



Wide Skies, learning about our community's heritage together

Evaluation Report
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1. Introduction

1.1 About Wide Skies

Wide Skies is a three year project, commencing April 2011, concerned with recruiting and training volunteers in nine Cambridgeshire museums to work with their collections to develop learning activities within their communities. The project application was made by Cambridgeshire Museums Advisory Partnership (CMAP). It has been funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) and Renaissance East of England, and hosted centrally by Cambridgeshire County Council.

The museums are split into two clusters; the Fenland cluster museums are Wisbech & Fenland Museum, Chatteris Museum, March Museum, Whittlesey Museum and Octavia Hill's Birthplace House. The Huntingdonshire cluster museums are St Neots Museum, The Norris Museum (St Ives), The Cromwell Museum (Huntingdon), and Ramsey Rural Museum. For the purposes of this report, they are referred to as the 'Wide Skies museums'.

Wisbech & Fenland Museum and St Neots Museum were chosen as the lead museums for the Fenland and Huntingdonshire clusters respectively. They were identified as being the museums with the greatest need to develop their learning provision.

Specifically, the **project aims** were to:

- Create learning programmes for local communities based on the museums' collections;
- Recruit and train volunteers to deliver the learning programmes;
- Create printed learning resources;
- Work with community groups, including reminiscence, adult learning, community programmes and youth work;
- Develop activity programmes for schools and youth groups at two of the museums (Wisbech & Fenland Museum, St. Neots' Museum)

The project grew out of a need to increase learning provision in these museums, as well as make it sustainable in the longer term, and a desire to build audiences. The original application to HLF stated that a learning audit of Wide Skies museums and a selection of independent Cambridgeshire museums revealed that although all the museums offered learning activities, they varied in 'programme delivery, audience reach and capacity.' Furthermore, that the museums were 'severely constrained by low staff numbers and a lack of experience in developing learning volunteers'. Key to the delivery of the project was the appointment of two part-time (0.6 FTE) Learning

Co-ordinators, one for each cluster. Essentially, they were tasked with recruiting and training volunteers to deliver the learning programmes, although there were several other tasks as well, including developing sustainable learning programmes for volunteers, schools and community groups, raising the profile of the museums' education offer to schools and developing workshops and outreach opportunities with adult audiences.

Since spring 2013, a 'project working group' has met, with membership consisting of the two lead museums, the Learning Coordinators and Museums Partnership Officer. Their purpose has been to keep people informed of project progress and to address any issues with cross- and intra-cluster communication.

In terms of **project outcomes** for the museums, volunteers and communities, these were articulated in the HLF application as follows:

- Increased access to collections
- Increased audience engagement with museum collections for all ages
- Increased community understanding of local heritage and of the benefits that museums can offer to local people (heritage has a greater significance for them personally, e.g. in offering a sense of place)
- Contribution to specific objectives in local and national agendas on community cohesion by participation of all ages, including 16-25 year olds
- Involving younger volunteers, "offering a measure of substantially for the museums"
- Volunteers have an increase in skills which "could be applied later in employment"
- Increased partnership between museums within the Districts
- Increased partnerships with external organisations including Cambridgeshire County Council Children and Young People Services, Community and Adults Services, Locality Youth Teams.
- Create a greater understanding of how partnerships between museums can potentially have the capability to deliver exciting and enjoyable learning activities that meet their agendas.

In addition, there were **targets** for the numbers of days that volunteers worked on the project and the number of people participating in learning activities, as follows:

Year 1	Year 2	Year 3
120 days @ £150/day = £18,000	156 days @ £150/day = £23,400	220 days @ £150/day = £33,000
25,236 participants across the two clusters		

It was also envisaged that the number of visits to the Wide Skies museums would increase from 52,076 to 77,312 in the twelve months after the project finished (i.e. 2014/15), that 20-50 volunteers would be expected to work on the project from start to finish and that 22-52 people would be expected to receive training through the project.

1.2 Purpose of the Wide Skies Evaluation

The author of this report was commissioned in June 2013, to evaluate the project up until the end of 2013. A comprehensive evaluation brief stated that this piece of work needed to encompass the following:

1. Assess the extent to which the project aims have been met.
2. Review the extent and quality of increased participation in learning about local heritage by existing and new audiences as a result of activities delivered by volunteers recruited and trained by the project.
3. Assess the effectiveness of the methods employed in the project to create sustainable learning provision, and to capture other outcomes, with a view to deciding whether and how best to extend the approach to other museums.
4. Compare learning provision at each of the nine museums before the project started and as it is now in the closing stages of the project, to include an estimation of the sustainability of provision at each museum.
5. Evaluate the training opportunities available to the Learning Co-ordinators and volunteers during the project.
6. Consider issues which arose during the project in respect of volunteer management, and the proportion of time spent by the Learning Co-ordinators in this and other aspects of the project.
7. Identify lessons learnt during the project relating to volunteer recruitment, induction, training and retention during the project.
8. Include a sustainable strategy for future development of learning provision with a volunteer workforce. It should produce a toolkit for museum managers and trustees to help them plan future delivery.

This evaluation report aims to address all of the above deliverables apart from point 8; the sustainable strategy or 'toolkit' it refers to is to be delivered separately.

1.3 Evaluation Methodology

Wide Skies involves a large number of stakeholders with varying interests in the project. Broadly, they can be grouped as follows:

1. The Learning Co-ordinators, playing a central role in the project, with responsibility for recruiting and training volunteers, assisting museums to

- develop appropriate learning programmes and opportunities with schools, families and adult audiences (as noted earlier).
2. Museum staff (both voluntary and paid) at the Wide Skies Museums, most of whom are in curatorial or education roles. They also include some Trustees.
 3. Volunteers who have been recruited before and through Wide Skies input but not themselves in a managerial or trustee role;
 4. Wider stakeholders working in the heritage sector, mainly in the fields of museum development, including funding bodies.
 5. Museum audiences who have experienced learning activities funded through Wide Skies;

It was therefore important to solicit the views of as many of these stakeholders as possible, as each potentially would have a different perspective on the project, both in terms of how it has been delivered, and where it may need to direct its legacy in the future. The outcomes of the early reminiscence strand of the project are not covered by this report as they were evaluated separately for the 'Key Memories' Project in 2011.

In total, 25 specific stakeholders were initially identified from groups one to four above, through discussion with members of the project working group, and it was agreed that all would be approached to provide feedback for the project evaluation. These stakeholders included members of the working group itself. Further volunteers were also identified over the summer period.

Key questions were formulated for each group, some of which were specific to certain stakeholders, and others that were common to all. Participants were contacted via e-mail and offered the opportunity to take part in a short interview, or to respond to a questionnaire. Subsequently, a total of 38 people have provided feedback (22 of whom are volunteers not involved with museum governance, i.e. as as a trustee¹). Fifteen people provided a response verbally (either through a semi-structured interview or a more informal conversation) with twenty three people giving their feedback via a questionnaire. A further five people who have been approached to participate have not responded to requests and one person has declined to take part.

Interviews were conducted by telephone (with the exception of two which were carried out in person) and followed a semi-structured format, whereby interview

¹ Fifteen of the volunteers surveyed had been working at the Wide Skies museums before the project started but their feedback was sought as many of them have received training through the project. In total, seven 'new' volunteers, recruited since the project started, provided detailed feedback.

topics were prepared in advance but areas of interest that arose during the interview were also explored with follow-up questions.

In keeping with good research practice, all participants were briefed before the interview commenced about the following:

- The purpose of the evaluation,
- How the principles of the Data Protection Act 1998 would be adhered to,
- Informed consent (participants were asked to sign a consent form),
- How their comments would be used anonymously so as to encourage openness and honesty.

The feedback from some stakeholders has been provided via written questionnaire, for example some volunteers and most museum audiences. With the latter stakeholder, comments were collected at certain activities delivered by Chatteris Museum, St Neots Museum and Wisbech & Fenland Museum.

In addition, the author attended two family events over the summer period, one in each of the lead museums. This provided an opportunity to meet museum staff and audiences and have an informal chat with these groups of people. Project documentation to support the evaluation has also been supplied by the participating museums, Learning Coordinators and Museum Partnership Officer and is referred to in the relevant sections below.

Overall, the feedback that has been collected gives a well-rounded picture of the successes and challenges with the Wide Skies Project. In fact, the stakeholders who have been surveyed so far have been very open and honest with their feedback. Some individuals have made very specific comments, to the point that they could be identified. In such cases, explicit information (e.g. reference to the museum the person works for) has been removed without detracting from the original message behind the comment.

2. Setting the context for the evaluation findings

Wide Skies is a large and somewhat complex project delivering different strands and working across very different museums. For this reason, and because of various challenges that the project has faced, it is important to provide a context to some of the points that are explored later in the discussion of stakeholder feedback.

2.1 The impact of staff changes

The Wide Skies project has witnessed a large number of changes in key staff since it began. It cannot be stressed enough that although these changes could not have been foreseen before the project began, they have had a significant impact on the delivery of the project.

In total, six 'key' staff have either moved on or been absent over a long period of time:

- The Cambridgeshire Museums Partnership Officer (MPO), who had been instrumental in developing the Wide Skies Project, securing its funding, and who subsequently managed the project, left in September 2012 and was not succeeded in post until spring 2013.
- The Museum Development Officer (MDO) for Cambridgeshire had also played a key role in the strategic development of this project. This post was lost during reorganisation at County Council level in September 2012.
- The position of 'Curator' at three different Wide Skies museums (St. Neots Museum, The Norris Museum and Whittlesey Museum) all saw changes in post. In some instances, the point at which the previous curator left and the current curator started did not coincide, or occurred in the Huntingdonshire cluster when the Learning Coordinator was on sick leave. This meant that information about Wide Skies could not be effectively cascaded to new staff in a timely fashion. Furthermore, the curator at St Neots Museum had played a critical role in the development of the project; the loss of this post-holder compromised communication with the Museum Development Officer about the impact of an early setback with the project in Huntingdonshire (see subsequent point).
- The Learning Coordinator for the Huntingdonshire cluster suffered sudden and serious ill health a few months into the start of the project and took long term sick leave lasting nearly twelve months. On return to work, after some months, further illness meant a second spell of extended sick leave. The absence of this post-holder, playing a pivotal role in the Huntingdonshire

cluster, has had a detrimental effect on the project. It has affected both clusters at times and has meant that initial plans for cross cluster working could not be realised. The line management for this post holder has also been described by one individual in the Huntingdonshire cluster as 'confused'. The Learning Coordinator's line manager (Curator at St. Neots Museum) left, and so too did the next person to fulfil this role in the interim (MPO).

