

Project title: Plant Cultures

Length/time taken: Ten months

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

Plant Cultures is led by Royal Botanical Gardens Kew with National Museums Liverpool acting as one of the community outreach partners, involved in the project specifically to engage with local South Asian communities based in and around Merseyside. National Museums Liverpool aims to engage local South Asian communities in outreach sessions that are based on the theme of the various uses of South Asian plants.

Aims:

- To engage local South Asian communities in outreach and museum activity sessions
- To gather stories and images relating to the traditional uses of South Asian plants for inclusion on the Plant Cultures project website
- To build relationships between National Museums Liverpool and local South Asian communities for future developments

Project description (including target audience):

Target audience:

Older adults from local South Asian communities.

Groups may be recruited from appropriate local faith groups

Plant Cultures is part of Culture Online, an initiative supported by the Department of Culture, Media and Sport. *Plant Cultures* is led by Kew Gardens with National Museums Liverpool acting as one of the community outreach partners, involved in the project specifically to engage with local South Asian communities based in and around Merseyside.

National Museums Liverpool explored the traditional uses of plants such as sandalwood, tea, holy basil and cumin in South Asian cultures (focusing on India, Pakistan and Bangladesh). The work with local communities focused on a variety of themes such as food and cooking, cosmetics, celebrations, life events such as birth, marriage and death. *Plant Cultures* has resulted in a web-based resource with associated outreach programmes.

In addition to the web based resources, we are in the process of recruiting a consultant who will carry out research, source images and provide text and content for a plant trail incorporating places in Liverpool that are historically significant in terms of plants and people.

Outcomes

- 50 stories for the Plant Cultures website
- 25 of the stories will be accompanied by audio clips
- Visit to Kew Gardens for project participants
- Approx 10 community outreach sessions

- Approx 5 museum visits (visits to botany archive)

Follow-on activities from this project:

This research collated by NML for the 'Plant Trail' will provide further information and links to further learning for adult learners (informal/beginner level) and families who wish to pursue an interest in South Asian plants. The trail will be available after the end of the project. Trail leaflets will be available in printed and downloadable formats, in a number of languages.

Key barriers and how were they overcome:

Language barriers

As participants were from South Asian communities in Liverpool, some group members had limited knowledge of the English language. The Community Consultant had language skills in Bengali, and was able to communicate to the groups in the native language. This helped build trust in the relationships between consultant and participants, and enabled some of the information to be translated and understood. The sessions at the museum involved practical activities and images, which enable all participants to get the most out of the sessions.

Length of stories

The Plant Cultures website had specific guidelines on the length of the stories collected. Some of the contributions were too short, consisting of a sentence or simple quote, and in order for the stories to be utilised on the website, the Consultant had to revisit the groups to add depth to the stories.

Evaluation method:

Can we beef this section up before we send it off?

The Community Consultant carried out continuous informal evaluation of project sessions in order to ensure that the project was enjoyable and meeting the practical needs of the participants. It is not confirmed whether the Plant Cultures Project leader, Kew, will undertake evaluation retrospectively.

Throughout the outreach sessions and visits, participants verbally responded that they enjoyed taking part in the project, and one particular participant has gone on to volunteer with the Community Consultant in other projects.

Tips and lessons learnt:

The participants in the project needed a lot of preparatory time spent with them, before they felt comfortable in visiting the museum. Key to the success of the project was the relationship that the Community Consultant had with the groups. The group felt comfortable in making their visits, in the accompaniment of the Consultant.

The timing of the sessions and visit was designed to fit around the participants schedule and needs. Planning for the sessions often had to be changed last minute, so museum staff and workers had to be flexible to accommodate the groups wishes and needs.

The participants enjoyed developing their knowledge and confidence through the project, and were keen to undertake future activities. Producing the plant trail will further involve

participants and hopefully make people aware of further projects they can get involved in e.g. further information and links to further learning for adult learners and families who wish to pursue an interest in South Asian plants.

Budget (including staff time)

Less than 5K	5-10K	10-20K	20-50K	50K+
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