



Natural
History
Museum

Dawnosaurus 2023-24

Report prepared for the Lord Leonard and Lady
Estelle Wolfson Foundation

September 2024



INTRODUCTION

We are delighted to present this report to the Trustees of the Lord Leonard and Lady Estelle Wolfson Foundation and share the impact of the Dawnosaurs programme over the last year.

Dawnosaurs is a series of free events for neurodivergent children (including autism, ADHD, Tourette’s, OCD and other sensory processing difficulties). Your generous gift of £100,000 over three years has allowed us to welcome thousands of neurodivergent children to the Museum to enjoy everything we have to offer in a quiet, safe, accessible environment curated to their needs.

EVENT ATTENDANCE

It is a pleasure to report that we have welcomed 6,444 Dawnosaurs participants in this reporting period, 2023–2024. We reach our audience via mailing lists, social media marketing, and engaging with the wider community through “Autism in Museums”, a free networking platform for organisers of similar programmes.

Despite the slight dip in advance bookings in May, the event was well attended, with a very low drop-off rate. Our August event, following the opening of our new gardens, was sold out.

The demand for Dawnosaurs is higher than ever. Over the last year, we have had multiple events sell out, and the quality of these events has increased as we explored new themes and exciting activities for children and adults to enjoy together. Beyond the numbers, the feedback we have received from participants demonstrates the positive impact the programme continues to have on families who would otherwise not be able to access the Museum.

We hope you enjoy reading this summary of the success of Dawnosaurs in year two of the three-year funding period, including examples of feedback we have received from very happy participants.

Month	Participants
November 2023	1,573
December 2023	1,310
March 2024	1,278
May 2024	783
August 2024	1,500
Total	6,444

EXPLORING NEW THEMES

In March, we adapted the theme of “Home”, which had been used in our half term Family Festival held in the Museum’s Jerwood Gallery. We tailored the existing activities for the Dawnosaurs audience alongside talks about what creatures the children may be sharing their homes with. The Jerwood Gallery remained open as a community art space, which was popular among the children as an opportunity for sensory decompression.

Another thematic highlight this year was “The Great Outdoors” which celebrated the opening of our new five-acre gardens. Our August event was held outside and we incorporated hands-on nature activities like pond dipping and wildlife photography which were very popular.

ACTIVITY HIGHLIGHTS

Our LEGO®: Build the Change activity is always a favourite among our Dawnosaurs participants. Drawing from the same activity run for children and families during our holiday programme, Dawnosaurs allows neurodivergent children to participate in a hands-on session and use their creativity and imagination to engage with themes of nature and planet. The relaxed environment of Dawnosaurs allows the children to learn through play and express their ideas with the LEGO® resources without the hustle and bustle of the public. This activity has generated excellent email feedback each time we have offered it.

In March 2024, we ran an activity called Coral Constructors in which children and their families learned about the work NHM scientists do to protect and regenerate coral reefs, linking with our strategic priority project Fixing Our Broken Planet. They then added tissue paper corals to populate a reef themed hat which they could take home. This activity was among the most popular we have ever put on at Dawnosaurs. Extra resources were required above what was originally planned due to uptake. We received a huge amount of positive verbal feedback on the day, and many parents sent us pictures of their children wearing their coral hats after the event.

FINANCIAL SUMMARY

We have become more ambitious since establishing Johnathan Leighton in his role as Learning Producer: Access and Neurodiversity, opening more of the Museum to Dawnosaurs participants and therefore incurring a higher event staff cost.

The full Dawnosaurs budget is broken down in the table below.



	Cost per month £	No. months	Total £
Salary cost	1,700	12	20,400
National Insurance	120	12	1,440
Pension	145	12	1,740
Agency staff/overtime	1,200	5	6,000
Event security	650	5	3,250
Consumables	200	5	1,000
Total			33,830

VISITOR FEEDBACK

We are delighted to receive feedback from our participants about activities they enjoyed, the impact the programme has had on their children, and what we can do to make the events even more special. Below is a selection of feedback we have received over email following our Dawnosaurs events this year.

“My son (aged 5) LOVED it! I think his comment afterwards was ‘I wish we could stay here forever’. He has ASD and the outdoor space couldn’t have been better for him. It was really calming for him to go and explore the west gardens – especially all the little paths in the south-west corner.”

“Thank you so so much for putting on the Dawnosaurs event. I have been raving about it all week to friends. It was absolutely brilliant. The last London museum we went to, we lasted a matter of minutes. This time we stayed 2 hours!”

“We came to the Titanosaur exhibition in January, and [my son] loved it, but he was so overwhelmed by the crowds that the rest of the museum was too much for him. To be able to enjoy the dinosaurs and Earth galleries almost to ourselves was a huge privilege that I cannot thank you enough for.”

“Dawnosaurs is the most fabulous thing.”

“I hope these events continue forever as it will be the only way our children are able to access museums. Our daughter is super interested in the sciences, especially dinosaurs and bugs but struggles with crowds and noise. Your events are like a lifeline for her learning and enjoyment.”

“All of the staff that we came into contact with were so friendly and inviting, particularly the team that were doing the photography session with my eldest, and the volunteers doing the crafting session. Every staff member/volunteer we encountered was kind and enthusiastic and inviting, engaging with our kids, and even our youngest child managed to talk to some of them, something that their Situational Mutism normally stops them from doing.”

“We were at the Dawnosaurs event last Saturday and I just wanted to thank you and everyone at the NHM for a wonderful welcoming experience for us. Our boy is neurodivergent and the extra space and smaller crowds made a big big difference to the visit not to mention the great feeling for him of it being a “special” event.”



CONCLUSION

Many of us have fond memories of visiting the Museum as a child, but neurodivergent children are often prevented from accessing the space and sharing in these formative experiences due to the noise, crowds and other triggering factors. Dawnosaurs offers a growing neurodiverse audience the opportunity to engage with our science and be inspired to care for the natural world from a young age, all in a safe and inclusive environment.

With the support of the Lord Leonard and Lady Estelle Wolfson Foundation, we have begun to rectify the historic exclusion of neurodivergent children from spaces like the Natural History Museum. We would like to extend our sincerest thanks to the Foundation for enabling us to deliver this programme, and we will be proud to continue doing so for the third and final year of this grant.

THANK YOU

CONTACT

Elizabeth Oates
Philanthropy Executive (Trusts and Foundations)
elizabeth.oates@nhm.ac.uk



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