

# Stepping Stones: museums supporting young people into work

## Can museums play a role in supporting young people facing unemployment?

### Introduction

This leaflet presents the key findings from research into the impact of the Renaissance East of England Stepping Stones into work programme.

Stepping Stones is an innovative programme looking at how museums and local study centres can meet the needs of young people who are out of work by building confidence and developing transferable skills. The programme explores the role of museums as a 'stepping-stone' to employment by providing experience of the world of work through short-term job placements and apprenticeship opportunities.

The Stepping Stones programme created 32 extra jobs for unemployed young people in 24 museums across the region. The museums offered a diverse range of job opportunities including front of house, retail, catering, learning and outreach, collections care, marketing, design, events and site maintenance all designed to develop a broad range of skills.

Young people were recruited to jobs in partnership with Jobcentre Plus. They came from a wide range of backgrounds with very differing levels of qualification and previous work experience. For some this was their first experience of paid employment.

**"I think it will be so much easier for me to find a job now, because I have experienced so many things."**



*Stepping Stones evaluation event, courtesy of The Fitzwilliam Museum*

The museums undertook to mentor the young employees identifying training and development opportunities, encouraging them to keep 'learning logs' and helping them to update CVs.

The impact of the programme was evaluated by Discovery Research Ltd who interviewed young people and museum staff involved in the programme. A summary of their findings is presented here.

### Key findings

The Stepping Stones project has been extremely effective and of great value for young people and participating museums alike.

The evaluation demonstrates that the key objectives of the project are exceeded, and young people experience:

- A boost in confidence
- A more positive attitude to achieving future employment
- Transferable skills and experience
- A broader scope of the types of future employment they might consider
- Improved mental health
- A wider social network
- Ongoing support from their mentors and peers within the museum

**The outcome is young people who feel they genuinely have something of practical value to offer potential employers, beyond education, which will help them compete effectively in the current job market.**

# What is the impact of the Stepping Stones programme?



**Stephen Roe**, Retail and Visitor Services Assistant, Stockwood Discovery Centre, Luton Culture  
'Being employed and gaining experience means that I am now more likely to get a job in the future.'



**Ailsa Clarke**, Marketing Assistant, Colchester and Ipswich Museum Service  
'It's given me a massive boost in confidence. I was so depressed before I started; I hadn't done anything productive in months.'



**Max Tucker**, Building Maintenance Trainee Electrician, Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge  
'I'm so grateful for this amazing chance. Within these last 6 months I feel like I have become a new person with a reason to get up in the morning.'

## Impact on young people

The Stepping Stones evaluation process has revealed that the project has had a profound effect on those taking part, and to a large extent worked extremely well for young people to transform their attitudes and mindset, feelings of confidence and self-worth, and crucially, propensity to continue into employment or training.

The experience has done this in a number of ways:

- i **For many this was their first experience of full-time employment**, and the very fact of having to be organised and timely has a significant impact and proves to the young people themselves that although daunting, they are able to commit to and hold down a full-time job. In addition, having a purpose and reason to get up each day, and a regular, productive routine, gives participants energy, enthusiasm, more meaning in their lives and a propensity to feel more positive about their future.
- ii **The responsibility and confidence that is placed in the young people is equally transformative**. Many of them go on a journey, from very low-esteem, low self-confidence, and in some cases, feelings of despondency or depression that can accompany long periods of unemployment, to feeling confident, valued, and with high self-worth, self-belief and a positive 'can-do' mindset. This is a side-effect of the sense of achievement they experience from being given a 'proper job', with specific expectations, that makes a significant contribution to the museum and its visitors.
- iii **The technical skills and training that accompanies the experience of working within the museum also make a significant impact**, ranging from administrative skills, to health and safety, software and IT to marketing and PR. The young people are keen to add these to their CVs to support the overall work experience, and these are felt to add to a belief that future employers will be attracted by the training and certificates acquired.



**Adam Bass**, Admin Assistant, Wisbech & Fenland Museum/Wisbech Library Fenland Collection  
'It has given me an extra confidence boost and the much needed experience of a full-time job.'

## The value of the museum environment

**Many of the young people have benefitted a huge amount from the way they have been welcomed, nurtured and mentored by staff within the museums.** Aside from the skills they have learned, they have enjoyed excellent professional working relationships, in many cases an extended social network, which only adds to the feelings of confidence and self-esteem.

The experience of unemployment can prompt people to feel like second class citizens, or judged negatively by their peers, and the experience of working in the museum challenges these feelings and leads to a more positive social life per se. On a rational level, the money they earn in working enables the young people to re-join their friends and peers in social activities.

