

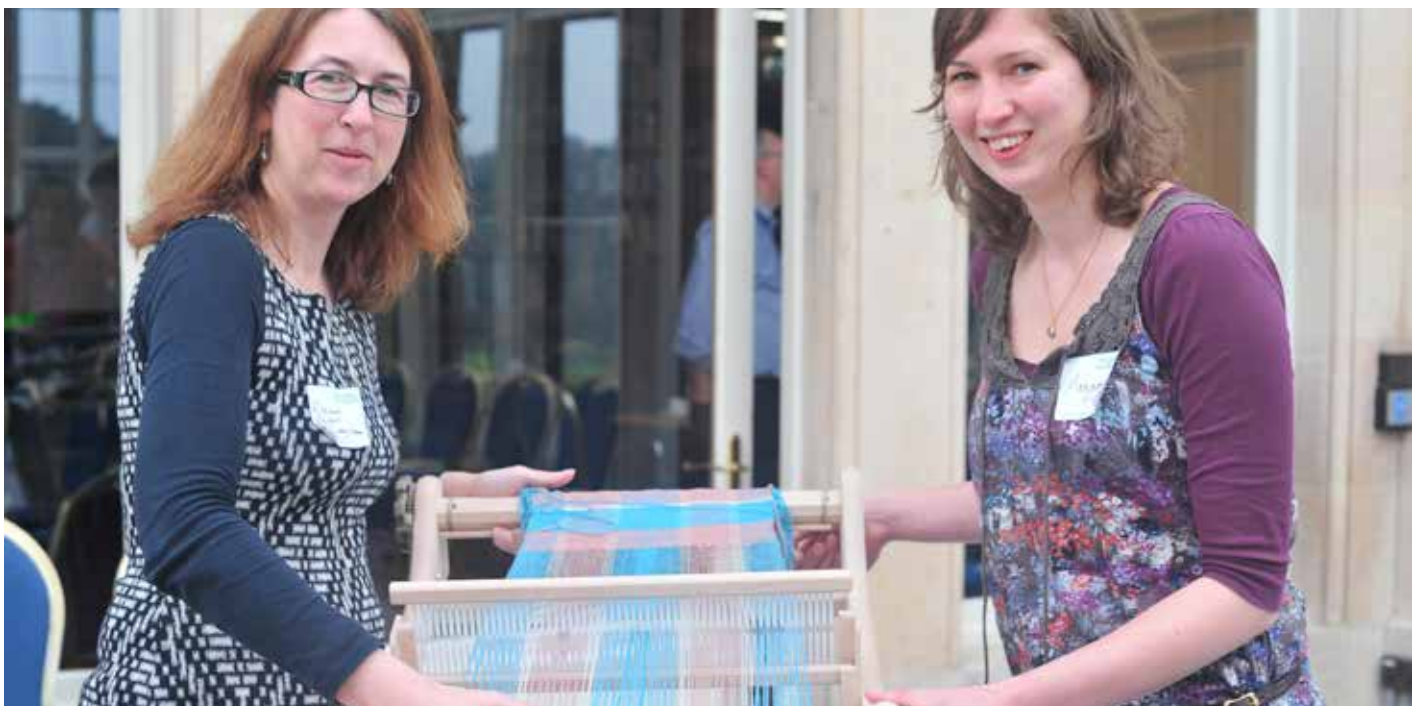


**the happy
museum**

Happy Museum Project Symposium 2014: inspiration, connection and impact

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“Happy Museum is a very thoughtful and ideas-driven project. Some of the most exciting and imaginative work in the sector is happening under the Happy Museum banner. It’s definitely bigger than the sum of its parts and I think it’s been quite influential. People now see that wellbeing is a way of growing museums. What’s really clever about it is that it spots potential recruits and believers and exposes them to all sorts of challenging ideas. It is as much a learning and development programme as it is about exploring the ideas. It’s about changing the way museums see themselves, how they are positioned in terms of their audiences. It makes them feel very different about what they are for – and many more would benefit from this process.”

Maurice Davies, head of policy and communication at the Museums Association

Introduction

The third Happy Museum Symposium brought together representatives from 22 commissioned projects, as well as key stakeholders and funders for two intense days of inspiration, discussion, reflection and connection.