Not only have there been a large number of staff changes in proportion to the overall number of staff, the amount of time between staff reappointments has sometimes been lengthy as noted above. Without key people in post, project delivery in some museums became disjointed. It has also made effective communication more difficult, particularly where new curatorial staff started in post when their Learning Coordinator was on sick leave and the Cambridgeshire Museums Partnership Officer was either not yet in post or newly in post.

For example, one person when first appointed, was not properly briefed about the project at that point, and so commented:

I didn't think to begin with that recruiting volunteers was part of it [the Wide Skies' brief].

Another person, in the same cluster said:

[When I first heard about Wide Skies] I think I was a little confused about the overall aims of the project....[it] seemed to be quite vague and diverse!

Communication was also an issue at the start of the project. Some participants report feeling confused about what the project was trying to do. Indeed, one person commented that:

When I was first heard about Wide Skies [the Cambridgeshire MDO and MPO] asked me what I wanted. My vision was totally different. Things like booking forms and paperwork are what I have difficulty with and I think need standardising. Also things like invoices and risk assessments for school visits. I saw the project as developing resources for volunteers to use. But of course it's nothing like this at all ... I thought the project was going to provide worksheets for schools, holiday activities and reminiscence ... My understanding was that whoever would do this [volunteer coordinator] job, would develop resources. So [this person] would provide the resources required for a small museum, such as a Victorian day, to do three activities in the morning and three activities in the afternoon. All these need teachers' notes, so I thought someone would come and do templates for them. Then

there would be a team of volunteers who you could approach for their availability [to deliver the sessions].

This individual reported that it was hard to find volunteers who could be very flexible and responsive to volunteer on a given day that a school wanted to visit. They therefore thought that prepared worksheets which could be used by a team of volunteers on the day a school visited would have worked well. The individual went on to concede that *“I’m not complaining because as it happens, it’s turned out fine”* but their comments do highlight that there was some confusion in this Wide Skies museum about what the project would deliver. This is also supported by other comments:

There’s also been issues with the strategic management of the project. [The MPO]’s leaving had an impact on the project. [A new person] has taken over now [who ...] is very good at project management but I don’t think I had a clear view of the strategic aims of the project at the start about recruitment and training of volunteers and the development of learning resources.

What I would see is that I felt everyone was signed up and that they understood what the project was about and that wasn’t necessarily the case on the ground.

[The previous MPO] came to see me to update me about the project but I still didn’t feel properly briefed. To be honest it felt like a slippery jelly, as soon as I was beginning to get hold of one end it felt like the other end was slipping away.

2.2 The Wide Skies Museums and their workforce

Having interviewed a large number of people from Wide Skies museums already, it is fair to say that the overriding impression is that all staff, whether paid or voluntary, have a strong sense of passion for and commitment to their museum. It is also clear that there are many different personalities and sometimes different priorities between museums. This has made it harder in some museums, particularly in the Huntingdonshire cluster although not exclusively so, to encourage particular museums to align activities they have funded through Wide Skies to the aims of the project. The following are comments made by different people to illustrate this point:

When I was new in post I had a conversation with [our Learning Coordinator] and explained to [them] that it might be difficult at [our museum] to fulfil some of the aims of Wide Skies [initially] because ... [there would soon be changes] in [the curatorial] post and [the current curator] wasn’t very interested in the sorts

of things it was trying to deliver. I didn't want to rock the boat. I wanted to develop my own relationship with volunteers, I didn't really need or want a lot of input in this area [or education]. Maybe this perhaps was not quite right but at the time it was very hard to see or understand from our [Learning Coordinator] how we would work together.

You need to be realistic about how much effort you can put into managing or coordinating volunteers. This takes time and would need more input and time if more volunteers were recruited. I tried to be clear with [our Learning Coordinator] from the start that I can engage with the project here and here [but perhaps not in other ways].

I would say that at the moment, working with [one individual and a particular museum], [this person] is passionate about [the museum] and wants to use Wide Skies to deliver certain things which is fine if it falls in the criteria. That has been a challenge as [this person] wants to do things the way they want to do them So it's been a case of ducking and diving to achieve some of our own aims but via a circuitous route... .. I've had to achieve ... [things] in different ways with different people because these individuals all very much have their own agendas.

Both Learning Coordinators have faced challenges in changing the mindset of certain individuals in museums when it came to welcoming new volunteers. In some museums, the existing paid staff and volunteers have been receptive to this project aim, in other museums this attitude has been less forthcoming because it has not fitted in with the way they have worked historically or because there is not capacity or willingness in the museum to manage large numbers of new volunteers.

This has meant that the Learning Coordinators have sometimes had a challenging time working within the constraints set by certain museums. This has certainly had an effect on the recruitment of volunteers to deliver learning activities in Huntingdonshire, and in part this may have been exacerbated here by the fact that the museums in this cluster had no formal working relationship before the project began, the cluster is mostly made up of museums run by paid staff where, traditionally, volunteering opportunities have followed a certain restricted pattern, and because their Learning Coordinator was absent over long periods. Introducing new ways of working takes time and requires that the person advocating these new methods builds up a good working relationship with the museums. Certainly the last quote given above suggests that a sensitive but persevering approach works well. For new ideas to take root, it would have been essential for the Learning Coordinator to maintain a high profile amongst his/her cluster of museums. Unfortunately, this has not happened in Huntingdonshire. It must be stressed that blame cannot be

apportioned on their Learning Coordinator because this individual took essential leave in response to a serious illness.

The Wide Skies museums themselves are also quite disparate. In Huntingdonshire, the cluster is made up of just one volunteer-run museum, the remaining three having paid staff although each with different governance structures in place (one being run by the Town Council, one by the County Council and one is an independent trust). Two of the museums also have a dedicated Education Officer. Although the museums do and have communicated with one another, they did not meet formally before Wide Skies, indeed they have only very recently begun to do so. One person pointed out that in the Huntingdonshire cluster, no one museum has an overarching role and another commented:

We are very different museums in our cluster, and because of this I thought the Learning Coordinator would have an impossible task.

A further person said:

With hindsight, I think a project meeting within the cluster involving all the museums would have been a good thing. With the other cluster, they were already meeting as the Fenland Five, and so were better organised than the museums in the Huntingdonshire cluster to work together towards Wide Skies when the project started.

Indeed, in the Fenland cluster, the five museums (consisting of one museum with paid staff, the remaining four being volunteer-run and none of the museums having a dedicated Education Officer), had met prior to Wide Skies as the 'Fenland Five'. Furthermore, the curator for Wisbech and Fenland Museum is expected to work across these Fenland museums as the post is funded by the District Council. Despite the fact that the museums already met as a group prior to Wide Skies, there are still some tensions between the Fenland museums:

"... sometimes they are really happy when they get together, but not all meet up, and sometimes there is tension between them. They are like the Fenlands anyway. People from March are a little bit funny about people from Wisbech. People from Wisbech find it a challenge to go to Cambridge for anything. Some people from Wisbech when asked to go on a training course at Chatteris had never been to Chatteris before. It's about crossing the river, it is about which town should be the lead one for the area, whether that's March or Wisbech, so there's all sorts of tension there."

Therefore, inherent differences both between and within the two clusters have made it harder to deliver a coherent project from the start. This suggests that management

of the project may have been demanding at times, certainly for the Learning Coordinators and for the new Museums Partnership Officer who started in 2013. During the months when there was no Museums Partnership Officer in post, and no Learning Coordinator in Huntingdonshire, it is a credit to the Learning Coordinator in Fenland and the museums in Huntingdonshire that they were able to continue with the project.

Importantly, therefore, the points above indicate that the Wide Skies museums cannot necessarily be evaluated against one another, because the point at which they started, the distance they have travelled and the level of support they have received along the way, are not all the same.

2.3 The origins of Wide Skies

Carrying on with the point above, another individual commented during an interview that *'when you read stuff about Wide Skies, [it was conceived by the MDO and previous MPO], but it's actually hard to deliver because it involves a wide range of organisations, places, volunteers which are all quite different'*. This begs the question, why was the project conceived in the first place?

In fact, Wide Skies has its origins in an earlier project which had planned to fund five part time Learning Officers, but this model was turned down by HLF at pre-application stage and was refined into what became the Wide Skies model (i.e. two volunteer coordinators and a focus on recruiting and training volunteers). One person suggested that the project was influenced to some extent by agendas from central government at that time (i.e. a strong focus on volunteering). There was a sense of disappointment that HLF would not fund a tried and tested model of working:

I think HLF needs to listen, that perhaps 'Plan A' [having five Learning Officers] was the best one, but they have a policy of never funding the same thing.

This is an important point and perhaps one that should be drawn to the attention of HLF. It also explains how Wide Skies was an ambitious project from the very beginning which aspired to realise outcomes that perhaps were very challenging to achieve across the number and range of museums involved.

2.4 Initial plans to evaluate the Wide Skies Project

It was intended that there would be an evaluation plan in place early on in the project. Indeed, mention is made of this in one of the supporting documents submitted as part of the HLF application. The Learning Coordinators would be 'free to choose their own methods of quantitative and qualitative record keeping'

(adhering to recognised frameworks for evaluation) and they would be 'issued with the necessary guidance at the start of the project'. The expectation was that the then Renaissance East of England Evaluation Officers would provide support in developing an evaluation plan. However, funding for these postholders was withdrawn around the same time Wide Skies started, although news that this was to occur was not available when the application for the project was being submitted to HLF. The Learning Coordinators were therefore largely left to devise their own means of recording information for monitoring and evaluation purposes:

I had been used to doing much more front-end, formative and summative evaluation in previous projects but with this one ... [I was told] to collect things as I went along and that ... I would know what to collect, that we would put things together at the end. I found this unusual. I assumed an external person would be appointed to manage this. I found this a bit loose for a three year project but as I was told this ... I assumed this was what had been agreed with HLF.

