

Background:

The Museums Association, Mindsets + Missions programme funded by UK Research and Innovation aimed to support museums to engage underrepresented groups with knowledge, research and innovation. The Newid Byd | Something New project was one of 12 projects aimed to foster inclusivity by engaging individuals with learning difference & disabilities (LDD) in the development of museum experiences. A collaboration between the Museum of Wales, Welsh Charity Innovate Trust, purpleSTARS and Rix Inclusive Research Team, involved the team in creating sensory interactives and a role-play quest game to enhance accessibility and representation in museum spaces. People with learning differences and disabilities (LDD) were included in the research project design process and created a sustainable impact on how museums approach inclusivity.

Key Aims:

1. Establish a working group of people with learning disabilities to create a space where they can be listened to.
2. Pilot a research framework developed by purpleSTARS for sensory engagement with collections for people with learning difference & disabilities to enhance representation.
3. Ensure participants feel better represented in museums and more welcome in our museum spaces.

Methods:

We received ethical approval from University of East London (UEL). Our collaboration was led by two Innovate Trust research assistants with LDD and ten coresearchers from purpleSTARS. purpleSTARS are a group of people with and without LDD who aim to make museums more sensory and fun, based at Rix Inclusive Research UEL. A working group (8-10 members) within Innovate Trust, was set up to communicate and test ideas. purpleSTARS expertise, with museums was integral to the success of the project. We followed purpleSTARS 6-step framework including monthly in-person workshops at St Fagan's Museum, Cardiff, and follow-up online meetings. We used a RixWiki -an interactive tool for people with LDD to upload material and group it by themes. The Wiki creates a valuable archive for the whole project, with videos, images, recorded online meetings, easy-read agendas, and meeting notes all documented in one place and accessible to the entire team (link to the Newid Byd | Something New Wiki <https://www.rixwiki.org/9174/?from=%2Flist%253Ft%253D1>) The project was embedded in the "Life is..." gallery at St Fagans, we chose not to define the final output to ensure that it was developed in genuine inclusive collaboration.

Results:

Sensory engagement took precedence, embedding ideas around museum objects on display in the Life is Gallery. Driven by the research assistant's excitement and knowledge of playing Dungeons & Dragons, we created a version of a role play quest game called Operation Dragon. Based on objects and historical characters in the Life is Gallery a quest or 'sensory treasure hunt' transformed into fantasy quest characters during Operation Dragon.

Conclusions:

One of the main successes of Newid Byd/Something New was the collaborative framework between partners, the expertise of purpleSTARS and their steps to inclusive research and sensory engagement, with the research assistants from Innovate Trust.

The idea of the sensory quest and game also reinforced the importance of tactile experiences for many, helping them understand museum collections - something the museum hadn't done in this way before and has since been adopted to be developed for other parts of the collections/displays, at St Fagans. We learned the power of gamification, adding a layer of engagement far greater than anticipated. It's difficult for museums to move away from 'traditional' concepts of interpretation and control over project direction, but in this instance, apart from pre-defining the gallery space, every part of the project was collaborative and led by partner members.