More than 60 participants gathered in the spectacular setting of Stoke Rochford Hall in Grantham to review the experiences, learning and impact achieved since the Happy Museum Project was launched in 2011 – and to set the direction for the next phase of the Project in 2014 and beyond.

It was a chance for the ten third round commissions to meet and learn from the six first round and six second round projects. Participants were encouraged to make use of the collective power of the people in the room and to ‘share aggressively and steal with pride’.

There was input and inspiration from Happy Museum Founder Tony Butler, from the Project’s new director Nick Winterbotham, from

Mike Zeidler of the Happy City initiative in Bristol, the powerful and moving Empathy Roadshow, and an inspired re-creation of The Paper Apothecary (a round 2 commission).

Representatives of sector bodies and funding organisations discussed the wider cultural context and trends in the sector in a panel session. Happy Museum evaluator, Mandy Barnett, reviewed progress made in the Project’s ambitious evaluation strand, which is measuring impact at a macro/national level as well as at the local/organisation level.

The following pages have details on all these sessions, as well as participants’ reactions and stories of change from three years of the Happy Museum Project. Happy reading!



Sessions

Learning through the community of practice

"Being involved in the Happy Museum has led to a lasting change in my practice and approach. I think I now really understand how the work that we do does benefit people's health and wellbeing."

Vicki Pipe, London Transport Museum

The Symposium began with a gathering of the community of practice, bringing together representatives of the 22 commissioned projects to share learning, engage in peer review and propose questions and issues that the Symposium would address. The commissions came up with the following questions as a focus for debate:

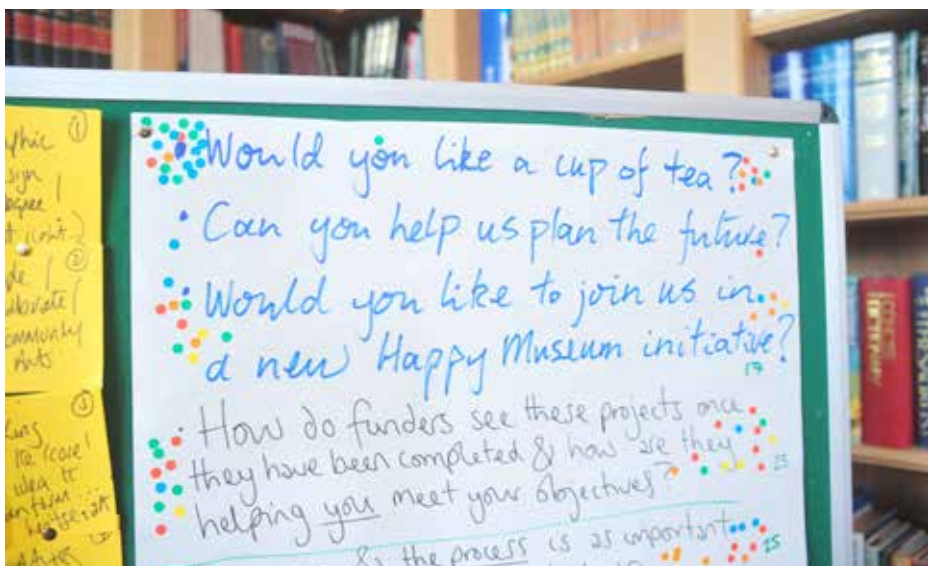
- How can we help each other play an active part in this community of practice now and in the future?
- How can we demonstrate that the learning and process is as important as the project?
- How do we embed the Happy Museum principles across and through the sector, bottom up and top down?

Once the guests arrived and the Symposium proper began, the assembled delegates were invited

to frame the event by determining what they wanted to achieve. Themes that emerged were:

- To reconnect and re-ignite enthusiasm.
- To learn what works in terms of individual and organisational change – what are the 'tipping points' for the sector?
- How to communicate the Happy Museum and its learning.
- How to sustain ourselves and our Happy Museum work.
- Deciding the next steps for Happy Museum.

All those present were invited to consider four steps that got them into the room – as active citizens to consider what turning and tipping points brought us to this moment and this place.



Symposium 2014 – share aggressively, steal with pride

“We should never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it’s the only thing that ever has.”

The third Happy Museum Symposium was official opened by Nick Winterbotham, interim director of the Museum of East Anglian Life and Happy Museum Director.