In short, no formal strategy across both clusters to collect certain information (such as project outcomes) was put in place which means that retrospectively capturing data such as this is difficult, and in some cases impossible (for example feedback from volunteers who were recruited through Wide Skies but have since moved on). This is an unfortunate situation but can be overcome to some extent. Some information has been collected which provides an insight into certain outcomes and efforts have been focussed in recent months on securing further data to address any gaps.

3. Aims and targets: an assessment of the project's outputs

3.1 Volunteers recruited through Wide Skies

A large number of volunteers have been recruited through the project. People generally volunteer for a variety of reasons and come from different backgrounds, and indeed this is true of volunteers at Wide Skies museums. Some people wish to volunteer for a discrete period of time (e.g. for work experience) or leave because of a change in circumstances (e.g. securing employment, to look after family or to attend college or University). It therefore would be unfair to dismiss the number of volunteers at Wide Skies museums who have been recruited through the project, and have delivered various activities, but have since left. Some indication of the numbers of volunteers recruited and retained is provided below. These figures relate to the period from April 2011 up to and including November 2013.

Fenland

- At least 80 people have made concerted enquiries into volunteering at the museums.
- More than 50 people have gone on to deliver activities at the museums, either working on discrete projects (see overleaf) or delivering longer term outcomes for the museum.
- At least 25 people who originally joined Fenland museums as a result of Wide Skies activities are still volunteering at these museums.

Huntingdonshire

- There have been fourteen volunteers recruited who have delivered various activities for the museums concerned (see overleaf).
- At least eight of these individuals are still volunteering in the museums.

One of the targets of the project was that 20-50 volunteers would work on delivering the Wide Skies project. In excess of 64 volunteers have been recruited across both clusters and this indicates that the upper range target has already been exceeded with another four more months for the project to run. It is encouraging that around half of the volunteers recruited have so far been retained by the museums and this should hopefully prove to be one of the legacies of the project, should the volunteers continue to be supported in their roles.

3.2 Volunteer Time

Table 1 summarises the number of days given by Wide Skies volunteers to museums in Fenland and Huntingdonshire.

Days worked (£ equivalent)	2011	2012	2013 (to 31st Oct)	TOTAL
Fenland	71.5 (£9,775)	220 (£31,738)	264.5 (£38,325)	556 (£79,838)
Huntingdonshire	64 (£8,150)	93.5 (£12,775)	158 (£21,150)	315.5 (£42,075)
TOTAL	135.5 (£17,925)	313.5 (£44,513)	422.5 (£59,475)	871.5 (£121,913)

Table 1: Number of days (and financial equivalent) given by Wide Skies volunteers to museums.

The Heritage Lottery Fund assigns three levels of financial equivalence to the number of days worked by volunteers depending on whether the tasks they are delivering are 'skilled' (£150), 'unskilled' (£50) or 'professional' (£350). A record of all volunteers' time was kept for the project and defined by the tasks being carried out. Using the figures available, Wide Skies volunteers in Fenland Museums have contributed the equivalent of £79,838 so far (to 31st October 2013) and in Huntingdonshire the same measure comes to £42,075. Therefore, in total across both clusters, the most recent figure amounts to £121,913 although this will rise as there are a further five months of volunteer time to account for.

Wide Skies volunteers have worked on many tasks for the museums. They have collectively and individually:

- Photographed, labelled, researched and re-packed museum collections
- Supported family events, school visits and reminiscence sessions
- Assisted with the development of volunteer handbooks
- Planned and developed the Post Office and Play Shop interactive, Wisbech & Fenland Museum (see Case Study)
- Become the Chair of the Friends of Wisbech & Fenland Museum, encouraged greater input from the Friends and produced a newsletter
- Worked on the Library Project (transferring the library card catalogue into digital format) at Wisbech & Fenland Museum
- Worked on the Cromwell Speed Project (to produce an exhibition on Speed's map of Huntingdon)
- Worked in Front of house
- Progressed to volunteer at other museums

- Used the experience to contribute towards accredited learning (e.g. an Open University degree, Duke of Edinburgh Award)
- Gone on to secure employment (e.g. in schools as a technician, teaching assistant, careers ambassador / working at Thorney library / working for a solicitors firm). In some cases people commented that their experience as a volunteer assisted with this process.

Furthermore, some of the people recruited to Wide Skies museums have been of foreign nationality. They have reported being pleased to improve their English through volunteering. There are also some examples of people who initially envisaged volunteering for a short and discrete period of time (e.g. for work experience or to support gaining other qualifications/awards) and have since returned to volunteer at the museums for their own enjoyment.

3.3. Training

The project has supported a large number of training sessions, including examples that have been delivered 'in-house' (i.e. by the Learning Coordinators) and through externally commissioned training providers. The list below demonstrates the variety of subject areas that training has covered. It does not include training that people in Wide Skies museums may have signed up for individually through SHARE.

- Reminiscence
- Arts Award Advisor
- Stepping Stones (museums supporting young people into work)
- Working with children
- Museum as Learning Spaces
- Oral History
- Collections Care
- Animation
- Delivering craft activities
- Photographing Objects
- Town Tours
- Conditions Reporting

Some of these training sessions involved attendance over several days (e.g. Arts Award Advisor, Stepping Stones, Collections Care, Oral History, Town Tours). Some people attended several different training courses.

The Arts Award training (for Discover & Explore and Bronze Awards) was in fact funded by a £5,000 grant made available to Cambridgeshire County Council via an Arts Council bridge organisation. This training was offered to Wide Skies museums

(as well as two other independent museums in Cambridgeshire). It is an example of how ‘learning staff’ in the network of museums supported by this project has been consolidated by additional targeted funding. It is anticipated that skills from the Arts Award qualifications will be put into practice in certain Wide Skies museums, therefore offering a potential legacy from the project for greater engagement with younger audiences.

In total, 57 people from Wide Skies museums have attended training on the subject areas listed above. There have been 111 instances of attendance by Wide Skies staff and volunteers on these courses.

It was envisaged that 22–52 people would receive training through the project. This target has therefore been exceeded.

3.4 Audience figures

It was anticipated that the overall number of visits to Wide Skies museums would increase during the lifetime of the project and in the twelve months thereafter, i.e. up until April 2015 (**Section 1.1**). It is not possible to comment on the anticipated audience figures at this stage. Data is available however for the number of people specifically participating in Wide Skies activities. The figures that have been compiled are given in **Table 2**.

	Schools / education²	Family activities & events aimed at young people	Reminiscence
Fenland	1,672 children 313 adults = 1,985 participants	445 children 254 adults 1,113 all ages = 1,812 participants	102 adults
Huntingdonshire	262 participants	3638 participants	342 adults
TOTAL	2247 participants	4476 participants	444 adults

Table 2: Number of people (audiences) participating in Wide Skies activities, Spring 2011 – end of October 2013.

² Original project plans included a budget to support education visits by offering transport bursaries to schools. However, the budget was not spent in this way as anticipated, and the project was not able to support school visits in Huntingdonshire museums in 2011 and 2013 due to the absence of their Learning Coordinator. This may account for a lower number of school audiences in Table 2 than originally envisaged.

3.5 Learning Programmes and Learning Resources

Two of the project aims were to:

- Create learning programmes for local communities based on the museums' collections;
- Create printed learning resources.

In fact, when assessing the breadth of resources developed and the range of opportunities for learning provided by the project, confining this solely to 'learning programmes for local communities' and 'printed learning resources', means that some valuable outputs are not being counted. The discussion below therefore considers the deliverables as articulated in the aims, as well as widening the definition to include other important outputs from the project.

Learning Programmes

The types of learning programmes which were based on the museums' collection, delivered through Wide Skies and which benefitted museum audiences include school visits, events, family activities and workshops, reminiscence sessions and museum clubs.

Up until November 1st 2013, a total of 118 such activities have been delivered by the museums through the project (64 in Fenland and 54 in Huntingdonshire).

At Wisbech & Fenland Museum, the curator has pointed out that as a result of Wide Skies, the Trustees of the museum now see events, activities and workshops as learning resources which are 'an essential part of the service delivery for an Accredited Museum'.

In addition, there have been other examples of learning which have benefitted audiences as well as paid staff and volunteers:

- Training (learning that provided benefits both directly to staff, volunteers, and indirectly to audiences, through enhanced activities programme) (**Sections 3.3 & 4.6**);
- Learning opportunities for audiences linked to targeted resources in museums or outreach sessions (see below, under 'other resources');
- Instances of staff and volunteers being mentored by both Learning Coordinators, including informal workshops, meetings, support or advice delivered by telephone or e-mail (see **Section 4.7**).

Printed learning resources

A wide range of printed learning resources have been developed during the project and encompass:

- Volunteer handbooks including role descriptions and registration forms for example. These have been used towards accreditation at Octavia Hill,

Wisbech & Fenland and Chatteris Museums, one is also in place now at St Neots Museum;

- Notes associated with developing or delivering events written by both Learning Coordinators (Ramsey Rural Museum for example now has a manual for delivering family activities);
- The Wide Skies newsletter, which shared information and learning amongst the participating museums;
- Training resources (for example handouts produced for the Photographing Objects training at The Norris Museum)
- An audience development grant at Octavia Hill which had significant input from the Fenland Learning Coordinator.
- A new national curriculum resource for Fenland Museums (see **Appendix 1**)
- A Wide Skies Fenland joint volunteer opportunities leaflet, produced in consultation with volunteers;
- Additional trails for visitors around Wisbech & Fenland and Ramsey Rural Museum;
- A draft template for a leaflet aimed at younger people, Wisbech & Fenland Museum.

