

Community Associates 2025-26



First year cohort of Community Associates © London Museum

Community Associates is a 2-year programme run by London Museum, funding three local organisations delivering community health and wellbeing work in the City of London and Islington. The first cohort of the Community Associates used the fund to run a variety of creative public programmes for their communities. Between October 2024 to June 2025, the Community Associates met with members of the London museum's Engagement team over four co-produced workshops exploring themes collectively around power, trust and wellbeing. The aim of the programme was to experiment with how the opening of the new London Museum Smithfield could be of benefit to the local community by fostering long-term, reciprocal relationships with local organisations.

For more information about London Museum's Community Associates programme, visit the website [here](#)

Below are some personal reflections and summaries of the projects each Community Associate delivered with the grant.

Giving the past a future

THE PEEL

London Museum's Community Associates programme came at a very good time for us - serendipitous even. Only a few months before it started a batch of old annual reports dating 1906-1975 turned up after someone broke into storage on our site, which gave us amazing material to work with.

We decided to build our project around these reports, which were in a variety of states but mostly ok and readable. Working with the Adult Social Club at The Peel we did two workshops in March to survey the condition and content and introduce what conservation work is needed. Eight people attended these, and four had long-term relationships with The Peel going back to their childhoods. They remembered Pat Try who ran The Peel from the early 1960s until at least the last report we had from 1975. They sent their own children there in the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s, when The Peel was still mainly based in a house in Lloyd Baker Street and then after it moved to purpose-built premises on Percy Circus.



Survey and conservation workshop at The Peel © The Peel

Of special interest to the group were the range of activities The Peel offered from the 1930's to the 1950's which included sports at the playing fields The Peel owned near Ilford, a 'rest cottage' in Lambourne, a cycling club, drama club, women's school, Girl Guides, Boy Scouts, a 'Mixed Intermediate Club' for youth 18-22 (which even had some sex education through the 1930s-50s

- very forward thinking!), an orchestra, and a savings and loan club. The Boys Club repaired the shoes of Men's Club members, as well as playing football, boxing and other activities.

Many of the workshop participants remarked on the religious and moral background to all the activities. In the 1934/35 report there was mention of 'Temperance Billiards' as The Peel, with its roots in the Quaker faith, also strove to give moral guidance to its members. But it was sensitive to trends, so in 1932 their Sunday Afternoon Meetings, where a range of current topics were discussed, was moved to Finsbury Town Hall in line with 'the growing antipathy towards religion.'

There were annual reports from throughout World War 2, and we were able to use these to create a small display for VE Day, used at the VE Day party on Brunswick Estate and later with the women's group there. The Peel itself had the catastrophic loss of their headquarters on St John Street after a bombing raid in 1940, but carried on their activities at other sites around Clerkenwell throughout the war, knitting socks for the soldiers and providing sports for the boys. After the war the boys offered to redecorate the premises on Lloyd Baker Street themselves. They formed a rota and gave up their evenings and weekends, making by the end 'a wonderful job of it'.

The Peel's Youth Club also benefited from the information in the reports, and towards the end of the Easter break all fourteen aged 5-16 went on a walking tour of three different sites where The Peel was active in south Clerkenwell. One thing which interested them was the fact that so many buildings had courtyards and back buildings for light industry. This was true of the original Peel headquarters on the site of a courtyard where wooden 'peels' had been made to slide bread in and out of large ovens. Although this site has long been built over, we found a couple of other sites along St John's Street which still retain their courtyards, although the old workshop spaces had been turned into flats or offices.

In June the adults will be visiting London Museum Docklands to see the work Allison Foster, archivist at the Sainsbury Archive, including how the museum is digitising that collection. We also look forward to a further workshop with the Adult Social Club, where we will be actively conserving more of the annual reports following guidance from Rose Briskman, the paper conservator at London Museum. This will mostly involve removing rusty staples, using conservation tape to hold covers together, and binding the reports with acid-free thread.

As a result of this project we will have a set of properly conserved reports and a detailed survey of the contents by people researching and conserving their own cultural heritage. But the more striking aspect is the enthusiasm of the participants to look through their own material at home, where some found old pictures and leaflets they had of Peel activities. One of the

participants even found The Peel on YouTube, where there's [a Pathé News clip of a Peel boy](#) winning a boxing match at Albert Hall in 1946!

The annual reports we found were a great boon, but the bulk of the Peel archives are sitting in boxes at the Islington Local Studies Centre. They need to be sorted and catalogued before they can be made available to the public. We hope this project will be a stepping stone to do this, and further projects to explore our community's heritage and the Peel's place in it.

Building a stronger, connected community

HARSHITA PATEL



When I first heard about the Community Associates programme at the London Museum, I was interested but unsure how I could contribute. The idea of working together to connect local communities around health and wellbeing felt meaningful, but I wasn't sure how it would unfold. Looking back, this experience has been a valuable journey that emphasised collaboration, inclusivity, and sustainability in community work.

