

Project title: Soho Science Club

Length/time: 3 years 2002 -2005

Overall purpose (why is your organisation involved in this project?):

Soho House Museum is two miles north of Birmingham city centre in the heart of the Soho Ward - a deprived area with 75% of the population from ethnic minority groups. Local communities within this ward are frequently socially excluded. There are a large number of children with English as a second language without access to 'Out of Hours Learning' or leisure opportunities. This contrasts sharply with the traditional museum audience of white, middle aged and middle class.

Aims:

- ◆ to link closely with local schools to target local people.
- ◆ to target socially excluded children living within the Soho ward.
- ◆ to improve their access to learning with 'Out of Hours Learning' opportunities.
- ◆ to provide fun interactive science workshops.
- ◆ to encourage the use of Soho House as a meeting place for local people.

Brief description (including target audience):

Soho Science Club is a Saturday science workshop meeting once per month for local young people aged between 9 - 11 years from disadvantaged socially excluded backgrounds, being educated in the Soho ward of Birmingham.

Using the Lunar Society who met at Soho House in the 18th Century as a stimulus, children are led and encouraged to discover matters of science and technology in a relaxed and informal environment. For example one of the many and varied interests of the Lunar Society was ballooning. Children can research tales of ballooning escapades and re-discover James Watt's account of the exploding balloon experiment to discover the nature of thunder. This leads the children to design and build their own balloons trying a variety of sizes and shapes. They are then built, launched and evaluated. The emphasis is on finding out about how we live today and making it readily accessible to this young audience.

We link up with the local schools and the Children's University to effectively target our audience. The project is running for 3 years in the first instance with joint from the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund and copus.

Outcomes:

- High levels of attendance achieved in 2002-03 and 2003 - 04.
- The children's drawing revealed that the favourite parts of the club included the fossil hunting, the rockets, hot air balloons, steam powered boats, the games and prizes.
- End of year formal evaluation revealed that we had a good model as demonstrated in the high levels of satisfaction, enjoyment and learning achieved.

Follow-on activities from this project:

The model of working has been used again within the Museum to offer other clubs in the summer holidays and half term holidays with funding from the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council.

Key barriers and how were they overcome:

- In April 2003 Soho House Museum went from an all year opening museum to summer season only. This was totally without warning. It had a serious knock on effect, staff morale was very low, most of the permanent front of house staff had to be redeployed elsewhere, additionally both Curatorial staff eventually decided to leave also. I became Acting Curator Manager of the site for a 4 month period, which made life really difficult in trying to keep my old responsibilities going. I did manage to keep the club on course though and I believe I fulfilled all my responsibilities

- The seasonal opening meant that we had no-one on site at winter weekends. To enable the club to continue to meet over the winter, I got one of our front of house staff to come in and open the site and stay to oversee the site and security. We have absorbed this cost into the site budget, this was not passed on.
- I needed to recruit a new lot of 6th formers in September 2003. Once again staff at the Children's University put me in contact with some of their 'Peer Tutors'. I now have a bank of 3 students again to call on. 2 of them live locally in the Handsworth Wood area.

Evaluation method:

- Attendance monitored monthly, with certificates awarded for attendance.
- Talking to the children throughout the project about their likes and dislikes
- Quizzes every month with prizes to assess the level of learning
- The club leader completes an evaluation form after each session.
- Several times during the year the children were asked to draw pictures of their favourite activities
- At the end of each year more formal evaluation completed with questionnaires given to the children, parents and teachers of the three schools

Tips and lessons learnt:

I have created and sustained many worthwhile partnerships during this project. Particularly I am highly visible in our 3 closest schools and have fostered an excellent relationship with staff and pupils alike. This has been hugely rewarding for all concerned and enabled other projects to go ahead almost seamlessly.

It takes far more time monitoring the project than I ever anticipated. This has to be built in somehow.

The link with the Children's University has been invaluable in recruiting staff. However if one leaves before another starts inevitably you are left delivering at the sharp end yourself.

Budget (including staff time):

Less than 5K	5-10K	10-20K	20-50K	50K+
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Project contacts and partners:

Partners:

- Children's University supported me in systems for working and in recommending suitable staff
- Birmingham Grid for Learning set up a club website.
- Wardens at Wren's Nest Nature Reserve gave up their time, facilities and expertise free of charge.
- Time given freely by staff from the Centre of the Earth Environmental Education Centre and by Andy Lound from the Planetary Society.
- Birmingham Museums supported the winter opening in 2003 especially for the club sessions.

For more information about this project, contact;

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