In addition, a significant number of other resources available because of the project include:

- Learning resources directed at audiences:
 - Jigsaws at Octavia Hill,
 - Discovery chest in The Norris Museum,
 - Family discovery trolley to be launched soon at St Neots Museum,
 - Post Office and Play Shop interactive in Wisbech (an additional one to be in place at Chatteris Museum by the end of 2013, with plans for a third at Whittlesey Museum in 2014),
 - Children's corner, March Museum
 - Loan or reminiscence boxes at Wisbech & Fenland, Whittlesey, March, The Norris and St Neots Museums,
- A film by the youth group (Wimbo Kids) at March Museum;
- Volunteer recruitment banners at Fenland Museums;
- Digital photographic resources for family activities at the Cromwell Museum;
- The learning coordinators themselves were a resource available to museums (the value of this as mentioned by some of the museums is discussed in **Section 4.7**).



Chatteris Museum
Family activities



Reminiscence Sessions
delivered by:
St Neots Museum
Wisbech & Fenland Museum
Octavia Hill Birthplace House





Engaging younger audiences: Cambridge Regional College performing arts students (16-19 years old) visited St Neots Museum. They researched material to devise performances which took the form of promenade performances in the museum's galleries.

4. Stakeholder feedback: discussion of the project's outcomes

Thematic analysis of feedback gathered so far from stakeholders has suggested a number of discussion topics. The reader is directed to interpret the discussion below in the context of the points made in **Section 2**.

4.1 New volunteers and learning resources

Not all museums have managed to develop printed learning resources to the same extent, or recruit and train volunteers to deliver learning activities (**Section 3.5**). This is due to more than one reason.

In Huntingdonshire, the absence of the Learning Coordinator has had a real impact on both of these deliverables. As one person pointed out, 'if you look at the projected number of working days from the Learning Coordinator, and the actual number delivered, there is a significant disparity [between the two]. If there's no input, there's no output.' Another said that 'the project's not been able to progress' as a result of this staff absence. A third commented that 'we didn't know how to access the funding or what funding was available, even simple things like claiming volunteers' travel expenses to training days didn't happen'. This significantly hindered the delivery of Wide Skies until its third year. Indeed, the outcomes from some of the project activity in this cluster are not yet available (because work is still being delivered). Needless to say, volunteer recruitment has not been particularly successful in this cluster. An exception is at St. Neots Museum which held a volunteer recruitment event in June 2013 at which at least eight people signed up to join the museum and six have since started volunteering. A similar such event at the museum held more recently in October resulted in twelve people making enquiries about volunteering:

*There has been a slow but steady flow of people wanting to be volunteers
But this is partly down to advertising. I've used Wide Skies money for
advertising, without this we couldn't have done this in the WI or newspaper.
Having the money has been very positive and a big help.*

In addition, the Cromwell Museum reported now having in place a 'small number of capable and committed volunteers' recruited through their 'exhibition project' who, it is hoped, will form a core team as they are being trained through Wide Skies funding to deliver town walks to audiences including schools. At Ramsey Rural Museum, the project has had less impact because museum staff were unclear for a long time about how the project could support them (they had 'little idea as to what was on offer'). This is now changing through recent and regular meetings with the Volunteer Coordinator with plans for the museum to develop a children's trail and the necessary support to put in place child focussed activities (such as brass rubbing

and sensory exhibits). Although the project has not realised the recruitment of new volunteers at Ramsey, the museum has said it has benefitted from training delivered through Wide Skies (on oral history, collections care, photography and tour guides). There are plans at Ramsey to use Wide Skies funding to support organisational learning, this will be achieved by staff visiting other museum for 'behind the scenes tours' to find out about good practices elsewhere. The museum is also receptive to learning how to retain, motivate and support volunteers in the future, based on the lessons learnt from the project. They see this as valuable input 'for a smaller museum with little or no professional expertise'.

At the Norris Museum, any volunteers recruited have not been trained specifically to deliver learning sessions on behalf of the museum; this is still very much the remit of the paid Education Officer. Nevertheless, many paid staff and volunteers at the museum have attended training delivered through the project and this museum delivered a substantial number of the project's reminiscence sessions overall, therefore volunteers have had input into some learning programmes.

There is a sense that the three satellite museums in the Huntingdonshire cluster were less receptive at the start and during the project to recruiting and training volunteers to deliver learning activities and that this would have been challenging to achieve even had the Learning Coordinator remained in post throughout the project.

In addition to those already mentioned, some other learning resources are being developed in this cluster, although not by all museums (see **Section 3.5**). In the Cromwell Museum, with the exception of the digital photographic resource, no further resources have been developed so far (but there are plans to create a town walks guide as noted above). At the Norris Museum, there is a sense that learning resources have not been developed because of Wide Skies but because the Education Officer there was doing this already. The Learning Coordinator however has pointed out that recent training in photographing objects at the Norris Museum (to feed into an HLF application) is a learning resource that can have a lasting legacy for the museum.

In Fenland, volunteer recruitment has been more successful. For example, at Whittlesey Museum, with a new curator in post there has been a change in recruitment methods:

Because of Wide Skies funding advertising in the Peterborough Evening Telegraph and the town magazine with a circulation of 22,000 readers, we've had fifteen new volunteers apply in July 2013 alone. Before that, from September 2012 to June 2013 [i.e. a ten month period] we only had six or seven applications for volunteering.

At Wisbech & Fenland Museum, there have been concerted efforts to recruit new volunteers too, for example:

One of the big successes has been [in] recruiting [one individual who] ... came along with her four children to family events. I used these to talk to parents/carers, grandparents to ask what they thought about the activities and to offer the opportunity to get involved. [This volunteer] initially helped with preparation for schools/family events but then got involved in delivery. She now leads sessions and is taking part in two days of Arts Award training. Another recruit ... had been put off volunteering on account of the reception she had received [previously]. She tried many times and gave up. She is now one of the regular members of the education team. She is also doing the Arts Award training and I am aware that this is somewhat outside her comfort zone. We also have a few graduates who have supported summer holiday activities which is a good way to keep young people in touch.

There are now three or four new volunteers working at Wisbech & Fenland Museum to deliver learning activities, whereas this delivery was wholly reliant on one volunteer before Wide Skies started. This suggests that there is now sustainability for volunteer-led learning provision at the museum beyond the life of Wide Skies.

At Chatteris Museum, the Learning Coordinator for the cluster has recruited some new volunteers, two of whom one individual has said 'have proved so far very good additions to our team'. Furthermore, two of their long term volunteers have been encouraged to take on the educational role in the museum, offering training and support to run family learning activities themselves. There are also plans for a future volunteer recruitment event.

At March Museum, volunteer recruitment has been more challenging because there was some reluctance by certain individuals initially to welcome new people, particularly younger volunteers. However, there is a sense that this attitude is changing slowly as new volunteers have been recruited here:

One of the successful recruitments has been a History graduate who has assisted with young people's activities. For example he has set up a Young People's History Group at the Museum, has encouraged other young people to volunteer, took part in a sleep over with a local Youth Club and is now leading on making a film about Percy Bush Cox. He wrote a piece about this for the newsletter. He is also on the March Committee and takes the minutes. He has demonstrated resolve and determination in sticking with the Museum and we have talked about managing relationships with existing volunteers and promoting incremental change. He is also involved in Arts Award training.

Octavia Hill Birthplace House has not recruited new volunteers involved with learning delivery. Several learning resources (both printed and other types) have been developed in the Fenland cluster, usually in response to the particular needs of the museum concerned. These are listed given in **Section 3.5**.

Nevertheless, both Fenland and Huntingdonshire museums have faced challenges in recruiting volunteers that want to become involved in delivering learning activities. Many new volunteers prefer to fulfil other roles in these museums or do not have the necessary skills set or confidence to run education sessions:

We've got some good new volunteers. They are Front of House mainly. We also have two or three volunteers doing cataloguing and have had another one or two who were here short term over the holidays. I haven't had anyone who wants to deliver learning. Quite a few of our volunteers are retired teachers but they have had enough of working with children and want to develop other skills. One of our volunteers who has recently retired, loves working in family workshops but she and the others don't want to run them. So we plan the activities and they help run them.

A lot of volunteers that I have recruited have been appropriate for Front of House role. A lot of volunteers that have come through from [the museum] have wanted to get back into volunteering because they've had issues themselves to do with confidence, to do with physical, emotional or other sorts of problems who were not suitable to work with families, children or schools. Some of them have gained confidence through doing Front of House so there are successes with the volunteers but not necessarily related to the Wide Skies aims to deliver learning. I have got some people filtered through to deliver to schools and families but not as many as ideally I would like to do and certainly not people who could lead or initiate and therefore that is still a need in [the museum] for some leaders in education and families.

This is an interesting point, and suggests it has been harder to recruit volunteers to deliver learning sessions than perhaps originally thought. This is not just because some of the new volunteers do not necessarily have the right skills set, but because volunteers who are prepared to deliver learning resources must be very flexible, meeting the schedule of visits set by schools. It is difficult to find people who are willing or able to work round this constraint because it actually demands a lot of them. In the words of one volunteer who works with schools:

My hours a week vary considerably, I can go one month with one school visit then I can have three schools in one week. A lot of volunteers want to come in one day a week but that is no good for me as I need them to come in when I need them. I need someone who is very flexible.

What some volunteers recruited through Wide Skies had to say about their experiences of volunteering

What do you most enjoy about being a volunteer at the museum?

*Meeting people and having a different role other than being at home.
Meeting visitors and finding information about the local area.
Talking to different people, local and visitors.
I love helping with children's workshops and being busy.
The ability to see artefacts, to learn about them & how to preserve and display them.*

What do you least enjoy about being a volunteer at the museum?

*Do not like it when it is very quiet.
When it is quiet.
Very quiet sessions.
Sometimes organisation and communication can be difficult with so many things going on. The main people I work with are great though.
The lack of my time & lack of visitors on a Saturday.*

Which three words best describe your experience of volunteering?

*A rewarding experience
Every day different
Interesting, friendly, satisfying
Beneficial, interesting, rewarding.
Learning about Chatteris*

How have museum visitors benefitted from things you have been involved with at the museum?

*Ability to have questions answered. Linking in with others on shared interests.
Museum audiences will have benefitted from myself being there to explain things that otherwise would have been in a written script and hands on help with our craft activities.
By my approach to engaging with them about what they would like to see or what they would like to donate or learn about.*

These volunteers have also expressed various benefits and skills they have acquired by working at the museums (**Section 4.6**).



