

Summary Impacts and Learning

Stepping Into Dragon Hall,
Aug 2023 — Nov 2024

Introduction

Project Summary

The project was a heritage engagement programme led by the National Centre for Writing at Dragon Hall, Aug 2023 - Nov 2024. It was made possible by the National Lottery Heritage Fund.

The project aimed to enable new and expanded audiences to explore the heritage of NCW's home, Dragon Hall, a Grade I-listed medieval trading hall in Norwich.

NCW invited community and visitors to explore Dragon Hall and stories of Norwich through storytelling, writing, making, and more: A new chapter of stories by and for communities who need culture and heritage to work harder for them in a post-pandemic and cost-of-living impacted climate.

Over twelve months, NCW has delivered free opening hours, visitor experience, expanded participatory and new volunteering activities combining creative writing and heritage.

We have connected new audiences to Dragon Hall and NCW and retained them thanks to an accessible and broad offer with multiple access points for residents and tourists; drop-in activities, facilitated sessions, volunteering opportunities and more.

‘Stepping Into Dragon Hall’ aimed to enable new and expanded audiences to explore the heritage of NCW’s home



DRAGON HALL GARDEN

What We Achieved

NEW SHOP FRONT AND VISITOR ENTRANCE



STORY MAKERS AT THE FORUM



'Stepping Into Dragon Hall' aimed to engage 3,450+ visitors across three key participant groups in activities and broader public through volunteering and drop-in visits.

- **Children, young people and families:**
Prioritising local families and those from levels of deprivation and low engagement.
- **Refugees, asylum seekers and isolated migrants:**
Refugee, Asylum Seekers and migrant communities in Norwich.
- **Older People:** focusing on those within Norwich and at risk of social isolation.

Key Deliverables:

- Created new heritage interpretation materials for visitors to Dragon Hall.
- Introduced new 'drop-in' visitor hours, four days per week.
- Created a new community kitchen for cookery and storytelling activities.
- Recruited two new heritage engagement staff and an expanded volunteer group trained to support public access, welcome services, events and tours.
- Expanded creative writing and heritage learning and participation sessions, with a focus on families, children and young people, refugees and asylum seekers, older residents.



Headline Outcomes

1,942
DROP-IN VISITORS

418
ACTIVITY SESSIONS

956
CHILDREN,
YOUNG PEOPLE
AND FAMILIES

238
REFUGEES AND
ASYLUM SEEKERS

210
OLDER PEOPLE

51
ACTIVE VOLUNTEERS

84%
OF PARTICIPANTS
NEW TO NCW

26%
HAVE RE-ENGAGED

17%
OF DROP-IN
VISITORS IN 20%
MOST DEPRIVED
POSTCODES

92%
REPORT A POSITIVE
WELLBEING IMPACT

89%
LEARNT SOMETHING
NEW

85%
FEEL MORE
CONNECTED TO THE
COMMUNITY

CHOOSE YOUR OWN ADVENTURE



CREATIVE PLAY FOR UNDER 5S



Volunteers:

Activities included:

- Supporting public events (stewarding, checking tickets).
- Supporting community group workshops and creative activity.
- Welcome Desk for drop-in visitors and activities.
- Welcome Desk for bookable 'Writers' Room' spaces.
- 14 'Story Maker' volunteers attended workshops and research time, making new interpretations of Dragon Hall public via an exhibition and publication.
- Heritage learning and research sessions and workshops.

Key Outcomes:

- 94% confident they will continue volunteering with NCW.
- 92% motivated to do creative things in future.
- 86% 'developed new skills'.
- 88% 'feel part of the community'.

Children and Young People:

Activities included:

- Character design with the Wayward Adventurers' Guild to create a 'Dragon Trail'.
- 'Choose Your Own Adventure' with artist Rose Feather, with home-educated children creating an interactive book.
- 11 artist-led workshops inspired by ghost stories, poetry, historical fiction and more!
- 'Family Days' with live storytelling, crafting, illustration and creative writing led by artists, NCW staff and volunteers – all for free throughout school holidays and weekends; animating Dragon Hall for drop-in family visits.