Nick opened by describing how his sister remained cheerful in the face of treatment for cancer – citing her delight at attending a recent exhibition as a key factor in her good mood. Her mantra, Nick said was relevant to the situation faced by many museums and galleries: “Pain is inevitable, suffering is a choice.”

He challenged the commissions to adopt three mantra for the Symposium:

- Share aggressively.
- Steal with pride (intellectual property is theft).
- None of us is as smart as all of us.

He referred to Margaret Meade’s encouraging words: “We should never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it’s the only thing that ever has.”

“Well this group of thoughtful, committed citizens just got a lot bigger and stronger.”

The brainpower and experience in this room is staggering: time to change the world!”



The Happy Museum 2011-2014 – Tony Butler

“To me Happy Museum was not a means to highlight the impact museums could have on the community, but to suggest that they articulate a new and equitable vision of a good society. Their role is to contribute to a sustainable future by fostering wellbeing that doesn’t cost the Earth.”

With under half a million pounds invested in it, the Happy Museum Project has supported innovation at 22 museums, conducted some major research and its advocacy had “punched well above its weight” founder Tony Butler said in his speech to the Symposium.

Speaking to representatives of all the museums commissioned by the Project, as well as key funders and other stakeholders, he reminded the Symposium of the journey taken so far. He reflected on the early decision to “create a community of practice [for] museums to experiment, take risks and reflect on their impact on society and their ability to do good.

“The projects have been joyful, unexpected, meaningful and all inspiring. Some influenced the way their organisations thought, many inspired those delivering them, almost all have impacted positively on participants.

“There’s a choice that we, as museum people, make. To paraphrase Brecht, do you want your museum to be a mirror to reflect society or a hammer with which to shape it.

“To me Happy Museum was not a means to highlight the impact museums could have on the community, but to suggest that they articulate a new and

equitable vision of a good society. Their role is to contribute to a sustainable future by fostering wellbeing that doesn’t cost the Earth.”

Tony highlighted the research funded by the Project, which was carried out by economist Daniel Fujiwara in 2013 – and “caused a stir”. “We saw the research as provocative, showing that a ‘soft’ notion such as wellbeing could be measured in an econometric way akin to economic impact.”

The research concluded that the value of museums to people’s happiness – at an average of £3,200 per year, per person – was greater than participation in sports, arts activities and being part of an audience in the arts. The Happy Museum Project plans to collaborate with Daniel again in 2014 to provide in-depth and rigorous analysis of the national picture.

“As it completes its third iteration, Happy Museum will keep asking people in museums how prepared they are to place themselves alongside the rest of civil society to work towards a flourishing, resilient public realm.”

See Tony’s paper on our website: www.happymuseumproject.org/?p=2334



Well-being and sustainability – the wider global context – Andrew Simms

Economist and author Andrew Simms was due to speak but, unfortunately, had to cancel at the last minute. The Symposium watched his TEDex speech in which he argued that radical change was possible and an alternative path to prosperity existed.

Andrew is a nef fellow and was nef's Policy Director for over a decade, also founding its work programme on climate change, energy and interdependence. He trained at the London School of Economics and was described by *New Scientist* magazine as, 'a master at joined-up progressive thinking.'

Andrew is a long-standing campaigner who coined the term 'Clone Towns' in nef's work on local economic regeneration, he

co-authored the ground-breaking *Green New Deal*, was one of the original organisers of the Jubilee 2000 campaign to cancel poor country debt, co-founded climate campaign onehundredmonth.org and devised 'ecological debt day.'

Andrew spoke at the first Symposium in 2012 highlighting how museums demonstrate change and disprove the myth of permanence.

After witnessing at first hand over two decades of failed international efforts to solve critical problems ranging from extreme poverty to climate change, his latest book *Cancel the Apocalypse: the new path to prosperity* (2013) is the result of a search for something better.

Community of practice – sharing what we have learnt



The community of practice consists of 22 projects in museums across England and Wales and it was important to have an opportunity to share this practice at the Symposium. Before the Symposium, each commission was posed the following question:

'If there were a Happy Museum that brought together objects collected from all the Happy Museums that currently exist, your own included, what object might you choose to place in it?

Please find and bring an object you

would be place in the museum to the Symposium – thank you.'