Volunteers in St Neots Museum developing learning activities with assistance from Jenny Cooper

There is no easy solution to this issue. However efforts are being made to address the shortage of 'learning focussed' volunteers in Fenland where the Learning Coordinator is trying a new approach:

I've recently put out an advert in the paper to say we want specific education, family volunteers who are 'people people'.

4.2 Increased capacity

Despite these challenges, there is evidence that more work is being delivered in museums as a result of recruiting new volunteers through Wide Skies:

By recruiting more volunteers and encouraging others to take over some of the responsibilities (i.e. activity sessions) [this] has lightened my personal workload, enabling me to concentrate on the curatorial aspects of running a museum. I also consider that at this time the museum would now continue functioning extremely well should I give up my volunteer role.

This comment also highlights how volunteers recruited through this project potentially may contribute to the sustainability of the museum in future (as noted in **Section 3.1** for Wisbech & Fenland Museum). Other museums have reported that having more volunteers in place has helped to some extent by improving capacity in the museum, although the amount of time needed to introduce, train and manage volunteers must not be underestimated. This can be very resource heavy and several people remarked on this point.

One person commented on how they have stepped back and are more likely to relinquish tasks to volunteers:

I would say Wide Skies has made me think about how to involve volunteers more. Sometimes I think that it would be quicker for me to do a job and then I say to myself, 'well no that's not what it's all about'. So I've learnt to let go a bit and get volunteers involved more. But it's about having the time to do that, as managing volunteers and making sure they are having a good experience does take time.

4.3 An attitudinal shift towards volunteers

This observation leads on to one of the most noticeable, and perhaps important, outcomes from the project which has been a change in attitudes within the museums towards volunteers. This includes how some paid staff think of volunteers in general and how long-standing volunteers think of new volunteers. There is a lot of evidence for this in the Fenland cluster:

As we had an older volunteer base, there has been prejudice against younger people. It might sound like this is a sweeping stereotype, but it really was the case. With people like [name removed] coming to volunteer, it's shown them that there are young people who are intelligent and interested in history and culture. This has been a good thing as it's changed perceptions in the museum.

This is the perspective of another person talking about the same situation:

[At one museum], the person recruited there is a graduate, he's set up a young people's History Club with the museum and is also working with a group to make a film. Another person there ... is on Front of House. They have been the few new people who have snuck in and survived! Slowly, slowly they are changing their perceptions about young people but it's incremental. It's very, very slow. It would be easy to have high expectations but what I would say is that attitudinal shift is one the achievements of the project.

At another museum, early on the MDO and MPO remarked to the Learning Coordinator how much the perception of the curator had changed towards volunteers:

[They said] 'you've made such a difference' ... They had never heard [the curator] talk that way about volunteers before, that was an achievement in itself, because of [the curator] working with me, that was their perception.

In fact, this was reinforced in a separate conversation with the curator in question:

My perspective [about volunteers] when I worked [in a former museum] was very different. I felt that if there was a job to be done, it should be paid to get done. Having come to this museum and to this part of the country, this perspective has changed and I am learning all the time. Museums here couldn't function without volunteers. March Museum for example is entirely volunteer run. There are things that you depend on here, such as Front of House, which, without volunteers you couldn't staff, and so would not be able to get on with the museum's core activities.

4.4 Recruiting different volunteers and retaining volunteers

Some museums have reported that they have been able to recruit volunteers of a different background and younger age which has helped to change the overall profile of volunteers in their museum:

It's helped bring volunteers into the museum, as well as different types of volunteers, including younger ones. The average age of volunteers in the museum before was 72!

We've been able to attract a younger demographic of volunteer as a result of Wide Skies. This is mainly because we had the financial backing to advertise in media which engages a more diverse range of people. So for example in July, of the fifteen or so volunteers who joined us, 90% were under 60 whereas the average age of volunteers at the museum before then was about 65.

In turn, one of the museums already cited in a quote above has reported that not only has the recruitment of younger volunteers helped to break down stereotypes held by older volunteers about younger people, it has also helped improve the general attitude in the museum towards *younger audiences*:

Because we've got different people in volunteering now, this has meant intergenerational work and understanding has been possible. This is a really important outcome [for the museum]. As we had an older volunteer base, there has been prejudice against younger people. It might sound like this is a sweeping stereotype, but it really was the case. With people like [named removed] coming to volunteer, it's shown them that there are young people who are intelligent and interested in history and culture. This has been a good thing as it's changed perceptions in the museum. The museum has allowed me to organise [events aimed at younger audiences that] I didn't believe could ever happen before.

The figures in **Section 3.1** suggest that during the life of the project an encouraging proportion of recruited volunteers have been retained (roughly half), and this also supports what some museums have reported anecdotally:

I think one of the main benefits is that it's helped us to retain people rather than having volunteers come and go.

At St. Neots Museum the observation has been that the series of family workshops, some run by the museum's Education Officer and some funded by Wide Skies, have encouraged repeat visits:

People come back because they are pretty confident that they will have a good time. I'm really pleased about this. They have definitely increased visitor numbers and the reputation of the museum. Also, some of the volunteers here will try something new, they will expand the range of things they get involved with.

4.5 Audience Feedback

St Neots Museum collects audience feedback at most events or activities and a selection has been provided for this evaluation. In addition responses to written surveys at an event at Whittlesey Museum and two events at Wisbech & Fenland Museum have been made available. This collection of feedback is not representative of all visitors but it does give a glimpse of the experiences of some audiences.

At St Neots Museum, the comments are all very positive. Several people who completed the survey indicated from their comments that they were new visitors to the museum. There were also several examples that suggested visitors at the event planned to return again for another visit because they had really enjoyed the activities on offer, or that their intention was to look round the museum after completing the activity that day. This provides evidence for the activities helping to build new audiences and improve visitor engagement with the collections.

Visitors quite often commented on the friendly staff at the museum and there was a strong sense that people had really enjoyed themselves. The author of this report attended the event 'Merlin and the Knights of the Round Table' and spoke to approximately five of the children there. They reported having had a great time, they were in high spirits when they left wearing the cloaks and crowns they had made. One mum said she came regularly and that her girls really enjoyed it, she knew she could expect to have a positive experience at these events. This ties in with the comment on the previous page made by the Huntingdonshire Learning Coordinator.

All the visitors who filled out surveys at Wisbech & Fenland Museum over the summer were regular visitors to the museum. Many stated specifically that they came for the activities on offer. The author of this report spoke to parents at one of their summer events and they all valued the activities highly, appreciated them being free/very inexpensive, and were pleased to have something constructive to do with the children in the summer holidays. They felt welcomed by the museum. One mum is there so regularly that if she isn't at an event then it is remarked upon (and she made this point herself).

Visitors to the 'Roman Whittlesey' event at the museum who completed a survey were broadly evenly split between new visitors and existing visitors. One person had come back having previously attended a special event day at the museum. Generally, visitors seemed particularly to appreciate the activities on offer that day (making shields and trying their hands at excavation).

A range of other comments made by visitors is given on subsequent pages alongside photographs from the events. They demonstrate evidence for increased engagement with museum collections by reporting that they:

- Have learnt new facts

- Used different skills
- Enjoyed themselves
- Plan to return for another activity or look around the museum as a result)

4.6 Skills Development and Training

Several participants in the project have reported that Wide Skies has facilitated skills development or contributed to an increase in knowledge or confidence levels. For example, one volunteer recruited through the project at Chatteris Museum said:

I've learnt a lot of new skills from volunteering at the museum particularly in terms of working with children and preparing resources for them. Before I had no experience of handling museum collections, I have learnt a lot already [about this]. I have been able to pursue my interest in archaeology in conjunction with learning about how what is found can be presented to the community.

Two others commented that:

I had no experience of doing anything in museums or with learning activities. Now I feel confident to do these things elsewhere in the future. General confidence is something I've gained from volunteering The experience is invaluable to be able to work somewhere and sometimes make contacts for future work or projects.

Through volunteering, I now have skills in researching local archives. I also have a better understanding of the curator's role.

Furthermore, some volunteers that were early recruits through Wide Skies have since moved on to other things but have been inspired to continue to work in the heritage or cultural sector:

One of my early recruits volunteered at Octavia Hill and the Museum in Wisbech. This was a first to have someone volunteering at both. [This volunteer] took part in three days of volunteer training organised by SHARE. He assisted with the development of the volunteer handbook. He moved away from the area on account of going to be near his family. He has however written to say that inspired by his volunteering at Wisbech he is going to volunteer at the Museum in Midhurst. Another volunteer who took part in the same training and whom I coached about job applications and interviews now has a job in a library.

Visitor comments from family events – St Neots Museum, Wisbech & Fenland Museum, Whittlesey Museum

It is important to bear in mind that the visitor comments reported here represent feedback from a small proportion of the overall events delivered; they therefore give an insight into some of the outcomes experienced by audiences but the impact overall is likely to have been further reaching.

Did you discover anything new today?

*Where St Neots came from.
The more you look, the more
you discover.*

At St Neots

*I found out about Romans, where they came from and their
shields.
Herbs and spices used for medicine.
Yes, about the Romans.
Surgical instruments and how they were used.
You could drive down High Causeway [in Whittlesey] once
[upon a time].*

At Whittlesey



Wild Animal Puppets workshop, St Neots Museum



Magic Castles and Scary Forests workshop, St Neots Museum

What did you enjoy most about today's event?