Key Outcomes:

- 93% desire to reattend.
- 88% learnt something new.
- Home Educated children's confidence working in groups increased by 31%.

Engagement:

14
DROP IN ACTIVITY
DAYS OR EVENTS FOR
617
FAMILY ATTENDEES

21
SESSIONS FOR
339
CHILDREN AND
YOUNG PEOPLE

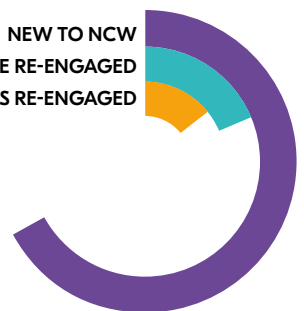
13
SCHOOL GROUP
VISITS FOR
272
YOUNG PEOPLE,
KS2 - KS4,
INCLUDING SEN.

Engagement:

51+
ACTIVE VOLUNTEERS
CONTRIBUTED SHIFTS
55%
NEW TO NCW

90
ATTENDED TRAINING
1,658
VOLUNTEER HOURS

UP TO **90%** NEW TO NCW
25.4% HAVE RE-ENGAGED
19.1% OF NEW VISITORS RE-ENGAGED



Refugees and Asylum Seekers:

Engagement:

- 22 sessions for 238 Refugees and Asylum Seekers.
- Partnership with English Plus, Zainab Project and New Routes Integration.

Activities included:

- Nutrition and Storytelling course using NCW's new community kitchen, partnering with the Zainab Project.
- Family drop-in days welcoming refugee and asylum seeker families to access our spaces for free, collaborating with New Routes.
- English language classes with English Plus – utilising the building and historical uses of Dragon Hall to create and experiment with spoken and written English.

Key Outcomes:

- New confidence accessing Dragon Hall; feeling comfortable within a heritage space.
- Increased skills in written and spoken English.
- Positive self-expressed wellbeing from participating in crafts and reading activities during family drop-in days.

Older People:

Activities included:

- Life writing course, 10 sessions, cumulating in an anthology
- 'Stitch Your Stories', 5 sessions and subsequent public exhibition of textiles, in partnership with community stitching programme 'Cloth of Kindness'.
- 'Personal Histories', 5 sessions of reminiscence and writing, leading to a publication.

Key Outcomes:

- Reached broad demographics; 60% D/Deaf, Disabled, Long-term Health Condition; 37% Working Class; 37% in 20% most deprived postcodes by Health & Disability indices
- 50% increase in 'sense of connection' to people.
- 100% achieved 'self-set goals', 39% related to socialisation and 57% related to skills.



TAPESTRY OF TALES EXHIBITION LAUNCH

General Visitors and Wider Public:

Activities included:

- 138 free drop-in visitor days with regular tours of Dragon Hall.
- New visitor experience, including digital screens, creative 'trails', self-led activities, and publications exploring Dragon Hall to browse or takeaway.

Key Outcomes:

- Increased connection to heritage; 4.03/5 rating for 'sense of connection to Dragon Hall'.
- Broadened access to heritage through new opening hours and interpretation materials.

People engaged:

36
HERITAGE TOURS
AND TALKS AND
3
CELEBRATION
EVENTS,

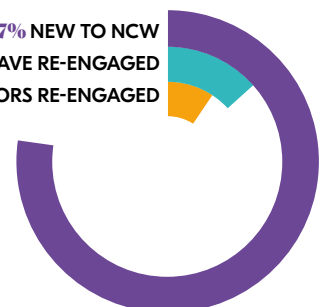
ENGAGING
262
ATTENDEES.
138
GENERAL OPENING
DAYS FOR FREE
VISITS,

ENGAGING
1,942
VISITORS

21 SESSIONS FOR 210 OLDER PEOPLE
53.8% NEW TO NCW
46.2% HAVE ENGAGED AGAIN SINCE PARTICIPATING
28.6% OF NEW VISITORS HAVE RE-ENGAGED



