

Norfolk Museums Service: Ancient House Museum, Thetford

Takeover Day – More than a day, 2-year Case Study 2013-14

Museums have been involved in Takeover Day for several years now and Norfolk Museums Service: Ancient House Museum, Thetford has taken part for the last two years. Here's how they have used their experiences to develop and deepen the involvement of young people in their organisation:

2013

What they did

Members of the museum's Teenage History Club (THC) wanted to design and create their own shop stock inspired by the museum collections. Over the course of a term the young people visited other museum shops, researched places that could make their designs into products, pitched their ideas to the museum's retail board and supervised the items being made. On Takeover Day half of the group sold items in the shop and the other half ran Tudor activities for the public.

Taking it forward

- Ancient House is a small museum and there were initial concerns amongst museum staff about the impact that letting the young people take over could have. The experience changed people's minds and left staff feeling confident and more understanding of young people.

'They did it so well that there's now a lot of confidence in their abilities. I certainly feel that I can step back and let them make decisions.'

- The museum felt their profile had been raised by the event and visitors, councillors and press that attended gave very positive feedback. The shop stock commissioned by the young people sold well and generated important income for the museum. Some of the items continue to be stocked in the shop, for example badges made from prints of the museum's famous flint knapped alphabet.
- The museum was selected to help launch the following year's Takeover Day in May 2014. People who attended this launch were so impressed by the teenagers' ability that Teenage History Club have since been asked to give tours to a number of groups, including one from Thetford's twinned town in Poland and another from Japan. This has promoted successful inter-departmental working as the whole museum team was involved in training and preparing the young people to give the tours.

'The launch event was something that pushed me into getting the young people ready to give guided tours. Now they are happy to do them at the drop of a hat.'

'A lot of people say – "We didn't think teenagers could do that". They are often surprised by how good they are. A few of them have said they were preparing themselves to be patient but actually they were really interested. Halfway through the tour they forget that they are young people and start asking really complicated questions.'

2014

What they did

In August the museum took part in Teen Twitter Takeover. THC members plus some other young people went behind the scenes at the museum and tweeted about it. They also tweeted their passionate responses to an article about teenagers not being allowed into museums. Takeover Day 2014 saw THC deliver a completely new event for the

museum. This began with THC curating a WWI display for the museum. Having done this, members of THC expressed the desire to bring the Great War in Thetford to life through a murder mystery evening at the museum, working with a storyteller to develop new skills. The young people developed the storyline, played all the characters, created the marketing and organised Front of House operations.

Taking it forward

- The museum has learnt how to reach young people and what is important for them. For example, when advertising for new members, the young people felt strongly that they wanted the club to be completely detached from their school life. So, instead of putting posters up in schools, the museum had to find other community spaces that the young people used e.g. skateboard parks, youth centres.
- Ancient House had never attempted a murder mystery event as staff always thought the museum was too small. Takeover Day challenged this idea and staff are considering making it a regular feature in the museum programme.
- All the young people have used their Takeover experiences to complete Arts Awards. These have helped them with college applications. Members of Teenage History Club and museum staff have delivered joint presentations at regional conferences to share their experiences with other museums.
- Having seen what young people can do, the museum is keen to further integrate their involvement with the organisation and is actively looking for more opportunities. Young people recently created a window display for the museum's WWI exhibition. They led the opening event, welcomed visitors and gave a speech. Members of THC, the younger children's museum club and visiting schools took over the Twitter feed during #Museumweek in 2015 and will do so again during the town's two-week Summer festival. Some of the young people who get involved with these events go on to join the THC.

'There's now a great desire to include them in lots of decisions about exhibitions, to get their input and that's certainly been something that's grown. There's a real commitment to maintaining that connection, giving them those opportunities and making them feel that it's their museum.'

'Having a structure like Takeover Day is really helpful as it gives you a focus and that you're working towards a goal. Just simple things like being able to say that we're part of this national event and people like the idea that it's happening all over the country.'

'I think it's given me a lot more confidence to do things that I might have been nervous about doing, and to ask more of the young people that I work with, as I know that they can rise to the challenge.'