

National Portrait Gallery

Access & Community programme report for the Lord Leonard and Lady Estelle Wolfson Foundation

Report covering period May 2018 – April 2019

The Lord Leonard and Lady Estelle Wolfson Foundation has kindly supported the National Portrait Gallery's Access programme since 2013. This report outlines some of the activities and audiences the funding has been able to support over this year; this includes *Musical Portraits*, the Gallery's creative arts project for young people with autism; the Gallery's onsite access public programme and access resources.

1. Musical Portraits - Partnership Project with Wigmore Hall and Turtle Key Arts



Gallery visits to be inspired by the portraits of Edith Sitwell by Maurice Lambert and Mary Wollstonecraft by John Opie.

Since 2010, the Gallery has worked in partnership with Wigmore Hall and Turtle Keys Arts to deliver *Musical Portraits*, a visual arts and musical engagement project in the summer holidays for young people aged 10-14 years old with Autism Spectrum Conditions (ASC).

The successful partnership between the three organisations ensures the project is delivered professionally and sensitively with the individual needs of the young people and creativity at the heart of the partnership. The Collection at the Gallery is the focus for the project and artists work with the young people to explore two portraits. Wigmore Hall provides *Ignite* – their ensemble group, including a composer, musical instruments, and a performance space. They work with the young people to create new compositions inspired by the portraits resulting in a performance at Wigmore Hall for family members, carers and friends. Turtle Key Arts provide the expertise with recruiting the young people and supporting them and their families.

Musical Portraits responds to the needs of young people with ASC, encouraging the development of social interaction and communication skills. By working with artists, musicians and a composer their creative response to art and music is celebrated with the performance of their work.

ASC can cause a wide range of symptoms, which are often grouped into two main categories:

- **Problems with social interaction and communication** – including problems understanding and being aware of other people's emotions and feelings; it can also include delayed language development and an inability to start conversations or take part in them properly.
- **Restricted and repetitive patterns of thought, interests and physical behaviors** – including making repetitive physical movements, such as hand tapping or twisting, and becoming upset if these set routines are disrupted.

Those with ASC are often also affected by other mental health conditions such as attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), anxiety or depression. About half of those with ASC also have varying levels of learning difficulties. (Information provided by the NHS www.nhs.uk).

The National Autistic Society describes autism as a lifelong disability that affects how a person makes sense of the world, processes information and relates to other people. People with ASC often find social situations very difficult. 22% of young people with autism responding to a 2012 survey said they had no friends at all. (Information provided by the National Autistic Society.)

Project Aims and Objectives

- To provide creative arts provision for young people with autism during the school holidays when there is limited, specialist, free provision
- To increase creative and cultural participation for autistic young people and encourage the development of art, music, creativity, ideas, literacy and communication
- To engage with art and music-making in renowned venues and respected organisations, supported by professional musicians, artists and pastoral support staff
- To enhance health, wellbeing and happiness through engaging with the creative arts. Providing enjoyment, fun and active participation with a peer group of others with similar experiences
- To engage new, hard to reach audiences beyond the Gallery with the Gallery's Collection
- To broaden our work with the wider community, encouraging the young people to visit the Gallery independently with their families
- To broaden our partnership work with different organisations outside the heritage sector.

Musical Portraits ran from Monday 30 July 2018 – Thursday 2 August 2018. Working with a group of ten young people aged 10-14 years old for four days, musicians and artists took inspiration from the Collection to create and perform new musical compositions with the young people. The portraits in focus this year included Edith Sitwell by Maurice Lambert and Mary Wollstonecraft by John Opie, which provided rich inspiration for the young people.



Edith Sitwell
by Maurice Lambert



Mary Wollstonecraft
by John Opie

The young people considered questions of ‘what is a portrait?’ and ‘why do we make portraits?’ They looked at the Edith Sitwell portrait, learned about her life and listened to a reading of her poem ‘Don Pasquito’. In the Gallery, they drew shapes from her portrait onto A6 silver card, cut it out and rotated it. They made repeating patterns by repeatedly rotating and placing their shapes under a sheet of cartridge paper and using wax crayons to rub over it. This linked with concepts of musical sampling and rotating which the group explored across the project.

To mark the centenary of women gaining the vote in Britain, the young people also focused on Mary Wollstonecraft – considered a founder of modern British feminism. Artist Freelancer Chloe Cooper spoke about the campaigning Wollstonecraft did in her life time and encourage the young people to create their own campaign slogans. Back in the Education Studio these slogans were applied to sashes for the participants to wear.