Each participating museum brought an object for the temporary exhibit: a lathe for working wood from Abergavenny; a padded old-style patient's 'restraint coat' from The Lightbox; an exquisite replica of Godalming's stained glass windows; a tray of bright green modelling 'gunk' from Wolverhampton; and many more.

These were laid out in the Orangery and four or five were selected for further explanation.



The objects' respective 'owners' told their stories and how they connected to their commission's work. Rib Davis' 'restraint' jacket for example showed that everything concerned with wellbeing was not always about positive experiences or emotions. The Cinema Museum displayed a map of South London featuring historic picture palaces and local community memories from a happy and popular cinema-going era.

Jo Dyers, from the Animate Arts Company, later recreated a full-size paper apothecary made of cardboard and recycled materials,

including every object the Symposium delegates had brought. This created a beautiful and intriguing aesthetic to echo the original installation at the Beaney House of Art and Knowledge in Canterbury (a key element of the museum's wellbeing project, funded by the Happy Museum Project in round 2) and allowed evidence of each commission to be 'presented' at the Symposium.

All Symposium participants were invited to view the entire installation together and, in smaller groups, followed an object they were curious about, and its 'owner'. Reflecting on how the objects

"Our involvement in the Happy Museum project built on what we were already doing. It gave us the confidence to say this is what we should be doing, it allowed us to ask a very fundamental question: what was our purpose? The most important change has been in in our organisational culture, it's contributed to giving a commonality of purpose across the organisation as well as across projects."

Rib Davies, The Lightbox



“That’s the essence of Happy Museum – it’s not about us doing lots of good things and proving what we do and showing off about that ... it’s about finding out what people are capable of doing, and being surprised by that, constantly, and that’s the really exciting thing, the thing that makes me happy.”

Nat Turner, Robert Burns Birthplace Museum

could be used as the basis for making someone else happy and following clear Paper Apothecary instructions from Jo, participants devised 'happiness prescriptions' which were handed out to members of the other groups.

Participants scattered through the house and grounds to take their medicine. Prescriptions included:

- Turn off your phone, take off your watch and enjoy unlimited and unrestricted time.
- Find a pond or water flow and just put your hand in it until a connection is felt.
- Find something to cook in the kitchen garden – crush a herb between your fingers.
- Slide down a banister with amorous intent as if your love is waiting for you.
- Scatter the seed: Tell someone (not here!) about the Happy Museum.
- Find out about the ice age and have a conversation with someone about it.
- Go outside and find the lambs (by the golf course). Watch them jumping in the fields.



[Click here for a video of Nat Edwards from Robert Burns Birthplace Museum on what he sees as the essence of Happy Museum.](#)

Measuring what matters – impact, learning and the LIFE Survey



Happy Museum evaluator Mandy Barnett gave an update on the different strands of impact evaluation underway or planned for 2014 – covering both national level impact as well as impact at the level of the individual museum. She referred to the major *Learning and Evaluation report* published last year – the final report will be published in June.

The national level evaluation will be carried out in a second collaboration with economist Daniel Fujiwara (details of his first study can be found [here](#)). The aim of this new piece of primary research is to put a value on the wellbeing that museums sector provides to the country.

Local evidence will come from the LIFE survey that the Happy Museum launched in 2013 to measure impact at all the current commissions and a wide range of museums across the country. The survey is based on the Happy Museum's [story of change](#).

The team has called it the LIFE survey because it asks about:

Learning,

Interaction

Feelings and

Environment and Surroundings

Mandy gave a presentation on the Happy Museum to the [Warwick Commission on the Future of Cultural Value](#). The Commission aims to undertake a comprehensive and holistic investigation into the future of

cultural value, gathering together the evidence and arguments to energise the debates about the future of investment and engagement in our cultural lives.

Mandy was invited to outline the rationale behind the Happy Museum Project and, in particular, its holistic approach to sustainability and wellbeing in relation to culture ([presentation here](#)). She described the Happy Museum's approach to learning evaluation and our associated programme of research.

"The Story Museum has been set up as a Happy Museum from the beginning. Lots of people say they want to live here."

"Even now, we still use the mood tree, so people put a mood leaf on it when they arrive and another when they leave. We also still use the Happy Count in meetings – we start with people saying how they are feeling on a scale of one to ten. Everyone does it including interns and volunteers."