Joining the project meant designing activities that brought diverse groups together on an even footing. As the only freelancer involved, I faced challenges managing everything—from planning to delivery and evaluation. I quickly learned that building trust is essential. Creating welcoming spaces where everyone's voice is valued was the foundation of this work.

One of the highlights was exploring the concept of power sharing alongside my associates. I really enjoyed working together, and we each brought something valuable to the table. This collaborative process helped us understand how sharing power, respecting each other's perspectives, and working towards common goals could strengthen our team. It also reinforced how genuine collaboration fosters mutual respect and inclusivity—key ingredients in building a resilient, connected community.

Developing Community Activities

I created four events using a co-production approach—working with community members and local groups to shape activities that reflected their needs. The aim was to foster social connection and wellbeing in ways that could be sustained.

The first was a Japanese Sashiko embroidery workshop led by textile artist Rob Jones. Participants learned a traditional craft, creating tote bags while sharing stories. Watching people work together, sharing tips and

experiences, demonstrated how making something with your hands can promote calmness and connection.

Next, I organised a workshop with Age UK and Hackney Herbal where participants learned to make herbal salts and body care products. Many older participants said that creating these helped improve their mood and provided a relaxing activity. Small, shared activities like this can support mental health and social bonds when embedded in ongoing community life.

The third event was a Wellbeing Walk, led by Mrs Londoner. We explored green spaces and quiet corners of the City of London, sharing stories and reconnecting with familiar places. Walking together created a gentle sense of community, fostering belonging and encouraging ongoing participation.

Finally, I set up a Knit Club through Craft Forward. Participants of all skill levels came together to knit squares for the 'Blankets for London' project. This shared activity built a warm, inclusive environment where stories were exchanged, and friendships blossomed. It demonstrated how ongoing collaboration can support community resilience.

A Community Map and Photos

A key element of the project was commissioning a flyer created by Hazel East, displaying a Smithfield map with key community locations, a suggested walking route, and photos of community participants. This visual tool helped people see their neighbourhood as a connected space and encouraged ongoing exploration and engagement. It reinforced the idea that building a resilient community involves supporting local places and fostering ongoing connection.



Hackney Herbal event with Harshita Patel © London Museum



Mrs Londoner walk with Harshita Patel © London Museum

A copy of the map now hangs in the London Museum Studios, for others to see the abundance of local connections.

The Value of Sharing and Collaboration

Throughout these activities, I saw how sharing stories and working together uplifted individuals and strengthened bonds. Many participants said that these activities improved their mood, reduced loneliness, and gave them purpose. Their positive feedback confirmed my belief that community-led activities rooted in collaboration are vital for wellbeing.

Working with the Associates was a true highlight. We all worked well together, each contributing something unique. Exploring power sharing during our sessions was especially meaningful. It helped us understand that respecting each other's perspectives and sharing responsibilities leads to stronger, more inclusive work. This experience reinforced that genuine collaboration, built on mutual respect, fosters community resilience.

Challenges and Lessons Learned

There were challenges, especially managing everything alone. Some activities, like the oral history project, required more time and funding than anticipated. I learned to be flexible and focus on achievable goals. Support from the London Museum team was invaluable, providing guidance and encouragement through difficulties.

Building a Resilient Community

One of the most rewarding aspects has been the relationships that formed—between community members and with the museum. These connections have potential to develop into long-term collaborations, helping to create a more resilient and inclusive neighbourhood. Participants expressed interest in more activities like these, showing their value.

This experience reaffirmed my belief that community work must be sustainable. It's not enough to run a few events; we must support ongoing opportunities for connection and collaboration. Building resilience involves listening to community needs, supporting local groups, and developing activities that can be maintained over time.

Moving Forward

Looking ahead, I plan to help communities build capacity, secure resources, and deepen partnerships. The goal is to create a lasting foundation where stories, crafts, and shared experiences continue to foster social cohesion and wellbeing.

This project has shown me that collaboration, inclusivity, and sustainability are essential to developing stronger, more connected neighbourhoods. When people come together to share their stories, they create a support network that benefits everyone.

Final Thoughts

Participating in the Community Associates programme has been a meaningful experience. It has demonstrated that genuine, community-led efforts—based on collaboration and shared purpose—can support mental health, reduce loneliness, and strengthen resilience.

I am grateful to the London Museum team, the community members who welcomed me, and everyone involved. Their openness and willingness to connect have left a lasting impression. I look forward to continuing this work, helping to nurture neighbourhoods where everyone feels valued, heard, and supported.

Streets to Stories **ALL CHANGE ARTS**



Excited to accept the opportunity offered to us by the London Museum's Community Associates programme and building on previous projects, which explored safety and opportunities for nourishment and respite in public space in our city, B Creative developed a creative community wellbeing walk around the City of London.

