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At the start of each year, we publish the **Kids in Museums Manifesto - 20 ways to make a museum family friendly**. And every year, we're contacted by museum organisations throughout Europe asking if they can either translate it or compile their own version. Kids in Museums would be delighted if they did either. But before they do so, these organisations must understand how the Kids in Museums Manifesto was generated, and

make sure theirs is conceived and produced in the same spirit. Otherwise their manifesto will be a meaningless document.

Kids in Museums, a small, feisty London-based charity, works with museums to make them more welcoming of families, in particular those who have never visited before. We are - and this is crucial - visitor led. We are for and of visitors, not museums. We have an outsider's independent eye on museums'



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welcome to their family visitors. We are the only visitor-led organisation working with museums in Britain.

We were founded just over five years ago when I was visiting the Aztec exhibition at the Royal Academy in London. My youngest child - then almost three - saw a statue of Eagle Man with a huge beak for a nose. He shouted - I don't deny he shouted - "Monster! Monster!" at the Aztec statue which looked rather like, well, a monster. I bent down to congratulate him on his early appreciation of pre-Hispanic art when a gallery assistant approached us and told us to leave. We were, she said, being far too noisy. My family was no longer welcome in the gallery.

Unfortunately for the gallery assistant, I'm a national newspaper journalist. Two days later I wrote a piece in the paper about being thrown out. By the end of that day, I'd had hundreds of emails from other families saying they were fed up with being told off in galleries. And, as a direct result of this public feeling, Kids in Museums was born.

It's important to tell our founding story to demonstrate our roots. We arose from the ground up, not the top down. We weren't the idea of a progressive museum director who thought it might be good to give family visitors a voice. We weren't part of a national museums association programme to increase access for young people. We were the voice of families saying loudly and clearly that they wanted to be treated better by museums. They were also, by implication, saying museums were important to them.

This public reaction grew and grew. From the thousands of visitor comments we received, we compiled the first Kids in Museums Manifesto. It distilled all the visitors' comments into 20 points. (See appendix - Kids in Museums Manifesto).

Why did we choose to present the visitors' to

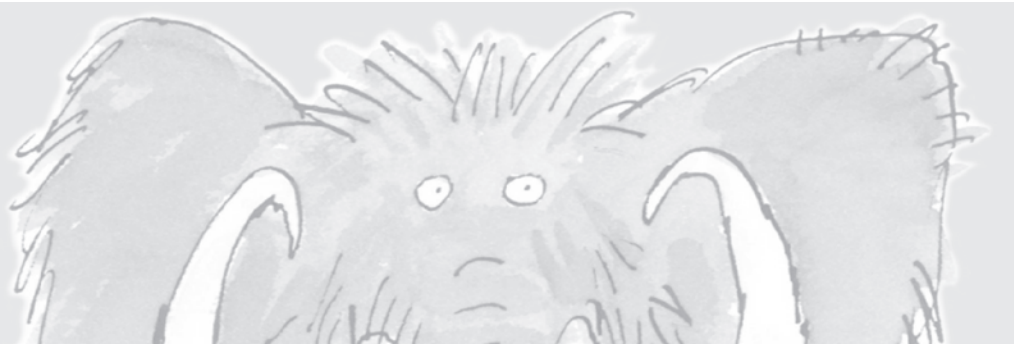
comments in the form of a manifesto? Because there's a track record in the arts of the power of this form of print. The 11-point Futurist Manifesto, published in 1909, was the first arts manifesto of the 20th century. Although it called for the demolition of museums and libraries, its centenary was still enthusiastically celebrated last year as if it had paved the way for every arts initiative since. A manifesto is always credited with having clout well beyond that of any mere report or proposal. Just the name is enough to conjure up visions of revolutionary change.

But for a manifesto to wield this power it must really be a manifesto, not just another thinly disguised report on the arts. It can't only be called it, it must be it. Firstly, that means it must be a call to action that can be easily summarised. It must be brief. (We keep our Kids in Museums Manifesto to one side of one sheet of paper.) No one can rally around a 15-page essay.

In addition to brevity, there must be clarity. It's no good having a manifesto with aims that boil down to nothing more than "enabling people to have access to the arts" or "placing the arts at the core of improving people's life opportunities". These may be rallying cries but to do what exactly? It's rather ironic that so many manifestos call for accessibility in totally inaccessible language.

Thirdly, a manifesto must have a call to action and change at its heart. And when that change happens, we must be able to notice a difference. The outcome must be measurable.

How has the Kids in Museums Manifesto made a difference? From the outset we decided to distribute the Manifesto free of charge to museums and galleries, so they could use it as a simple audit tool against which they could judge their family friendliness. Museums themselves then became more and more inventive on how they could use it to change



their family practices. Some use it as the basis of whole-staff training days, involving not only education, outreach and curatorial staff, but those who work in the cafe, car park or front of house. One museum blew the Manifesto up to tablecloth size and laid it out in the cafe, for their visitors to scribble comments on. Some museums pick one of the points as an achievable aim, and go for it. It has led to real changes being made in museums, from the introduction of free tap water in museum cafes to the development of activities and trails targeted at families.