"With the Happy Museum Project the level of enthusiasm and effort goes well beyond the level of funding."

"We had done lots of fantastic projects in past, but we didn't know what impact they had. The Happy Museum idea of measuring what matters has been really important for us. Also, within the staffing structure we have at the moment, many of the people find any kind of change really difficult. It's been great being able to share our experience though a community of practice."

Alice Briggs, Ceredigion Museum

Tish Francis, Story Museum

The Empathy Roadshow



A funny, moving and poetic reflection on the nature and power of empathy, The Empathy Roadshow struck a chord with many at the Symposium. Commissioned by People United and created by playwright and activist Sarah Woods with camera and editing by Richard Gott, it is a mix of engagingly honest video interviews and live commentary. The Empathy Roadshow introduced many at the Symposium to the existence of mirror neurons, a discovery (in the 1990s) which, scientists argue, proved humans are hard-wired for empathy.

A young woman described how her sister had lost some of her capacity for empathy. Twin sister and brother described their special bond. For Huxley, a young carer,

empathy “begins to forge the bonds between people so that they can form friendships and relationships.”

Neuroscientist Christian Keysers believes empathy has the ability to push us out of scepticism and antagonism – “for long enough to care about each other’s needs; for just long enough to give each other a chance”.

The Empathy Roadshow’s conclusion that ‘empathy is contagious’ resonates with the Happy Museum theme of connectedness as being a key to well-being.

[Click here for a video of Mike Zeidler from Happy City Bristol on the one thing he will take away from the Symposium.](#)

Panel discussion – the cultural context

“What is really interesting is how, through a series of commissions, a movement or a kind of conversation has emerged. The Happy Museum is trying to get museums to reimagine what these buildings or collections are for. These experiments or bits of practice have shifted the debate in a group of quite disparate organisations – and that’s a really very, very positive thing.

“The questions for the future are how these experiments have changed the organisations, how durable the change is, does all this work aggregate to more than the sum of its parts – what are the lessons. I am interested to find out if the sector as a whole is really ready for change.”

Régis Cochefert, Paul Hamlyn Foundation

The morning of day two continued with a panel discussion hosted by Maurice Davies, Head of Policy and Communication at the Museums Association. On the panel were Régis Cochefert of Paul Hamlyn Foundation, Miranda Stearn of the Heritage Lottery Fund, Nat Edwards of the Robert Burns Birthplace Museum and Carol Whittaker of CyMAL.

Régis challenged the commissioned museums to focus on the next phase. “This group of museums and galleries has done some really interesting [Happy Museum] experiments – but my challenge for you is how do you now take that forward?”

Museums and galleries were not typically at the forefront of innovation when it comes to audience participation, he said. “In other cultural sectors, such as orchestras like those using ‘el Sistema’ model, people are trying things that are beyond the usual approaches.”

When it came to funding, he warned that the subsidy model could be in danger. “My advice is to be real with funders, get away from trying to spin what you are doing, get back to the real stuff.”

From the HLF perspective, Miranda identified some interesting trends: the growing role of apprenticeships and traineeships; the rise in examples of asset transfer from private and public organisation to communities; a new strand related to transition funding; and the growth in applications from third sector or community-led organisations.

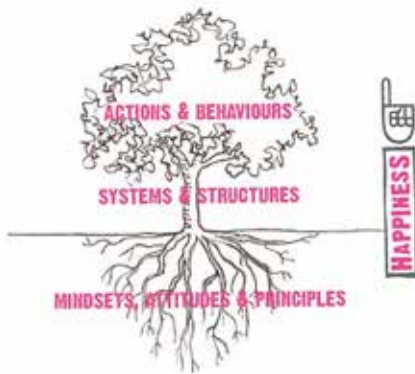
When it comes to funding, the HLF was looking “to fund projects strongly based on needs, inspired by good consultation and participation.” She said that being at the Symposium had made her think about measuring what matters. “How can I apply that in my role and how can we encourage more learning and sharing between projects.”

For his part, Maurice recognised the challenges that everyone in the sector face: “It is hard for the sector to articulate in terms of outcomes what the impact of their collections is.”