91.7% NEW TO NCW
15.9% HAVE RE-ENGAGED
11.3% OF NEW VISITORS RE-ENGAGED



National Lottery Heritage Fund 'Outcomes for Heritage'

A wider range of people will be involved in heritage

NCW successfully attracted new and returning visitors across key target groups; **84% of attendees to pre-booked activities were new**, as were **<90% of drop-in visitors**.

In their words:

- 'I felt dubious about doing something for over 60s but it was a great experience.'
- 'Free - so great for financial accessibility. Super friendly and informative staff. Very welcoming. Amazing building. My daughter loved it' – Family.
- 'I grew up in a council estate and I looked at NCW and I thought, this is not a 'me' place, then getting to know the place and people, volunteering... You come here for free, this is opening up now!' – Volunteer.

Audiences with postcodes the 20% most deprived nationwide (IMD, 2019):

CHILDREN AND
YOUNG PEOPLE:
13.5%
GENERAL PUBLIC:
15.7%

VOLUNTEERS:
22.5%
DROP-IN VISITORS:
17.9%

NCW BASELINE (ALL
TICKET BOOKERS,
2022/23):
11.5%

People will have developed skills

- Volunteers gained skills in stewarding, handling heritage objects, oral history, facilitating creative activities, public speaking and comfort interacting with diverse demographics. Skills have led to employment and interviews, with references from NCW.
- Children and Young People enhanced specific storytelling and writing ability, alongside broader critical thinking and teamwork skills.
- Older Adults in creative sessions integrated heritage themes into existing creative interests and expressed new enthusiasm for creative pursuits.
- Refugees and Asylum Seekers developed skills through English language sessions and a food-based course, gaining certifications that support employability and volunteering.

In their words:

- 'Allowed me to expand my knowledge of local history and improve my people skills; I am more comfortable now talking to people on the fly' – Volunteer
- 'Facilitators were thoughtful, kind, curious and supportive. Their energy was pitched perfectly to engage and not overwhelm. The creatives were sensitive to the wide range of social and emotional difficulties the students' – Teacher

'Providing these opportunities free to users is extremely valuable and appreciated – we would have difficulty attending otherwise'

– FAMILY

'Learnt about different techniques you can use to improve your character design and also how to continue learning about history and finding inspiration'

– CHILD



VISITORS IN GARDEN



People will have greater wellbeing

- Volunteers gained confidence, new social groups, and a sense of contributing to the community.
- Older People felt more connected to the people around them. Many continue to meet at NCW's for other free and paid programmes/events.
- Children & Young People developed wellbeing through new social interaction and increased confidence working with peers.
- Refugees and Asylum Seekers unanimously reported, via surveys, feeling welcomed.

In their words:

- *'Very inclusive friendly safe and informal space. People felt calm and relaxed and inspired and share and honestly + with confidence' – Artist.*
- *'Group gained confidence from being in a space that they would not normally access and working with creatives' – SEN Co-ordinator, City College.*

The local area will be a better place to live, work and visit

- Positioned Dragon Hall as a free cultural attraction in an underserved area of Norwich that lost community spaces in 2024.
- Residents began to see it as their space, leading to increased footfall and word-of-mouth referrals.
- NCW became better connected to Norwich's heritage organisations, signposting visitors and sharing knowledge about visitor communications, experience and engagement.
- Staff and volunteers enhanced their understanding of the communities around NCW.

