

Elmbridge Museum, Surrey

Why take part?

Elmbridge Museum closed in June 2014 and is instead displaying its collections in locations across the Borough. The museum staff wanted to show the museum has a valuable role to play in the community so they looked for ways to extend their existing outreach programme and use the object collection in new and innovative ways. They had never taken part in Takeover Day and thought that the centenary of the Brownie movement created a good opportunity to explore its history in the local area. The museum decided to use its collection of objects relating to the Brownie movement with local Brownies.

Who took part?

A Brownie pack and their leaders participated. An initial session was held for the whole pack of 20 children. The group discussed the role of the museum and how to handle and conserve objects. During the next visit, two smaller groups of six children looked at the Brownie related artefacts, learnt about interpretation and created labels for a display. One group of children acted as curators, creating the Takeover Day display and attended the opening event.

What did they do?

The Brownies helped to select objects, photos and uniforms from the museum's collections for the display. They thought about what they valued about being a Brownie and included this information in the mini exhibition which was set up in Esher Civic Centre's public foyer.

How did they spend their time on the day?

The children worked as:

- Curators – the group of six Brownies dressed and arranged mannequins and helped the museum staff set up the display of chosen objects

What happened next?

Following Takeover Day, the Brownies attended an opening ceremony with the Mayor and other invited guests. The mini exhibition was advertised on a poster which was displayed in libraries and other council venues.

The Brownies also helped to host a reminiscence event for a community group with special educational needs. The event was held in the Civic Centre and followed a talk by the museum curator. The Brownies talked about their project, took handling objects round the group and shared their stories with the older people and people with learning disabilities. They served tea and cakes to their guests.

Being involved in the Takeover Day project also provided opportunities for the Brownies to work towards achieving a number of different badges, so there were positive personal and group outcomes for the Brownies. The project received publicity from the local press and feedback from the public has been very positive.

The museum staff had some challenges with the project as this was their first display away from the museum, but it turned out to be very successful. Involving the Brownies in this project opened up new ways to use and display the collection. Staff gained confidence and plan to work with other community groups and schools on innovative projects, which may change people's perceptions about a local museum being '*just a building full of old objects.*'

'Installing our display together with the Brownies on Takeover Day created a buzz about the exhibition and the way we are using our museum's collection to work in the community.' Elmbridge Museum Manager