World War One Event, St Neots Museum

*The summer programme is excellent!
The staff were extremely helpful and enthusiastic – the children loved making a film of their plasticine figures.
The children were able to create their own models and create their own movie – all their own work [re. animation workshop].
Really enjoyed the animation – brilliant fun.
Friendly staff.*

At St Neots

*Looking for all the clues with the children.
A great way to explore the museum.
All of the disgusting medieval implements, fascinating soldiers tales and making some great lamps – all of us learnt something.
Washing the Roman finds and meeting the soldier.
Trying on the Roman armour, making swords and cleaning artefacts.
Very participative – good to have such enthusiastic helpers.
Access to activities that the children don't normally get.
It was epic (Thomas aged 7).*

*Making the [Roman] shield.
Digging in the sand, looking at the features [re. archaeological activity].
Loved dressing up as a Roman soldier.
Daggers, poison and trepanning.
All of it, especially digging.*

At Whittlesey

*Lots of variety and adult help and support. Great that children are making something for others to appreciate.
Craft session was fun. Trying on clothing was particularly good and helped gain interest in education for this time period.
Trollen work [weaving] was fun, my daughter really enjoyed it. The young lady showing her was very helpful.
My two girls really enjoy the activities on offer.
We enjoyed making things and dressing up.
I really enjoyed learning about the food the Saxons had.
I thought the activities were really good for the kids and a fun way of learning about history.*

At Wisbech & Fenland



Saxons Family Event, Wisbech & Fenland Museum



Whittlesey Museum
Family Days
Summer 2013



Wisbech & Fenland Museum
Wildlife Family Workshop
Summer 2013



Young visitors with one of the Wide Skies volunteers

Wisbech & Fenland Museum
Summer Drop in Workshop
50p per child
Wed 7 Aug 10.30 - 2.30

Britain's Wildlife in Danger

Discover which animals are in danger in our country
Make a paper plate hedgehog
Make a barn owl mask and help dissect a barn owl pellet
Make a red squirrel and a small tortoiseshell butterfly
Plus colouring etc

Children under 10 must be accompanied by a responsible adult
Museum Square, Wisbech, Cambs PE13 1BB
01954 282077
info@wisbechmuseum.org.uk
www.wisbechmuseum.org.uk



Many people have cited a wide variety of training offered through the project (e.g. Reminiscence, Arts Award, Volunteer Development workshops amongst others). The outcomes from the training programme are one of the most noticeable successes from the project. Participants have mentioned a wide range of benefits relating to new skills and the delivery of improved services to museum audiences:

The funding has paid for volunteer training in reminiscence and the delivery of these activities which had been a new and successful departure for [our museum], making us more visible out in the community.

Three different volunteers said:

[I now plan to use these new skills by] getting more involved in future projects or developments.

I've recently trained to be an Arts Award advisor and these new skills easily transfer to this.

I am looking for opportunities to present museum services to the wider community, at the museum and at public events & venues.

Collections Care training for individuals from The Norris Museum, St. Neots Museum and Ramsey Rural Museum, which was provided by Wide Skies funding, is being put to good use. As explained by one individual at The Norris Museum it is developing these skills that may help the museum secure funding for a future project:

Wide Skies has also now helped us to train volunteers in object handling and collections care, a very important area for any museum, and which will help us move forward with confidence in our HLF bid which will involve packing up the entire museum, removal and storage and eventually total redisplay which volunteers can then be involved in.

Further training for staff on the subject of Guided Walks is also being delivered. At least twelve volunteers and one member of paid staff from the Huntingdonshire cluster are signed up for this course. At the Cromwell Museum, it is hoped that staff can deliver a town trail to schools visitors as a result. At The Norris Museum, this training will aid the development of their activity and learning programme for adults, meaning that volunteers can deliver guided tours of their historic town and give talks at the museum.

At St. Neots Museum, building on the digital skills of the Learning Coordinator, several volunteers have been trained in delivering animation at family events. It is hoped that this will form the basis of an Arts Award Advisor qualification.

Four volunteers in the Fenland cluster have received Arts Award training and other courses or mentoring that Fenland Museums have benefitted from covered reminiscence work, working with children, 'Museums as Learning Spaces', 'Stepping Stones' (museums supporting young people into work) (see **Section 3.3**).

4.7 Wide Skies funding and resources

It comes as no surprise that the Wide Skies museums have very much welcomed the funding and the resources provided by the project. This has been seen as opening up lots of new opportunities and the message from museums is that it has been exciting and motivational. In Huntingdonshire, it is fair to say that these resources have not been fully realised until 2013 but plans are well underway to make the most of the funding before the project ends. Many positive comments were received about this aspect of the project, a selection is given below.

The money is brilliant. We can do loads now that we couldn't do before. For example, our yearly budget before [Wide Skies] for education was £500, for exhibitions and display was £500 and for miscellaneous expenses was £200. Now we can buy materials for family activities, and we can pay for people to come into the museum, we couldn't have done this without Wide Skies. For example over half term I used Wide Skies money to pay for [a re-enactor] to come along. [As a result] there were more people in the museum than we've ever had before, and everyone loved him.

Through Wide Skies we've had assistance with children's work, the family area has been funded through Wide Skies, as have the children's activities. The film I've done with the youth group, I don't think we could have done this without Wide Skies.

Wide Skies has also paid for the reminiscence boxes. It has helped us see how museums can contribute to helping people in this way, people with dementia.

To be honest, the actual idea of event days came about through Wide Skies. There was funding available for resources and it snowballed from there.

[Overall] I think that the Wide Skies project has brought opportunities in funding that otherwise would not have been available to the museums involved. At the first cluster-wide meeting earlier this year, people could see that Wide Skies was giving them the opportunity of having a pot of money to apply for.

Having the resources, both the money and [the Learning Coordinator]'s expertise, have been important The museum is a lot further ahead now

than when I took over. I know this is because we have been able to utilise the resources on offer from Wide Skies.

This last comment is from a Fenland museum. All museums in this cluster have spoken very highly of their Learning Coordinator as someone who has been an excellent mentor, who has introduced new ideas and who they have found to be very motivational. More than one museum remarked on how they appreciated the flexible approach of the Learning Coordinator, both in terms of providing them with tailor-made support and in terms of being prepared to travel to the museums themselves to work with staff or to get the necessary resources to them:

[The volunteer open day in] July simply wouldn't have happened without the funding. [The Learning Coordinator] helped with organising this. As the only professionally trained member of staff in the museum I have no one to run ideas past like [the Learning Coordinator]. She came up with some ideas that I hadn't thought of for the events. They were brilliant. Also, [she]'s quite local. She organised a banner about volunteering to go in the entrance of the museum which is really eye catching and brightens up the space. It's really useful. I had no time to collect it from Cambridge but in the end only had to travel across to Wisbech for it. So having her on the doorstep has been very helpful.

The support of our Learning Coordinator has been very tactful. She does things and assists us. That's been a good thing about Wide Skies, the mentoring that's been done here, the Learning Coordinator has worked hard to this. She has been on our doorstep [and this has been good] as we cannot go anywhere, it has to come to us, directly on site.

In the Fenland cluster, it comes across strongly that museums have been able to make the most of the opportunities provided through Wide Skies funding because of the commitment of their Learning Officer to work with each of the museums on an individual level to realise outputs and outcomes that will have the most benefit to them. However, the Learning Coordinator, through Wide Skies, has also facilitated the sharing of information which has had benefits across the cluster as a whole:

I thought [Wide Skies] was a good project to have. Quite often small museums can end up feeling marginalised. Anything to link these small museums is a good thing. [Wide Skies is] really useful in terms of providing a network. It links up lots of different museums ... [We] are part of the 'Fenland Five' group of museums. [Our Learning Coordinator] is able to communicate what is happening beyond the Fenland Five.

External support such as Wide Skies has brought new thinking into the museum. Someone not directly involved but with professional skills and a wider knowledge of “what’s available out there” has proved invaluable to us.

Indeed, at Wisbech & Fenland Museum, where a Post Office shop interactive has been developed by volunteers through the Wide Skies project (see Case Study), the concept has proved a success with visitors and has been shared with Chatteris Museum and Whittlesey Museum which are hoping to replicate a smaller version of it. The Learning Coordinator commented how ‘this an example of one volunteer developed activity which has transferred from one museum to another. It is also an outcome of the Learning Spaces training.’

4.8 Lessons Learnt

Fenland museums have also reported more learning points, both as individuals and as organisations. For example, a trustee of one museum commented at the end of an interview ‘I’d just like to say that I have learnt so much along the way. It’s truly been a positive experience and I feel so empowered by it all.’ Another individual articulated that:

I understand volunteers in a much deeper way and I understand that every volunteer has their own motivation for being a volunteer. Each volunteer is altruistic but still has some self-need there. You need to fulfil that self-need or the person will stop volunteering.

Others have reported a change in their or others’ attitudes towards volunteers (see **Section 3.3**). At an organisational level, Wisbech & Fenland Museum has adopted new ways of managing volunteers, both in terms of fielding enquiries more effectively and in providing a more holistic offer to volunteers through opportunities for greater social interaction:

Getting that socialising element in place has been another benefit. One of the main problems before was the volunteers would come in on different days and not necessarily see one another. We’ve tried to do a volunteer forum, we’ve been a little tardy in holding another, but the social element [to volunteering] is important Doing this [sort of thing] means that volunteers become more self-motivated, they don’t feel isolated and can see the bigger picture. I think it’s important for people to see the context of what they are doing.

At this museum, an interesting project to develop family audience and which has involved several different volunteers has had some positive outcomes for both the museum and visitors – this is covered in the Case Study below.

Another example is provided by March Museum, where the process of developing reminiscence boxes for people with dementia, and involving representatives who work with these audiences, has been a steep learning curve. The volunteer there who put a lot of effort into this task was disappointed by the poor response to a meeting about this area of work but one of the trustees commented 'I felt it was not a problem. So I think that managing expectations is important. People these days are so busy and don't always have the time for things like this. But the upshot of it is that people know about the reminiscence boxes now.'

More than one museum has said how Wide Skies has brought to their attention the fact that volunteer recruitment needs to be more 'formalised' and akin to the recruitment used for a paid post, although this should be achieved in a friendly and less official manner. One curator reported specifically how Wide Skies has helped to focus their mind on the importance of volunteer induction and ongoing support.

In Fenland, the Learning Coordinator and the lead museum have remarked on how resource heavy it has been for the Learning Coordinator both to recruit, train and manage volunteers and to assist with developing the learning programme. It is now recognised that the two roles would work best if they were distinct from one another and delivered by two different people. Having to coordinate volunteers has meant less time could be spent on learning focussed activities.

4.9 Distance travelled and the project's legacy

Despite the challenges with the project outlined in Section 2, including some of the evaluation being carried out retrospectively, it is clear that several of the Wide Skies museums have travelled a considerable distance from where they were before the project began. The following summary highlights some of the changes that have occurred and has been compiled by considering information in a 'baseline evaluation' document prepared at the start of the project and comparing this to the data that has been gathered through this evaluation.