In their words:

- *'Learning about how families engaged was interesting; what they've had to overcome to get to NCW' – Volunteers*

'Has given me so much more confidence and given a new social aspect to my life that was lacking before'

– VOLUNTEER

'I have met so many new, interesting people and made friends. I have attended events I would not have otherwise and expanded my knowledge'

DRAGON HALL WHEN USED AS SWATMAN'S BUTCHERS



DRAGON HALL, EXTERIOR



People will have learned about heritage and Heritage will be identified, better explained and in better condition

- Across ages and demographics there was strong interest in historical content, asking questions about Dragon Hall's history and architecture.
- 100% of volunteers reported learning about Dragon Hall's heritage.
- Enriched heritage interpretation through new resources and displays. Co-created content from the 'Story Makers', children, and older participants shared lesser-known stories of King Street and Dragon Hall.
- A newly refurbished welcome room provides an accessible entry point, while physical artefacts enhance visitor understanding of the building's fabric.
- NCW website's heritage section was revamped to improve access to digital resources.

In their words:

- *'I learnt that Dragon Hall was more than a place to write and has a deep history' – Child*
- *'Access to the wealth of history... Links with the history of the local area help to build a picture of the development of this important part of Norwich'*

The organisation will be more resilient

- New visitor experience and opened Dragon Hall to drop-in for the first time since 2015.
- NCW has new spaces, resources and expertise to deliver free drop-in visitors' hours.
- New partnerships have refined programming and will facilitate future delivery.
- Public awareness and confidence in Dragon Hall as a heritage asset have led to the introduction of a restoration levy. Increased footfall saw onsite donations rise.
- Increased in-house understanding of, and responsibility for, evaluation.

'The tour was extremely successful. It made the building seem 'special' and they really enjoyed exploring'

– SCHOOLS VISIT

'It's an amazing building, great that you've preserved the history but still using the building for stuff that's creative and good!'

Reflections and Recommendations

Collaborating with Refugee and Asylum Seekers

- Facilitating transportation to the venue is key to ensuring a feeling of safety.
- Build strong relationships with partner staff who understand NCW's site and expertise.
- Retain flexibility in activity planning; the needs of participants can quickly change.
- Opportunities to gain skills beyond English language are welcomed by partners.

Children and Young People

- Free and drop-in activities are essential to reach family visitors.
- Instigate further collaborations with local providers and community organisations to signpost participants.
- Continue opportunities for young people to co-create public-facing resources.
- Develop free schools' engagement and resources with clearer curriculum tie-ins.

Older People

- Deepen collaboration with Age UK Norwich to better reach marginalised older people.
- Consider opportunities for participants to date to continue to meet at NCW.

Volunteers

- Volunteers – both visitor-facing and 'Story Makers' – will be vital to NCW's ability to explore and share new stories. They offer enthusiasm, knowledge and capacity.
- Offer training outside NCW to learn more about Norwich's broader heritage offer.
- Invest in web-based solutions for shift management.
- Sustain avenues for volunteers to contribute to NCW's broader public events.
- Offer training about NCW's literary-led programmes and workshop facilitation.
- Sustain 'Story Makers' model for volunteers to create public-facing resources.

Volunteers – both visitor-facing and 'Story Makers' – will be vital to NCW's ability to explore and share new stories. They offer enthusiasm, knowledge and capacity

Visitor Experience and Heritage Interpretation

- Visitors want to learn more about social histories and Norwich's literary heritage.
- Refresh signage and wayfinding responding to insights about visitor flows.
- Participant-led interpretation of Dragon Hall is engaging for participants and visitors; combining heritage with creative writing effectively brings together past and present.

Communication

- Paid social media advertising is a viable channel to reach heritage and family audiences.
- Consider extending partnerships (e.g., Visit Norwich) to attract tourists.
- Print remains important, especially in reaching hyper-local audiences.

We look forward to sharing the Next Chapter with you.



Stepping into Dragon Hall was made possible by a grant from the National Lottery Heritage Fund

NEW SIGNAGE AT NCW



Stepping Into Dragon Hall was made possible by the National Lottery Heritage Fund and National Lottery players.
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