[Click here for a video of Afsheen Butt from Aik Saath, Slough Museum Partners talking about her Ah Ha! moment](#)



Happy City/Happy Bristol – linking wellbeing and sustainability



Co-founder of the Happy City initiative, Mike Zeidler hosted a session on his work in Bristol over the past four years. He began by involving all the Symposium participants in an intriguing live exercise that demonstrated how even simple connectedness in a system could allow small changes to lead to major shifts. He talked about the African concept of Ubuntu, or connectedness: "I am because you are because we are."

Standard economic models and ways of thinking lead society in the wrong direction. The focus on

growth as measured by financial success means society is inevitably unhappy, as consumer discontent is the basis of selling most products. "GDP-led economics requires us to be unhappy." So much attention is given to 'rich lists' – we should have 'happy lists' instead, he said.

He said many efforts to shift actions and behaviour focused only on changing systems and structures. The underlying mindsets, attitudes and principles are too often ignored.



Happy Museum Scotland

A welcome addition to the Happy Museum Symposium was a delegation from Scotland: Stephen Allen, National Museums Scotland; Gillian Findlay, Edinburgh Museums and Galleries; Nat Edwards, Robert Burns Birthplace Museum; and Peter Stott of Falkirk Community Trust.

“It was an experiment. What it did was quite remarkable. People starting bringing things to the table, there’s a real sense of autonomy, excitement. And it’s all been catalysed by this simple and easy step – one that doesn’t cost anything.

“We are trying to create a community of practice for the sector in Scotland, work together, create a plan of action. Of course, there’s no funding at this stage, so we are seeing what we can do without funding, what could we steal from the Happy Museum Project, or adapt to suit the way the sector is organised in Scotland.”

Peter shared with the Symposium the group’s emerging plans: “We are trying to create a community of practice for the sector in Scotland, work together, create a plan of action. Of course, there’s no funding at this stage, so we are seeing what we can do without funding, what could we steal from the Happy Museum Project, or adapt to suit the way the sector is organised in Scotland.”

“We had been looking quite a lot at visitor experience and customer care and trying to mobilise staff into thinking about visitor experience. When we started using the Happy Museum principles as the meeting agenda items, suddenly the catering manager started talking about her advocacy work in mental health and whether the learning team could help her, soon they were talking together – and now we have a regular event around that interest. Across the board, there’s a real sense of autonomy and can-do excitement among everyone.”

Nat Edwards described how Happy Museum thinking had already influenced the organisational culture at the Robert Burns Birthplace Museum. The Museum has adopted the Happy Museum principles as agenda headings for the regular staff meeting.

[Click here for a video of Peter Stott from Falkirk Community Trust on his hopes for Happy Museum in Scotland.](#)



What next – how do we identify tipping points?

“The most important tipping points the groups identified were the ones where wellbeing agendas supported the bottom line or were to do with embedding wellbeing in day-to-day operations.”

Nick Winterbotham led a session aimed at identifying what developments in the sector could lead to significant change.

The Symposium divided into eight groups and each group was given a list of 16 possible tipping points – possible changes in practice in the sector. The groups were asked to rank the tipping points in terms of their potential to change the sector’s culture and working practices – leading to the Happy Museum principles being truly embedded.

Opinions varied between the groups. Broadly, there was agreement that the most powerful tipping points that could lead to real progress were:

- job descriptions, CPD reviews and annual appraisals predicated on the HM principles
- Happy Museum activities supporting the bottom line in organisations
- annual and national ‘wellbeing Oscars’.

“The most important tipping points the groups identified were the ones where wellbeing agendas supported the bottom line or were to do with embedding wellbeing in day-to-day operations,” said Nick.

[Click here for a video of Jack Shuttleworth from Bilston Craft Gallery on the need to engage the wider museum service.](#)



Symposium close – what next for the Happy Museum and the community of practice?

“As it completes its third iteration, Happy Museum will keep asking people in museums how prepared they are to place themselves alongside the rest of civil society to work towards a flourishing, resilient public realm.”

Tony Butler

At this point we sent everyone out to have a walk in the grounds – they were invited to consider the idea of stewardship and what that means to them as individuals and institutions.

On their return, participants formed into groups to discuss next steps for them as individuals, institutions and communities.