Wisbech & Fenland Museum

- Previously all education sessions were run by one volunteer. There are now several new volunteers involved with developing and delivering leaning activities.
- There are now more frequent family drop-in events.
- A family trail has been created. A popular Post Office and shop interactive has been installed.
- Loan / reminiscence boxes have been developed and used.
- New procedures for recruitment, interviewing and induction of volunteers are in place, including a Volunteer Handbook.
- Reception staff are more welcoming to visitors.

- Support for the management of volunteers has been provided through the Learning Coordinator role (with the project ending the sustainability of this will need to be reviewed).

March Museum

- Younger audiences are now viewed more positively by Trustees and museum staff.
- Work with younger audiences has been achieved with a new volunteer (this person has since moved on to employment).
- Loan / reminiscence boxes have been developed and used.
- Family learning spaces in museum have been introduced.
- Wimbo Kids (youth group) film has been produced.

Whittlesey Museum

- Many new (and younger) volunteers have been recruited.
- Reminiscence and loan boxes have been improved/developed.
- There is a new curator in post whose priority is to build family audiences.
- Some successful family activities have been delivered over the summer of 2013, with input from new volunteers.
- There are plans to recreate the successful Post Office and Shop interactive at Wisbech & Fenland Museum.

Chatteris Museum

- New volunteers have been recruited. Two long term volunteers have taken on an educational role in the museum which has freed up some of the curator's time. This had been a challenge previously.
- Wide Skies has supported family learning activities at the museum.
- There are plans to recreate the successful Post Office and Shop interactive at Wisbech & Fenland Museum.
- Volunteer handbook has been produced.
- Wide Skies has "brought new thinking into the museum".

Octavia Hill Birthplace House

- Family activities (including new trails and replicas of Octavia Hill's toys, therefore linked to the museum's unique collections)
- Family areas in each gallery (planned)
- Volunteer handbook has been produced.
- Audience Development grant
- "The best part about Wide Skies is that its delivering the things we've always wanted to do."

St Neots Museum

- More family activities are being held.
- Many new volunteers have been recruited.
- Loan / reminiscence boxes have been developed and used.
- Volunteer handbook has been created.
- Family discovery trolley to support family learning to be launched soon.
- Two day Medieval Festival held – this was only made possible with Wide Skies funding – and there are plans to repeat this in 2014.

The Norris Museum

- More volunteers have been recruited.
- Discovery chest for families.
- Loan / reminiscence boxes have been developed and used.
- Photographing objects training will feed into future learning activities and potential HLF funding.

The Cromwell Museum

- There are now volunteers working at the museum.
- A digital photographic resource has been developed.

Ramsey Rural Museum

- Family activities manual has been created.
- Museum trails have been developed.

In addition to the above points, and the outcomes mentioned earlier in this Section, there are two other important legacies from the Wide Skies project:

1. A national curriculum resource for Fenland Museums (**Appendix 1**). This is a new resource, developed through Wide Skies, to be available to museums in February 2014. Its purpose is to equip museums with the necessary information about the new national curriculum and how they can best support formal education in this context.
2. Input from the Fenland Learning Coordinator into the Fenland Arts Development Network. Its vision is that young people in Fenland aspire, achieve and take the lead, in and through arts and culture so that in 10 years, there will be an effective body of home-grown cultural leaders living and working in Fenland. So far the network has:
 - a. Created an outcomes framework as a means of understanding how activities on offer contribute to a set of shared objectives which are connected to their vision.
 - b. Negotiated seed funding for the network to allow for the right membership and to buy in skilled time to do some of the thinking.

- c. Enabled a project funded by Youth Music to happen in Thomas Clarkson Academy.
- d. Had a young people's focus group to help test their thoughts and specifically think about communicating to young people.
- e. Applied for and achieved £10,000 from Cambridgeshire Culture Negotiated in kind support from Fenland District Council to host a three day a week Coordinator role.

Case Study: The Post Office Interactive at Wisbech & Fenland Museum

During the summer of 2013, Wisbech & Fenland Museum have trialled a series of activities linked to a new interactive designed by two volunteers recruited through the Wide Skies Project. Here is a flavour of how this process has worked and what audiences have had to say about it.

There were two volunteers, one a student of Art & Design, who came up with a proposal for the interactive, the other volunteer was a part time teacher, who came up with ideas for the activities. So this was really nice, two different kinds of volunteers working together to combine their different talents. Since then they have both moved on, the student to get a job and the teacher has gone into full time teaching. But other volunteers have taken up the idea.

It's an idea that has grown, developed by different volunteers.

The Learning Coordinator

It is important for the Friends and Trustees to know what about the valuable contribution the volunteers make to the Museum and wider community.



Children playing with the Post Office Shop

The new volunteers who have taken up this concept have developed ideas around how to use it in the museum for family activities. Inspired by a visit to the Museum of Cambridge where there was a shopping and weighing activity and as a result of talking to visitors, the volunteers decided to host two family focussed events at which visitors could take part in making items to 'sell' in the Post Office. At the first event visitors made money, stamps, parcels, packets and sweets. At the subsequent event they made fruit and vegetables.

Volunteers involved in developing the interactive have also taken part in a 'Friends of Museum' evening. The Learning Coordinator spoke about Wide Skies and the volunteers spoke about the project. One of the volunteers also talked about her role.



Left: money and stamps made by children during a family activity for the interactive. At the second event, other children were playing with these items.



Right: A museum volunteer works with children to make cards for the Post Office

Below: visitors help to make fruit and vegetables for the shop



I suppose I've had a few Eureka moments [during the life of the project]. One involved the post office/ shop idea that two volunteers initially had who have since left. They came up with the idea, they designed it and worked with different constraints, both practical and those related to the Trustees of the museum, who were not very receptive to having visits from children or interactives in place – their attitude may have changed a bit since then. So, they worked with these constraints and organised [someone] to make their design.

The other interesting thing is that these volunteers are not the ones who are now using it, they've created it, handed it over to other volunteers to deliver [activities using] it and these volunteers have welcomed it and accepted it and they are willing to take it forward. This is a real breakthrough. It potentially opens the door for other activities; they don't have to be self-generated by certain volunteers. Communication in this process is really important though, volunteers have to feel as if they have been involved in the process as a stakeholder, even if they haven't designed something but are going to deliver an activity round it. This is time consuming.

The Curator

Children playing with the Post Office interactive in the museum



What family audiences had to say about the Post Office and associated activities

Think it's a good idea.

Ely Museum has one and it works there.

Me and daughter really enjoyed the activity session, looking back at all the different cards was interesting, making the fruit and veg.

Looks like a good idea if the children play with it.

Good idea, needs more sweets.

Great for kids. Grace enjoys crafts and learning about history – great way to introduce children to museums.

Great idea, needs a till. Lots of variety and adult help and support. Great that the children are making something for others to appreciate.

Good activities. We then had time looking at related museum pieces.

This is superb, we will be coming again.

Lots of variety and adult help and support. Great that the children are making something for others to appreciate.

My daughter and I had great fun making cards and vegetables for the Museum play shop.

Children enjoyed looking at it and went to make vegetables.

Amber says it was great and went to make vegetables for it.

My grand daughter quickly became engrossed in the activities offered. The lady manning the "Post Office" upstairs was particularly welcoming and encouraging.

Like the idea of it and being able to make things for it today.

5. Conclusions

Context to the evaluation

1. A total of 38 people have provided feedback including the Learning Coordinators, Museum staff, volunteers and wider stakeholders. Some family audiences at Wide Skies activities were also surveyed.
2. The Wide Skies museums saw a significant number of staff changes which had an impact on the project; this led to poor communication at times which meant that some key stakeholders were not fully briefed about the project. The long term absence of the Learning Coordinator in Huntingdonshire meant that the project met difficulties in delivery in this cluster until 2013.
3. Wide Skies was an ambitious project from the start because it aimed to work across museums that were very different to one another.
4. Any conclusions below that refer to specific Wide Skies museums should not result in comparisons being drawn across museums out of context – in fact, the museums cannot be easily evaluated against one another, because the point at which they started, the distance they have travelled and the level of support they have received along the way, are not all the same.
5. No formal evaluation plan was put in place at the start of the project. This has made it challenging to assess all the outcomes from the project.

Project Aims

6. The extent to which the project's aims have been met varies by cluster, indeed even at museum level within one of the clusters. In the Fenland museums, all the project aims have been met (to some extent). Some of the project aims have been met in Huntingdonshire. Greater detail is given in subsequent points.

Project Outputs

7. From April 2011 up to and including November 2013, more than 50 new volunteers have been involved with delivering activities at the museums in Fenland. At least 25 people who originally joined these museums as a result of Wide Skies activities are still volunteering at these museums. In Huntingdonshire, there have been fourteen volunteers recruited who have delivered various activities for the museums concerned. At least eight of these individuals are still volunteering in the museums.

8. One of the targets of the project was that 20-50 volunteers would work on delivering the Wide Skies project. In excess of 64 volunteers have been recruited across both clusters and this indicates that the upper range target has already been exceeded with another four more months for the project to run.
9. In both clusters some of the 'new' volunteers have been involved with delivery of learning programmes although the majority have carried out other tasks on the collections or in front-of-house roles.
10. A total of 362.5 days have been delivered on Wide Skies activities by volunteers since the project began (up to and including 31st October 2013). This equates to a financial value of £113,405, although this will rise as there are a further five months of volunteer time to account for.
11. A substantial output from the project is the number of training sessions held (covering a breadth of topics), the number of people who have attended training and the number of attendances at training. In total 57 people have attended training, and there have been 111 attendances at training (up to and including 31st October 2013). These figures indicate that the project targets for training have already been exceeded.
12. It was anticipated that the overall number of visits to Wide Skies museums would increase during the lifetime of the project and in the twelve months thereafter, i.e. up until April 2015. It is not possible to comment on the anticipated audience figures at this stage. Data is available however for the number of people specifically participating in Wide Skies activities (up to and including the 31st October 2013). Across the two clusters the number of participants (or more specifically the number of instances of participation) comes to 8,141.
13. Learning programmes developed and delivered with support from the project include school visits, events, family activities and workshops, reminiscence sessions and museum clubs. This has involved working with schools and community groups. Up until November 1st 2013, a total of 118 such activities have been delivered by the Wide Skies museums (64 in Fenland and 54 in Huntingdonshire).
14. Other learning that the project has facilitated include training, learning opportunities for audiences linked to targeted resources in museums or outreach sessions and instances of staff and volunteers being mentored by both Learning Coordinators.

