteers, people experiencing isolation or limited access to green space, creating a supportive environment rooted in care, belonging and shared learning. Through regular gardening sessions, skills development and peer exchange, she has embedded wellbeing at the heart of the programme."[15]

Emily Elsworth, access consultant

> "Emily uses her lived experience to improve access, working life and wellbeing for neurodivergent museum professionals and visitors. She has delivered training and mentoring to museums to help boost their confidence in understanding what neurodivergence is and how to make their site more accessible."[16]

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[14] Taken from: https://www.museumsassociation.org/museums-journal/news/2026/11/winners-of-the-museums-change-lives-awards-2026-announced/#msdynmkt_trackingcontext=646d9fea-b49f-4f72-b297-ecbfb2060300.
[15] See: https://www.museumsassociation.org/campaigns/museums-change-lives/awards-2026/.
[16] See: https://www.museumsassociation.org/campaigns/museums-change-lives/awards-2026/.

Health & Wellbeing issues – Libraries, Museums, Archives and Cultural and Heritage Organisations

The recommended dose of art: a prescription for health & wellbeing

This new report[17]:

> "[…] brings together evidence of the wide-ranging benefits of engaging with art, from reducing stress hormones such as cortisol to lowering the risk of developing dementia and helping adults remain physiologically younger."[18]

It was commissioned by Art Fund[19], the national art charity, and produced in partnership with Daisy Fancourt, professor of psychobiology and epidemiology at University College London (UCL).

As Daisy Fancourt writes in the Foreword:

> "The problem is that the majority of us are not engaging sufficiently to experience all these myriad benefits. Figures showing that 45% of UK adults went to a museum in the past year may sound like a lot of people. But much like going for a run once a year is not going to drive meaningful health improvements, going to a museum once in 365 days does not allow us the opportunity to reap all the health and wellbeing benefits that cultural experiences provide." [p3]

The report draws together evidence to show the benefits of art in a range of areas:

- Art and mental health
- Art and brain health
- Art and healthy ageing
- Art and wellbeing
- Art and loneliness.

It then goes on to outline how we can "get more art in your life" with eight suggested steps. As an example, the first tip is "Know your RDA" – where RDA equals "Recommended Dose of Art" – which recommends that:

> "To reap the benefits of cultural engagement, we should aim to visit a museum or gallery for at least one hour every month." [p14]

The report concludes:

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[17] *The recommended dose of art: a prescription for health & wellbeing*. Art Fund, 2026, https://bibli.artfund.org/asset/95558e6a-dd30-4cd3-b4eb-22f4f50fc089/The-Recommended-Dose-of-Art-report.pdf.
[18] Taken from: https://www.artfund.org/our-purpose/news/art-fund-report-recommended-dose-of-art.
[19] See: https://www.artfund.org/.

> "The studies cited in this paper are not proposing art as a replacement for medical treatment or professional healthcare. What they point to is a powerful and largely untapped resource for enhancing our wellbeing and our wellness. Art as the extra pillar of health.
>
> Activities like visiting museums and galleries have multiple, quantifiable, interrelated benefits. They keep us socially connected, emotionally regulated, cognitively fit, physically active, functioning and flourishing for a longer period of time. And the more regular and sustained this activity, the better the results." [p16]

The report also recommends the National Art Pass[20] and Daisy Fancourt's book, *Art cure*[21].[22]

SEND issues – Other Agencies

"Making mainstream inclusion work"

This is a new blogpost[23] from NFER, which comments on the Government's "[…] ambitious vision for a more inclusive education system, with more children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) learning and thriving in mainstream settings alongside their peers."

It makes six important points:

1. Training is not a substitute for strengthening inclusive practice: NFER's "[…] research found some high-SEND schools have developed particularly strong inclusive cultures and expertise. Inclusion is often embedded in the ethos of these schools, rather than being dependent on a small number of individual staff."

2. Training needs to be matched by specialist expertise: this argues that "[…] mainstream schools cannot be expected to develop all the expertise they need internally."