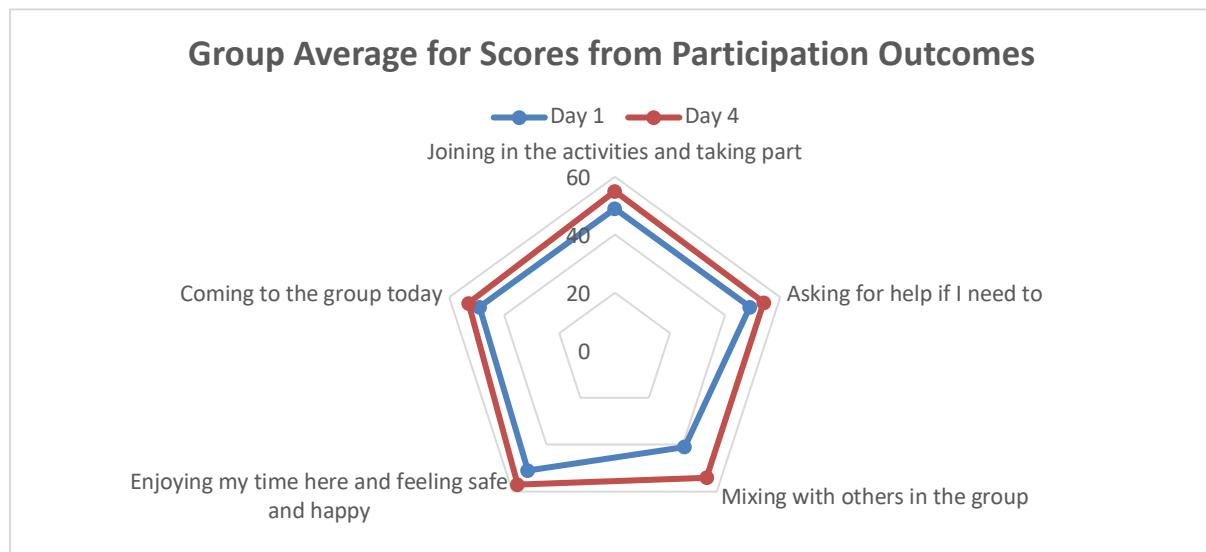
Creative activities inspired by the portraits of Edith Sitwell by Maurice Lambert and Mary Wollstonecraft by John Opie.

Outcomes for the young people included the following:

- Reduced social isolation, improved communication skills and increased confidence/self-esteem.
- Enjoyment in the creative process, taking part in creative activities and a sense of achievement through seeing the results of their work

Response of parents and carers to the question: 'What, if any, benefits do you feel your young person has received from this project that they cannot get from involvement in ordinary mainstream creative projects?'

- *The program is very beneficial to my son because he is working with other children with the same or similar abilities and the adults that support them are very knowledgeable about his condition*
- *The confidence to attend something independently*
- *He enjoyed the project and gained confidence*
- *Most importantly sharing all types of music & instruments with like-minded people*
- *Language, care and support clearly catering for people with autism. Friendly atmosphere, very inclusive yet individual*
- *I feel that they are not in great number involved in this project so they are well supported by the staff having experience of this condition and their understanding may be more comp*
- *Social interactions with like-minded people, great support from carers and finding their creativity*
- *Very good on acceptance & not criticising what cannot be helped. He said "I've got more of a say in what would happen"*



This graph demonstrates how young people felt on the first day of the project compared to the fourth day of the project. This shows an increase in confidence and enjoyment.

The project takes place at the start of the summer holidays, enabling a wider range of young people to take part. Evaluation demonstrates that the project enables parents to spend time in London with their other children during the project and then all join together at the performance.

In the February 2019 half-term school holidays, the participants from the summer 2018 project were invited back to take part in *Musical Band*. Artist Daniel Wallis worked with the group to explore and take inspiration from the Gallery's self portrait of Pauline Boty. The young people examined the portrait and discussed their thoughts about it before creating their own self-portraits in a drawing activity using clear acetate, permanent black markers and coloured cellophane. Taking inspiration from this layering of content the participants then created musical pieces with the *Ignite* musicians.



Pauline Boty by Pauline Boty

Musical Band culminated in a showcase for family and friends at Wigmore Hall. The opportunity for thirteen young people to come back and participate in another project had a very positive impact on them. Young people were familiar with some of the others in the group and the adults working with them so were able to focus on the creative activities more quickly.

Each year the project builds and is a model of best practice. Each partner brings their skills and expertise to the project and now in its eighth year this partnership continues to flourish. The feedback from young people and their parents demonstrates the value of this project in enhancing experimentation and confidence with the creative arts, introduces young people to feeling comfortable and confident in an art Gallery, promotes wellbeing and happiness, and provides an enjoyable, fun and active project for young people to meet and forge new friendships and work collaboratively with each other creatively and with artists and musicians. The impact of this project is high with constantly positive feedback from parents on the value of this project and the journey their child undertakes, gaining confidence and new skills, being supported and encouraged, and learning how to work as part of a team.

We are currently planning for this year's *Musical Portraits* taking place at the start of the school summer holidays - July 2019. We have been planning this with our partners and Turtle Key Arts have been recruiting young people to take part. This is the tenth year of this hugely successful partnership which is testament to the value of the project and the effectiveness of the partnership.