**The young people all indicate that the experience of working in a museum environment has provided some very specific advantages that would be lacking in any other working environment.** The range of skills and activities is extremely broad, and many have benefitted from this to the extent that they feel very optimistic about applying successfully for all kinds of jobs once their time at the museum comes to a close. On a general level, there is also a sense of real pride in being in a learned, cultural environment, and around artefacts and exhibits of note, that provide interest and pleasure to a spectrum of visitors.

**In many cases, the experience has exceeded expectations.** Many young people, excluding those with prior experience of working, studying or volunteering in the museum sector, had expected the experience might be boring, academic or lacking in business experience. Such expectations have been confounded, and these positive messages have been taken back into the community with participants persuading their friends and peers of the benefits of using or volunteering for the museums.

**Many were amazed at the sheer breadth of activities taken on in their museums**, and considered themselves fascinated by the work of the museums, and the variety and high quality of the outputs for members of the public. This has helped many consider new and varied ideas for their future careers or training opportunities.

*Stepping Stones evaluation event, courtesy of The Fitzwilliam Museum*



**Reece Pursey**, Exhibitions Assistant, Epping Forest District Museum  
'This job has made a big difference to me and my future by giving me confidence in myself as well as more skills and qualifications added to my belt and C.V.'



**Jordan Taylor-Todd**, Museum Assistant, The National Horseracing Museum  
'It has made me a lot more confident and the best thing about my experience is that I have been able to work in all areas of the museum. I feel like I could do anything!'



**Amy Seaman**, Visitor Services Apprentice, Norwich Castle Museum  
'It has shown me that you can still follow your dream of working in a museum, even though it might take a while to get there.'

# The contribution of young people

**Participants were extremely reluctant to leave their museums and felt they had made a significant contribution, bringing a fresh view of things, and in many cases from the perspective of those who do not know about or visit museums.** Many have made strong social bonds with staff and intend to maintain a close connection with the museum, either through visiting or volunteering in future. To this extent, it is very clear that the experience has dramatically changed the way many participants view museums per se.

This in turn has been beneficial to visitors to the museums, enabling changes, improvements and an increase in what the museums are able to achieve, how they communicate and interact with young people in the wider community. One of the key benefits appears to have been that those with no knowledge or prior experience of the museum sector are able to look at these organisations

with fresh eyes, a lack of preconceptions, and also with a view about what young people like themselves, and within their peer group, may want or need from the museum environment to engage them.

## Conclusion

All who took part in the evaluation felt that the museum environment lent itself perfectly to the Stepping Stones project, and the task of up-skilling young people in unemployment, due to the extraordinary breadth of work and skills available with the one organisation, and the nurturing, supportive atmosphere.

**This element should not be underestimated, and the evidence suggests that the museum environment may be unique in being able to take in young people, some of whom are at a real low point, or have very limited work experience, and in a very short time give them the means to thrive and prosper.**

*Stepping Stones evaluation report, Discovery East, February 2011*

To read the full evaluation report and a booklet with case studies go to: [www.mla.gov.uk/renaissanceeastofengland](http://www.mla.gov.uk/renaissanceeastofengland) and click on the link to News and publications.

**“It’s made museum staff look afresh at their work and has helped us incorporate new ideas which will appeal to a younger audience.”**

## Further information

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*Renaissance is the Museums, Libraries & Archives (MLA) Council’s groundbreaking programme to transform regional museums. Central government funding is enabling regional museums across the country to raise their standards and deliver real results in local communities.*

## Project partners

### Museum and Local Studies Services:

Braintree District Museum Service  
Cambridge & County Folk Museum  
Cecil Higgins Art Gallery and Bedford Museum  
Chelmsford Museum  
Colchester and Ipswich Museum Service  
Cromwell Museum with Huntingdon Archives & Local Studies  
Ely Museum  
Epping Forest District Museum  
The Farmland Museum & Denny Abbey  
Fitzwilliam Museum

Luton Culture  
Museum of Harlow  
National Horseracing Museum  
Norfolk Museum & Archaeology Service  
North Herts Museum Service  
St Edmundsbury Borough Council Heritage Service  
Southend Museums Service  
Stevenage Museum  
Wisbech & Fenland Museum with Wisbech Library

### Colleges:

Bedford College  
City College Norwich  
Easton College  
Hertford Regional College  
North Hertfordshire College  
South East Essex College

### Other Partners:

Beryl Perez, Consultancy & Research: Lifelong Learning  
Department for Work & Pensions  
Jobcentre Plus  
The National Apprenticeship Service