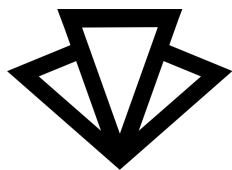


PROJECT REPORT

2020 | OCTOBER



HIDDEN GEMS

Lead: Katie Musgrove, Special Educational Needs Officer

Lines: Merseyrail and West Lancashire

Budget: £5,300





OVERVIEW

'Hidden Gems' was conceived as a photography project that would engage local school and community groups across Merseyside and West Lancashire. Our aim was to work with local people to encourage a sense of connection to their local train stations and foster a sense of pride in the area surrounding it. Through this project we wanted to provide a platform for people to explore, discover and share the places that were local and of interest to them and photography was a very accessible way to do so. Three train lines, Liverpool-Southport, Southport-Wigan and Wigan-Liverpool, were involved and thirteen stations were chosen to be part of the project as focus points.

APPROACH

Led by Katie school and community groups took walking tours around their local stations taking photographs of places and things of interest – the 'hidden gems' – as they went. The photographs were digitally collaged by a Liverpool-based designer (Jodie Greenwood) and printed onto Dibond panels ready for installation. Each of the stations involved were to display three Dibond photo-collages accompanied by an explanation board about the project. Although a professional designer was commissioned to ensure the artwork was 'print ready' it was very important that the people involved were central to the artistic process and were also involved in selecting and arranging the photographs. As a way of recognising the achievement of those involved two photography exhibitions were organised and certificates were presented.

STATIONS

Southport, Meols Cop, Gathurst, Bryn, Wigan North Western, St Helens Central, Huyton, Liverpool Moorfields, Seaforth and Litherland, Crosby, Waterloo, Bootle New Strand, Formby.

PEOPLE

- 3 school groups
- 1 college group
- 6 community groups
- 4 Special Educational Needs & Disability providers
- 240+ people
- 5 creative practitioners
- 1 British Sign Language interpreter



OUTCOMES

- People from currently under-represented communities were involved in sharing their places of interest
- A sense of ownership and pride in local stations and the surrounding areas
- Clear and visually interesting artwork displayed on rail platforms that inform rail passengers about the 'hidden gems' that are in walking distance from the station
- Developed a network of local school and community groups who are more aware of community rail
- Delivery of rail safety talks and sign-posting to career opportunities in the rail industry
- Three groups (Our Place SEND Youth Group, Deaf Club, True Colours group) were able to experience rail travel first-hand by visiting Manchester and Preston; for some this was the very first time they had been on a train.
- A joint application with Scrapyard Studios for funding from Sefton Borough of Culture Fund to deliver a similar project – Hidden Gems: Sefton Stories – at eight additional stations in Sefton.
- A strong working relationship with St Helen's College developed and an additional partnership project, Extending the Reach of Hidden Gems, was awarded CRDF funding.
- From working with the Deafness Resource Centre (DRC) during this project it was decided that the Education Network would benefit from Deaf Awareness Training and Katie Musgrove has since enrolled on British Sign Language Level 1 course at the DRC.



WHAT WORKED WELL

The approach taken with this project is a simple idea that people can easily understand and take part in with no prior knowledge of photography, art or rail being required. We saw a real enthusiasm from people of all ages to explore and share the highlights of their neighbourhoods and found that the photography walks were a great way for people to get to know each other, grow in confidence and get some exercise. All of those involved discovered something new about where they lived and were excited about sharing this with others at their local station.

It was a great way to deliver rail safety to a wide variety of groups that might not have been otherwise interested in what Community Rail Lancashire could offer in this regard. This is particularly true for non-school based groups.

LESSONS LEARNT

- It was very helpful to have a designer who was able to make sure that there was a consistent style across the artwork created by multiple groups and to make sure that the resolution was correct for printing.
- The photography walks were a great way to get to know the groups and hear what they thought of their station and neighbourhood. Giving opportunity to gather on-the-ground thoughts and feelings that may lead to further project ideas.
- Photography is a very accessible way to engage groups of all ages and abilities. Many people (young and older) had not used a digital camera before so very much worth starting from the very beginning, i.e. how to turn the camera on!
- The production and installation time required may mean that celebration events are not meaningful for some groups (particularly those with special educational needs). It is worth celebrating their achievement of being involved at the end of their engagement time rather than waiting for a more traditional launch later on.
- Lastly, it is worth getting all permissions required in writing before starting any engagement so that there is no lag between engagement and installation.