2. Visualising Portraits

Visualising Portraits is our monthly picture description programme for blind and partially sighted visitors. Artists, historians and photographers who are trained in delivering audio descriptions of pictures lead the talks. *Visualising Portraits* attracts a core group of regular attendees who value the sessions and in addition to the art appreciation they learn, have also forged new friendships and a feeling of community.



Visualising Portraits session in the Gallery

When programming the talks, we consider quiet spaces in the Gallery and select a range of different portraits to explore ranging from historic to contemporary. The talks focus on the art and the biographies of the sitter.

In the past year, we have extended the programme to pilot *Visualising Portraits* in our exhibitions. This has set an exciting new precedent for *Visualising Portraits*. Feedback from the group was overwhelmingly positive. We worked closely with our Visitor Services and Ticketing team to ensure the group had a rich experience while other visitors to the exhibition also enjoyed the show. The success of the pilot means we will continue to offer visual descriptions in our exhibitions.

Some of the talks that have proved popular this past year included:

- *Martin Parr: Only Human* – Photographer Marysa Dowling led a discussion in the Wolfson Gallery exhibition space
- The Restoration – Historian Julie Barlow gave a rousing talk on the life and loves of Charles II, pondering the question: ‘Is it better to be a mistress or a wife?’
- Activists – Artist John Harmer delivered a picture description and discussion of new commission ‘Malala Yousafzai’ by Shirin Neshat
- Love is Love – Blue badge guide Alan Read looked at LGBTQI sitters in the collection to mark LGBT history month

Between May 2018 and April 2019, 114 adults attended *Visualising Portraits* sessions, an average of 10 adults each month.

3. British Sign Language (BSL) events

Adults

British Sign-Language tours take place every month during *Friday Lates*. The tours have a strong following with an average of between 25-30 audience members at each event. The tours are led in BSL with one event a quarter interpreted into English. The events are promoted via the Gallery’s social media channels with a dedicated Facebook page and a quarterly e-newsletter.

Events over the past year have included:

- John Wilson led tours of the *BP Portrait Award 2018* and the *Taylor Wessing Photographic Portrait Prize 2018* exhibitions
- Chisato Minamimura marked Black History Month with a very well-attended tour of the Gallery’s display, *Black is the New Black*, which celebrated the breadth and diversity of black British achievement today
- In March, we marked International Women’s Day with a tour of *Illuminating Women*, a display featuring photographs of creative women taken by Mayotte Magnus

Between May 2018 and April 2019, 324 adults attended our *BSL* tours, an average of 27 adults each month.



BSL Tour, *Illuminating Women: Photographs by Mayotte Magnus*



BSL Tour, BP Portrait Award 2018

Families

During February 2019 half-term, workshops were themed around the LGBT History Month. A Rainbow Family Day with multiple activities was offered to families, including a Gallery tour led by Timberlina of key LGBTQI sitters in the Collection and a talk by young adult author Juno Dawson about her books and life. BSL interpreter Peter Abraham provided interpretation at both events and there was positive feedback from visitors for both the offer and content.



BSL Family Tour, Rainbow Family Day

4. Access Resources

i) Access Guide



The Gallery's new Access Guide was designed and printed during this period and is proving popular with audiences and staff alike. Highlighting all the Gallery's accessibility facilities, programmes and resources this brings all the relevant information for visitors into one place. Its bold and visually-strong design makes it attractive, stand out and accessible. The Guide is free for all visitors and can be picked up at the front desk. The Guide is in an accessible and easy to read font with large-print versions also at the front desk. It is also available online. The Guide also provides our Ticketing and Call Centre colleagues all information in one accessible place so they can helpfully answer any accessibility questions and help visitors access the Gallery.

The creation of this Access Guide was in response to the Access Audits undertaken by Vocaleyes and Action on Hearing Loss. Both Audits highlighted that the Gallery offered good access programmes and resources but that visitors did not know about them. The Access Guide has helped to redress this.

Alongside this, the Gallery's Digital Team have worked on increasing visibility of the Access programme on the Gallery's website and all Access information has been brought together in one place. They have also increased access standards online to support audiences.

ii) Large-Print Guides

For every exhibition we are producing quality large-print guides for visitors. Recent exhibitions have included *Elizabethan Treasures* and *Martin Parr*.

iii) Hearing Loops

Responding to recommendations in the Access Audits, all hearing loops were tested, reviewed and new loops were bought to either replacing broken loops and to ensure all key meeting spaces had a hearing loop. These are now regularly tested on a monthly basis.

With thanks to the Lord Leonard and Lady Estelle Wolfson Foundation

The support of the Lord Leonard and Lady Estelle Wolfson Foundation has been invaluable in enabling a wide variety of activities as part of the National Portrait Gallery's Access programme to take place. The Gallery is extremely grateful for this support.