B Creative is an arts activism programme designed by young women for young women aged 16-25, run by All Change since 2011, working with inspiring artists, activists and cultural partners. B Creative welcomes

young people who identify as young women including d/Deaf, disabled and neurodivergent young women, LGBTQ+ young women and young women from global majority and ethnically diverse backgrounds.

Having curated creative walks previously, we started by reflecting on what had been successful about these, concluding that interactive elements such as inviting attendees to leave a creation on the landscape had enabled connection and engagement. We remembered Emily Thornberry MP chalking 'he's rarely worth it' onto the pavement at our WALK, TALK, CHALK event in 2021 as a message of empathy and encouragement to other women, prompting laughter and shared stories. We decided that the walk would centre creativity, arts and culture.

We considered places in the city where we feel safe, can rest and be inspired, and contemplated how many had elements of nature, green space and bodies of water. Others places chosen offered opportunities to study, meet friends and see art. Maryan shared that Barbican Centre is a place where she often goes to read her book and relax next to water, so we decided their Lakeside Terrace would our starting point. Autograph Gallery exhibitions have always been a favourite visit for us. We feel welcome and their free exhibitions provide us with inspiration. We discovered their current exhibitions explore relevant themes and late opening on a Thursday made a perfect ending point for our walk.

We brainstormed activities that might work as ice-breakers, to enable attendees to get to know one another and feel comfortable embarking upon our walk together. Our Associate Artist, photographer Marysa Dowling, suggested an idea for water portrait painting, part of a practice she developed with women in Mexico, and something we had tried last summer in Granary Square as part of our Summer of Softness project. We could utilise the Barbican's natural resources, whilst not leaving anything permanently behind. Instead creating fleeting artworks that would evaporate into thin air but be photographed and captured forever. The activity would also permit people who might not know each other to witness their portrait partner, fostering a moment of connection and bonding.

With the beginning of our walk forming, we started to use our local and family knowledge to flesh out our route. One person shared that her dad is a Black Cab driver who has studied the knowledge and knows the city like the back of his hand! We conducted field research, trying out routes to figure out timings, considering the risks of being in public space, such as the noisiness of certain streets, that could be overwhelming to neurodivergent walkers. Our Associate Artist NJ suggested working with rather than against this obstacle, and that she could lead an intentional listening exercise to enable participants to mindfully experience the city soundscape, rather than being engulfed by it.

The final part of our planning process was deciding how to end the walk. We wanted to leave attendees with a creative offering from us before they enjoyed the exhibitions and decided to play to our strengths. We have a number of talented poets within our group, so we curated a selection of original poems that spoke to the themes of the walk - wellbeing, mindfulness, sensory experiencing, placemaking, and liberation.

At last, Creativity and Wellbeing Week rolled around and it was time for our walk. We were so pleased that a good number of people had signed up to take part, and as we gathered at Barbican's Lakeside Terrace we welcomed friends old and new, some who had been to previous All Change events, as well as new people who had found us through WhatsApp walker's groups, or read about us in the EC1 Echo. We noticed how diverse our group was, an intergenerational collection of folk ready for an evening of creativity and connection!



All Change Streets to Stories Walk, photo © Tolu Elusade

People enjoyed producing each other's water portraits, snapping photos before they disappeared. Paintbrushes to the sky to lead the way. We headed up Whitecross Street, turning into Fortune Street Park, a hidden gem of greenspace tucked away from this main road, usually bustling with street food vendors. Gathering around the mosaic in the park, we shared favourite spots in the city with one another, discovering a Finsbury Park warden amongst our group and resolving to visit places we hadn't been before.

Along to Leonard Circus, with people chatting to one another along the way, and time for some intentional listening! Slowing down and really noticing the textures of sounds was a lesson in both serenity and playfulness. One attendee even took things a step further, interacting with the built

environment and becoming a human statue! Onwards to our last stop, we were greeted by the Autograph Gallery team who welcomed us with an introduction to the gallery and the current exhibitions - 'Eileen Perrier: A Thousand Small Stories and Dianne Minnicucci: Belonging and Beyond'. We learnt about Autograph's mission to champion the work of artists who use photography and film to highlight questions of race, representation, human rights and social justice, before exploring the exhibitions.

To mark the end of the event, our pop-up poetry performances commenced in the ground floor gallery, with Ambia sharing 'Lavender's Peace', Maryan presenting 'Home and Tolu' closing with 'Sounds of Liberation'. After a big round of applause, we made sure to take a group photo, solidifying this new community we'd made over the course of an evening and then made our way homewards, feeling full of wholesome vibes and a distinct sense of not only being part of our city, but having actively contributed something positive.



All Change Streets to Stories Walk, photo © Tolu Elusade

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