Two years ago, we decided to make the Manifesto an annual document. This is because visitors' needs and expectations change, as well as the offer to families by museums. This way, it can be a dynamic document responding to families changing demands.

This year, we also added another incentive to museums to implement the 20 points on the Manifesto. We developed a signatory supporters' scheme, whereby a museum can sign up in support of the Manifesto. In return they can use our specially designed We Love Kids in Museums logo on their website and other publications. This is not a Kitemark; we make that clear. What this says is that the museum recognises the Manifesto as an inspirational and aspirational document, and is working towards its aims. This way, the power of the Manifesto as a tool remains with the visitor rather than becoming a mere marketing tool for the museum. So far, around 300 museums have signed up as supporters.

I hope it's now clear that this process is hard to replicate. It's no good museums just taking our Manifesto and translating it. Visitors have to be involved. So before a museum even thinks of compiling their version of the Kids in Museums Manifesto, they have to connect to their visitors and ask them what they think and

what they want. They have to empower them. And they have to let them draw up the 20 points. It's a longer, messier, more time-consuming process than a museum drawing up the points themselves. But if you don't do it, you have a manifesto with no teeth and little impact. And nothing will change.

Appendix - Kids in Museums Manifesto

20 ways to make a visit family friendly

1. **Be welcoming.** Cleaners, curators, front of house staff and those in the café should all be involved in making families feel welcome. Consider different families' needs, with automatic doors, wheelchair-user friendly activities and Braille descriptions.

2. **Have flexible family tickets.** Don't dictate the size of a family. Families come in all shapes and sizes.

3. **Give a hand to parents** to help their children enjoy the museum. Sometimes it isn't the kids who are shy. Parents need your support too.

The staff help me talk to my children about the art, so I don't feel embarrassed if I don't know the answer.

4. **Don't say ssshhush!** Museums are places for debate and new ideas.

5. **Answer kids' questions** - not just those asked by adults. Address them directly when you do so. You don't have to be experts on everything, just enthusiastic and open.

The best bit was the visitor assistant who had great knowledge of football skills herself and spent a lot of time with my football-mad son!

6. **"Don't touch!" is never enough.** Say why. Use positive remarks like, "Isn't that a great painting! Let's look at it together from further back." Teach respect by explaining why some



things shouldn't be touched. Direct to something nearby which can be.

7. **Reach out** to homes and communities. Not everyone can come to you. Sometimes, you need to go to them first.

8. **Use your Website** to encourage families to visit and give clear information. Be honest about what you can't provide, so visitors come prepared. No one can do everything.

9. **Don't assume what kids want.** They can appreciate fine art as well as finger painting. Involve kids, not just adults, in deciding what you offer.

10. **Don't forget teenagers and toddlers.** Older and younger children are often left out. Every age brings fresh ideas and insights.

11. **Be height aware.** Display objects, art and labels low enough for a child to see.

12. **Watch your language!** Use your imagination with signs, symbols and words understood by all ages.

There were great child friendly signs green hands and red hands showing what we're allowed to touch.

13. **Be interactive and hands on,** not only with computer screens and fancy gadgets. Dressing up and getting messy are as important as buttons to push.

My eight year old told me on the way home that she thought it was better than a theme park, because she could join in and have fun being part of everything.

14. **Produce guides, trails and activities for all the family together,** not just the kids. Encourage families to chat.

15. **Have different sorts of spaces** - big open spaces for children to let off steam. Picnic areas for families to bring their own food. Small quiet spaces where children and families can reflect. Provide somewhere to sit down. *"Nice cosy sofas!"*

16. **Keep an eye on your toilets,** and make sure they're always pleasant places, with baby changing facilities and room for pushchairs. It's the one place every family will visit.

17. **Provide healthy, good-value food,** high chairs and unlimited tap water. Your café should work to the same family friendly values as the rest of the museum.

18. **Provide a place to leave coats,** bags and pushchairs. It makes it far easier for families to move around.

19. **Sell items in the shop that aren't too expensive** and not just junk, but things kids will treasure.

20. **Give a friendly goodbye.** Ask families to describe the best bit of their visit, either in words or pictures. Respect these responses and act on them. Invite them back.

I know I say wow a lot, but this is for real, this is a real wow, this is like wow (six year old).

You can download a copy of the Kids in Museums Manifesto from www.kidsinmuseums.org.uk or order free hard copies from manifesto@kidsinmuseums.org.uk. Details of how to sign up as a supporter of the Manifesto can be found at www.kidsinmuseums.org.uk or e-mail signup@kidsinmuseums.org.uk