Some gathered around areas of potential group activity emerging from discussions over the two days (including museums grouping to work on city-wide scale in the Happy City frame, a playful museum project, a possible Paper Apothecary tour, craft in museum, digital activity and Happy Museum in Scotland) while others shared plans for their *own* institutions and practice.

To close the Symposium – and in sending the participants on their journeys home – Lucy Neal invited everyone to share with the Symposium something they would take away with them from the event. Comments reflected feelings of energy, enthusiasm and inspiration (alongside a certain degree of exhaustion!) and a sense of both personal agency and shared commitment to what one delegate described as the ‘ethos’ of Happy Museum.

[Click here for a video of Tony Butler, Founder Director and Director of Derby Museums Service on the shared sense of purpose in the community of practice.](#)



Stories of change: the Happy Museum effect



What difference has The Happy Museum Project made?

Representatives of three of the commissions reflect.

The Cinema Museum, round 1 commission – Katharine Ford

"It's been years since those first HM inspired projects, but we are still using the HM thinking to inform what we do. I can't say how influential it's been – hugely – and it's changed the way that other people perceive us."

The 'Creative Community Curators' project at The Cinema Museum (based in The Lambeth Workhouse once home to Charlie Chaplin) invited local people to explore the museum's international collection of cinema memorabilia by becoming 'community curators'. This engagement triggered a new wave of museum-led community and wellbeing projects that included mapping the London boroughs of Lambeth and Southwark's cinema heritage.

"When we saw the Happy Museum offering, it didn't feel as if this was a marvellous new idea – it was a light bulb flash of recognition and joy that here was a funder who wanted to do some of the stuff we needed to do.

"Before we got involved, we had already defined strategic aims, which were focused on nef's '5 ways to wellbeing'. The Happy Museum Project allowed us to develop our thinking framework and helped us to disseminate what we do more coherently to others.

We have tied ourselves quite closely to the Happy Museum brand – it's our Waitrose if you like, we trust it, we use it.

"Now every event, product or service that The Cinema Museum considers is first looked at through the lenses of the '5 ways' and the HM principles. The result has been that we are doing more, and we are doing it in a more focused way. Operationally, we are a lot more efficient; we spend less time talking, more time doing. We have formalised our work around wellbeing, which has allowed us in practice to be more creative. We have got quite a lot of clarity now so we can get stuck in with the execution.

"If you were to visit now you would see a lot more activity than before; we have doubled the number of our volunteers and quadrupled our volume of wellbeing work, which is not entirely down to HMP, but was certainly triggered by our HMP experience and learning. I'd like



to think that you would see a lot more satisfaction among volunteers because now we talk to volunteers about their ambition and their skills; they work in teams that reflect their interests and use their skills, so they are doing things that make them happy rather than just drifting.

"It's been years since those first HM inspired projects, but we are still using the HM thinking to inform what we do. I can't say how influential it's been – hugely – and it's changed the way that other people perceive us. We have created a local wellbeing partnership; we have created 12 separate wellbeing offers and we are now seen as a deliverer of wellbeing for the local community.

"We are now a lot more connected about wellbeing. Everyone, from board to volunteers, understands the concept and the wellbeing thread runs right through. The challenge has been embedding the HM principles in the museum systems and processes rather than in its people. This has allowed us to move from theory to practice and to develop a wellbeing delivery partnership with South London and Maudsley Hospital (SLaM) – who bring their mental health patients, expertise and support to the museum."

[Click here for a video of Katherine Ford from the Story Museum on the future of the community of practice.](#)

Royal West of England Academy (RWA), round 3 commission – Alison Bevan

"The Happy Museum for us has been about organisational transformation. The project made us focus on what was important to all of us, the things that united the different warring factions, which was a love of the RWA."

Founded over 150 years ago, the Royal West of England Academy is a much-loved institution at the historic heart of Bristol. At the core of this project has been the development of a new strategic and capital plan for the museum, working with existing stakeholders and new partnerships and embracing Happy Museum principles. The project aims to make the RWA economically and environmentally sustainable – creating a thriving and happy institution for the future.

"The RWA is England's only regional academy of art – it is recognised as one of finest exhibition spaces in the country. When I joined as director in the

middle of last year, I found that all the disparate groups connected with the RWA – our friends, our academicians, our Board, our volunteers and staff – were almost all at war with each other. There was a huge amount of stress and high turnover of staff. Our Friends had become 'frenemies' and felt distanced from the RWA.