   It refers to the "Experts at Hand"[24] programme, but also says that: "But the pace at which specialist capacity can be developed will matter. The

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[20] See: https://www.artfund.org/national-art-pass.
[21] Daisy Fancourt. *Art cure: the science of how the arts transform our health*. Penguin, 2026 – charged-for publication, for more info see: https://www.penguin.co.uk/books/462340/art-cure-by-fancourt-daisy/9781804950784.
[22] Source: Museums Association email updates, 10 Nov 2026.
[23] Jenna Julius "Making mainstream inclusion work", NFER, 19 Oct 2026, https://www.nfer.ac.uk/blogs/making-mainstream-inclusion-work/?utm_campaign=nd_jun_24&utm_medium=email&utm_source=dotdigital&dm_i=7IN9,DKKO,16YTPV,1WMQP,1,0,0,0.
[24] "Experts at Hand will bring specialists such as speech and language therapists, occupational therapists, educational psychologists and specialist teachers into mainstream settings – schools, early years settings and colleges – to support children earlier and more effectively.

key question is therefore not simply whether staff receive SEND training, but whether access to the specialist expertise they require is scaled up rapidly enough and keeps pace with reform."

3. Making the most of the workforce schools already have: "Support staff are central to this picture. They make up more than half of the school workforce, and their numbers have continued to grow. As their role in supporting pupils with SEND becomes increasingly important, schools need to ensure that support staff have appropriate training, clear roles and opportunities to work closely with teachers and specialists."

4. Are inclusion bases part of the solution? This argues that: "Inclusion bases should therefore be seen as part of a wider approach to building expertise, not as a substitute for it. Their value will depend on whether they help spread specialist knowledge across the school and strengthen collaboration between mainstream and specialist staff."[25]

5. Inclusion also needs to ensure access to adequate specialist school places: "Mainstream schools cannot compensate for insufficient places in specialist schools. NFER's research highlighted that many schools felt that a small number of pupils currently in mainstream settings required specialist places to be supported safely and effectively in accessing education.

6. A more inclusive system therefore needs capacity across both mainstream and specialist education. The aim should not be to make mainstream provision responsible for meeting every need, but to ensure pupils can access the right provision at the right time, with effective links between mainstream schools, specialist settings and specialist services."

7. From investment to implementation: "The Government has made clear that workforce development is a central part of SEND reform. The next challenge is making sure that investment creates lasting capacity across the system.

- Occupational Therapist help children with everyday skills like dressing, playing, and using their hands
- Speech and Language Therapist help children understand and use words, and communicate with others
- Specialist teachers who have extra training to support children with specific learning needs, helping them access learning in a way that suits them

Rather than children having to wait for support elsewhere, experts will work alongside staff in the places where children already learn.
The aim is to spot difficulties earlier and give children the help they need before problems grow." See: https://educationhub.blog.gov.uk/2026/06/experts-at-hand-everything-you-need-to-know/.

[25] According to Ambition Institute: "An inclusion base is a way for mainstream schools to provide targeted or specialist teaching and support for children and young people with additional needs. The aim is to help more pupils remain in their local school, close to family and friends, while accessing the support they need to learn and thrive." [Taken from: https://www.ambition.org.uk/blog/inclusion-bases-what-school-leaders-need-to-know/.

That means giving staff access to high-quality training, while also ensuring schools can draw on specialist expertise, support collaboration between teachers and support staff, and develop inclusive cultures across whole schools. It also means recognising that mainstream inclusion must sit alongside sufficient specialist provision for children and young people whose needs cannot be met effectively in mainstream settings."[26]

Abbreviations and acronyms

GWL = Glasgow Women's Library
NEET = not in education, employment or training
NFER = National Foundation for Educational Research
SEND = Special Educational Needs and Disabilities

This Newsletter was compiled by John Vincent, and all items are written by him, unless otherwise stated. Please send any comments or items for the next issue to:

John Vincent
Wisteria Cottage
Nadderwater
Exeter EX4 2JQ

Tel/fax: 01392 256045
E-mail: john@nadder.org.uk

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[26] Source: *NFER Direct*, Oct 2026.