15. A wide range of printed learning resources have been developed during the project. A significant number of other resources have also been delivered by the project.

Project Outcomes

16. The museums involved in the project are very varied, both between and within clusters (in terms of their collections, governance and source of funding). Their priorities have not always been the same. This has made it more challenging to deliver a large project with a common set of aims and outcomes across nine museums and two clusters.
17. The project has had less of an impact in Huntingdonshire: Ramsey Rural Museum and the Cromwell Museum have not recruited volunteers to deliver learning activities; St Neots Museum and The Norris Museum have recruited new volunteers and these volunteers have assisted with the delivery of learning activities, but they have not led these activities themselves. In part this is because the cluster's Learning Coordinator was absent for a long period of time due to extended sick leave (and there were other key staff absences too due to changes in post holders), but also because some museums in this cluster were not fully signed up to the aims of the project at the outset. Also these museums were at a disadvantage because they were not used to working with one another in the same way as the 'Fenland Five' museums. There were no Huntingdonshire cluster meetings until 2013.
18. The creation of learning resources has been more successful during the life of the project in Fenland. In Huntingdonshire, learning resources directly linked to the project have only been developed more recently, with the exception of St Neots Museum.
19. New volunteers who have become involved with delivering learning programmes have been recruited at the following museums: Chatteris, March, St Neots, The Norris (to some extent), Whittlesey, Wisbech & Fenland. The sustainability of volunteers continuing to be involved with the delivery of learning activities is likely to be greatest at Wisbech & Fenland Museum and St Neots and to a lesser extent at Chatteris, March and Whittlesey. At the latter three museums, lower numbers of volunteers have been recruited and/or some have only very recently been recruited so it is too early to assess the likely longevity of their time with the museum.
20. There is evidence that the newly recruited volunteers have brought about increased capacity at the museums concerned and that some museums are

giving volunteers greater responsibility to manage their own work. This also links to other outcomes, such as a positive attitudinal shift towards new volunteers, the welcoming of younger volunteers and improved retention of volunteers

21. The audience feedback collected at a sample of family events has been positive. It has indicated that these visitors value the activities on offer, some are repeat visitors because of these activities (and those visitors who were 'new' planned to return again) and that they have experienced benefits because of the activities, such as learning new facts, using different skills, enjoyment and greater engagement with the museum collections.
22. Several participants in the project have reported that Wide Skies has facilitated skills development or contributed to an increase in knowledge or confidence levels.
23. The outcomes from the training programme are one of the most noticeable successes from the project. Participants have mentioned a wide range of benefits relating to new skills and the delivery of improved services to museum audiences. This is likely to be one of the lasting legacies of the project.
24. Wide Skies museums have very much welcomed the funding and the resources provided by the project. This has been seen as opening up lots of new opportunities and the message from museums is that it has been exciting and motivational.
25. In the Fenland cluster, it comes across strongly that museums have been able to make the most of the opportunities provided through Wide Skies funding because of the commitment of their Learning Officer to work with each of the museums on an individual level.
26. Learning points for the museums to emerge from the project include: a greater understanding of volunteers, the development of new ways of managing volunteers, experience in developing new learning programmes and the realisation that any future learning coordinator / volunteer coordinator role should be delivered by different people.
27. Although the project has not always delivered outcomes in the ways intended, there have been a large number of positive changes to come from Wide Skies funding and the Volunteer Coordinator support. This 'distance travelled' arises from the delivery of family focused activities, reminiscence, a larger number of

volunteers being recruited at most of the museums, changes in attitudes towards volunteers and in some cases, younger audiences. Other legacies from the project include a national curriculum resource for Fenland Museums and input into the Fenland Arts Development Network which hopefully, in time, should realise positive outcomes for young people in the area.

There were some specific outcomes articulated in the project plans. These are listed in below with evidence that most have been achieved.

Desired outcome	Evidence that this has been achieved
Increased access to collections	The number of activities delivered and numbers of audiences benefitting from these.
Increased audience engagement with museum collections for all ages	Events aimed at families, young people (e.g. youth clubs), older audiences (reminiscence). Positive feedback from family events.
Increased community understanding of local heritage and of the benefits that museums can offer to local people (heritage has a greater significance for them personally, e.g. in offering a sense of place)	Evidence from audience feedback.
Contribution to specific objectives in local and national agendas on community cohesion by participation of all ages	Not known. This would very difficult to track / measure or attribute as an outcome to have directly resulted from Wide Skies.
Involving younger volunteers	Anecdotally museums have reported that the average age of their volunteer base is now lower.
Volunteers have an increase in skills which “could be applied later in employment”	Feedback from volunteers; range and number of courses attended by volunteers.
Increased partnership between museums within the Districts	In Fenland this was already being achieved to some extent prior to the project by the Fenland Five group, although Wide Skies has enhanced this relationship. In Huntingdonshire, increased partnership between the museums is starting to be realised.
Increased partnerships with external organisations including Cambridgeshire County Council Children and Young People Services, Community and Adults Services, Locality Youth Teams.	This is being achieved in Fenland for example with the Fenland Arts Development Network.
Create a greater understanding of how partnerships between museums can potentially have the capability to deliver exciting and enjoyable learning activities that meet their agendas.	Not necessarily articulated by the museums involved at this stage but it is possibly a longer term impact of the project.

6. Recommendations

The recommendations below have been formulated based on the lessons learnt to emerge from the Wide Skies project. They are grouped broadly according to recommendations relating to general management of projects involving several museums and those that relate to the management of volunteers in museums.

In future, for a similar 'cluster' project (where museums are working in partnership to deliver common outcomes):

1. All museums should to be signed up from the start, to all of the aims of the 'project'. All the people involved need to be very clear about what their commitment will entail and what the project targets are. Plans should include how to brief staff / volunteers effectively, and an understanding of how to progress the project should there be changes in key staff. This could be covered within a simple project manual.
2. An initial set-up meeting is vital so that all museums involved can agree how they will contribute to meeting the project's overall aims. Additional, regular, cluster meetings would be advisable (e.g. quarterly).
3. The project should be carefully structured and proactively (rather than reactively) managed – a series of discrete, smaller projects (one or two per museum) would have two benefits – (1) each museum can contribute to the overall project aims by working to its own strengths / addressing its own audience development needs; (2) if one museum were to experience difficulties (e.g. through staff absence), this would have less of an impact on the overall cluster project.
4. An evaluation plan should be formulated before or very early on in the project which would set out:
 - a. Project milestones (as well as when and how often they would be reviewed to monitor progress);
 - b. Project outcomes and how these would be evidenced;
 - c. Clear and consistent definitions of what outputs are to be counted and how across the whole project;
 - d. The responsibilities of certain stakeholders to assist in the collection of this information.

In order to achieve or sustain best practices in volunteer recruitment, induction, training and management, the following points should be carefully considered:

5. It is important to have in place the infrastructure or policies before embarking on a significant volunteer 'recruitment drive' – e.g. volunteer handbooks, an identified person or number of people to coordinate the volunteers. Having in place a volunteer coordinator is vital.

6. Have in place a clear plan for the volunteer base that is needed and recruit appropriately. Match volunteer skills to the volunteer roles that are needed, as one individual commented: *“Don’t be afraid of managing volunteers as you would paid staff.”* It is acknowledged that the dynamics between any given museum and its volunteers is different to that between the same museum and its paid staff – volunteers can have less of a stake in their position which means they will more readily leave if they are unhappy – however, this point is about taking the time to make an ‘informal contract’ or agreement with volunteers so that both they and the museum are clear about each other’s expectations (see point 9 below).
7. Be prepared to invest a lot of time in managing volunteers – this applies not only to the volunteer coordinator but other members of staff too. New volunteers can need a lot of support, especially when they first start out. Not all new volunteers may have come from recent paid employment, they may be unused to working in a museum environment, and they may need additional time to build their confidence or self- esteem before feeling ready to work on more responsible tasks.
8. The volunteer coordinator and education coordinator roles should be delivered by different people as the two roles should not be confused.
9. As part of the induction process, it is important to establish:
 - a. what skills the volunteer already has;
 - b. what the volunteer hopes to achieve from their experience, both soft skills and hard skills – including any opportunities or need for training;
 - c. what the museum hopes to achieve from this volunteer role.

It should also include an action plan for both volunteer and museum. The record should be regularly reviewed (i.e. bi annually / annually as appropriate) much as a personal development plan in a paid post would work. It would be an organic document that could be updated at each review. Such a resource is being developed separately.

Appendix 1: National Curriculum Resource for Fenland Museums

This is a new resource, developed through Wide Skies, to be available to museums in February 2014. Its purpose is to equip museums with the necessary information about the new national curriculum and how they can best support formal education in this context.

Aims

- To support museums in reviewing their current & potential schools offer so it meets with new National Curriculum requirements
- To support museums in developing partnerships with local schools

Methods

- Half day site visits for interested museums
- 'Toolkit' that offers tips, resources & templates for museums to use
- Presenting toolkit to museums (possibly)

Audience

Fenland museums: mainly volunteer museums with no professional education staff. Most are probably offering a limited school service. They would like to be working with their schools in walking distance to their site, and even attracting schools to visiting by coach but in the first instance, it is schools in walking distance.

Three toolkits per museum will be produced covering the following areas:

- Introductory sheet – what is happening (key headlines)
- Timetable / assessments / issues for schools
- Differences with old curriculum
- How to approach curriculum / Reviewing your current offer
- Implications for history curriculum & schools
- Tips for working with secondary schools
- Tips for communicating with schools
- What teachers want from a museum visit
- Check list for running a school service
- Mapping grid – history
- Mapping grid – geography
- Mapping grid – science
- Creating links – making links with art, literacy, maths
- Planning session template
- Evaluating visits