"The Happy Museum for us has been about organisational transformation. The project made us focus on what was important to all of us, the things that united the different warring factions, which was a love of the RWA. As a result of the process we have been through, our prospects are now much better.

“This time last year around 30% of visitors were giving that additional donation. A change of attitude in staff and some new wording on signage and that has gone up to 83 % this year. And, generally, I put all that down to the Happy Museum Project and the transformation it started in attitudes towards the organisation.”



“When I heard about the Happy Museum Project, I thought: this is what we need – an injection of happiness to turn this situation around. We started a process of looking at the spaces within RWA and how we were using them and how we could use them more effectively. We held an open spaces day with all the partners and disparate groups together, and it was facilitated by Mike Zeidler of Happy City/Happy Bristol.

“Instead of holding a truth and reconciliation committee and dragging over the situation, the approach was to engage with all the disparate groups who hadn’t worked with each other. It focused everyone on what was important to all of them: the future success of RWA. However much they hate and distrust each other, they all have that in common.

“The result has been astonishing. It may be that still some of the personalities don’t gel. But by being in a room and talking, it has completely changed the feel of the organisation. Staff turnover is down – in fact I don’t think anyone has left. We have more friends, more patrons, and visitor numbers are going up. The front of house staff feel more confident about what we are offering to the public and this helps them with selling

the message that we are a charity so please give that extra donation. This time last year around 30% of visitors were giving that additional donation. A change of attitude in staff and some new wording on signage and that has gone up to 83% this year. And, generally, I put all that down to the Happy Museum Project and the transformation it started in attitudes towards the organisation.

“You cannot be a successful organisation if internally you don’t have self-belief, or people are miserable. These things communicate themselves so quickly. Why would a patron put their hand in their pocket? We are in the process of changing the whole culture and feel of the place – and people want to be part of a place that is uplifting.

“The next step is to build our business by looking for further funding. The RWA will only survive if we are loved and cherished. We are entirely self-financed, and after years of not functioning particularly well, our financial situation is now critical. But, instead of panicking that we have got no money, the attitude is now: we have got this fantastic resource, things are improving, we can get there. There’s a sense of belief in the power of the organisation.”

Derby Silk Mill, round 3 commission – Hannah Fox and Andrea Mercer



'Re-making the Museum' at Derby Museums is a ground-breaking approach to developing museums. This project is engaging Derby's communities (including staff, partners and volunteers), in co-designing and fitting-out the ground floor of the Silk Mill – a former industrial museum that was mothballed in 2011. Communities are becoming actively engaged in co-producing the Silk Mill as designers and makers – inspiring and empowering citizens to become active co-creators of their cultures and societies. Together they are making all of the furniture and the fittings for the 'new' Silk Mill.

Hannah

"The Happy Museum's approach is one that resonates because it is about understanding how people become more connected. For us as an organisation, the project has been a way of testing out the idea of co-producing. The project has enabled people to connect while actually doing something.

"As a result we have had people coming in again and again every week because they feel it's their space. Many of these people say they have never been to a museum before. What we'd hoped for is definitely happening.

"The impact of the project has made us more resilient as an organisation, and me as a person. The Symposium has got me thinking how do we make it part of everything we do? It's about

embedding what we are already doing, which, we think is working. This approach is about saying 'We're not the experts – together we can do more things'.

"This project has made me reflect on why I came to Derby Museum. I have realised that there is a strength and momentum here that I can get really excited about."

Andrea

"The Happy Museum Project has enabled us to think about wellbeing and happiness on a much broader scale. Our project is about getting people involved in shaping places and spaces through making. The aim to create a safe and comfortable environment for people to feel involved seems to be working, a number of our participants have openly shared how much it has enriched their personal lives, in particular raising confidence and self-esteem. This has been born out through a clinical evaluation of this project.

"We are working with Derby University's Art & Design department and the Biology department to measure the impact of the activity of making. We are doing it through taking people's blood pressure, heart rate and cortisol (they spit into small vials) over a period of three weeks so we can analyse cortisol levels in their saliva. We are also doing qualitative interviews with individual visitors on issues around health, wellbeing and happiness."

"The Happy Museum's approach is one that resonates because it is about understanding how people become more connected."
