

BRITISH ASSOCIATION OF FRIENDS OF MUSEUMS

# Engaging with Young People

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Recommendations to Friends

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BAfm

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# 1 Introduction

The purpose of this report is to present a range of recommendations to Friends of museums and galleries across the UK of ways of engaging with young people, and crucially, encouraging young people to join as Friends.

These recommendations have been informed by a questionnaire completed by Friends organisations, with the short questionnaire asking questions around current membership of young people, what programming was aimed at this audience and the importance of encouraging their membership.

In addition to asking these questions of Friends organisations in Britain, the questionnaire was also shared with Young Friends members of the World Federation of Friends of Museums, drawing on their experience of new and thriving Young Friends groups to present a series of recommendations.



## 1.1 Research method

A short questionnaire was made available to Friends to share their experience and feedback, this was available online via *surveymonkey* with the link shared via the BAFM Council, website and social media.

Jasmine Farram, Youth Ambassador for BAFM, contacted Friends groups via email, asking for their participation. Regional Co-ordinators also helped to share the survey. Research was carried out online, looking at Friends websites at events and membership offers.

In total the questionnaire received 41 individual responses, made up of 33 from the UK and 8 from international Friends via the World Federation of Friends of Museums.

## 1.2 British Friends Groups who responded

Whilst a large number of Friends groups were contacted, a number responded to say that they did not feel they could respond due to not having young people in their existing membership.

Those who did respond wrote on behalf of or as an individual member of:

- Friends of Tunbridge Wells Museum, Library and Art Gallery
- The Salisbury Museum Members
- Friends of City Art Centre and Museums, Edinburgh
- Friends of Leicester & Leicestershire Museums
- Friends of Leicestershire Museums
- Friends of the Geffrye Museum
- Hunterian Friends
- Friends of the Bath Postal Museum
- Friends of the Oriental Museum, Durham
- Calderdale MBC
- Friends of Tunbridge Wells Cemetery
- Ben Uri Friends
- Friends of Kirkcaldy Galleries
- Friends of the Harris Museum & Art Gallery
- Maidstone Museums' Foundation
- Friends of Kent Firefighting Museum

## 1.3 International Friends

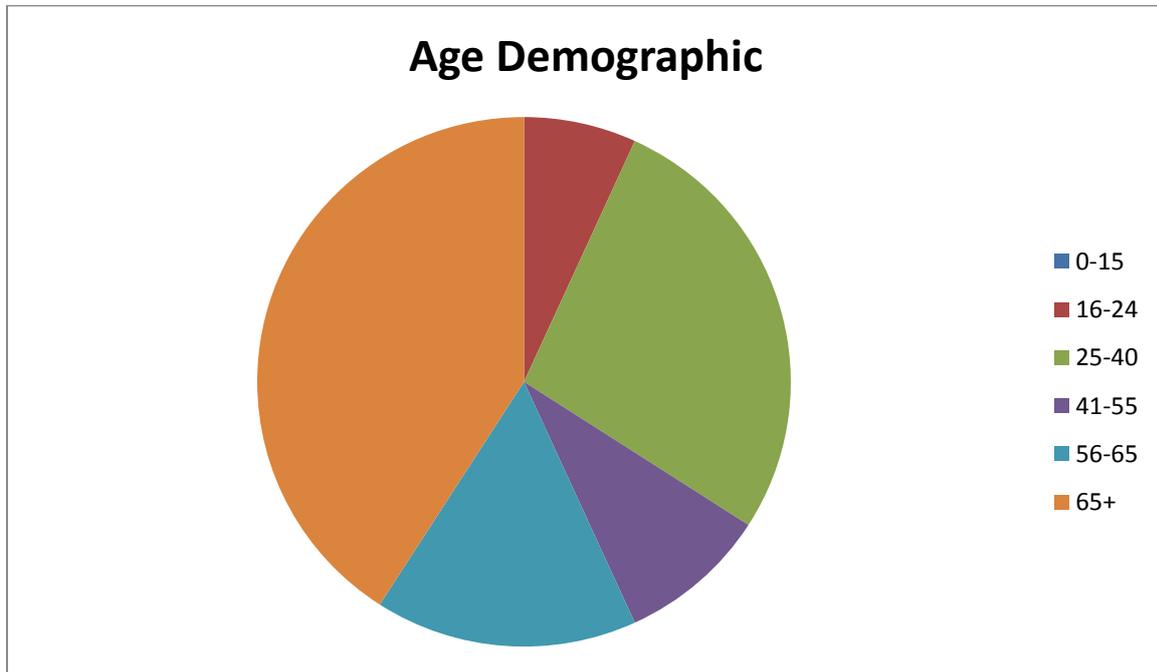
International Friends who responded represented:

- Young Art Crowd (Netherlands)
- Jovenes del Bellas Artes (Argentina)
- Associazione Amici del Museo Poldi Pezzoli (Italy)
- Villa Ocampo Joven (Argentina)
- Amici dei Civici Musei d'Arte di Verona (Italy)
- JAMEC (Jóvenes Amigos del Museo Emilio Caraffa) (Argentina)
- Freunde des Museums für Kunst und Kultur Münster e. V. (Germany)



*Young Friends, World Federation of Friends of Museums, Verona, May 2017*

## 1.4 Age of responders



The greatest proportion of responses came from those aged 65+. The second largest portion of responses came from those aged 24-40 and the third from those aged 56-65. Smaller portions of responses came from those aged 41-55 and 16-24, with no one aged 0-15 responding.

A typical age for Friends members is 50 and above. Many members have spare time due to less work and family commitments and retirement, along with a desire to volunteer and support their community/interests.

A majority of the responses from those aged 16-25 and 25-40 came from the Young Friends of the World Federation of Friends of Museums.

## 2 Results of questionnaire

The following section pulled together a summary of responses to the questionnaires outlined in the questionnaire, along with quotes from responses.

### Do you have any Young Friends (age 25 and under) or do you run any youth initiatives?

A majority of those who took part in the survey indicated that they did not currently have any members aged 25 or under.

“Unfortunately not”

“Very few under 50!”

One group stated that they actively did not market their Friends association at this younger age group as they were not their target demographic.

University Museums indicated that they had some young members but did not run any events aimed specifically at this age group.

A number of responses indicated that although there were no ‘Young Friends’, the museum ran a number of youth initiatives, events and activities that were well attended by this age group.

Some Friends offer family memberships as a means of encouraging young people to join, and young people had been involved in Remembrance Sunday events with the Friends, working with local schools, Young Curators Clubs etc.

### Why is it important to encourage young people to join as Friends?

It is clear from the majority of the responses that young people are seen as the future of Friends and that they will help to sustain the museum and collections through providing fresh perspectives, vitality and enthusiasm.

It has also been indicated that many Friends see membership as an opportunity for life long learning and community participation. Young people can shape the museum programme and help ensure exhibitions and events are relevant to a wider demographic of people. Through their knowledge of new technologies and trends, Young People can help to upskill existing Friends Groups, helping to sustain the Friends.

### Quotes:

*“So Friends doesn't die out”*

*“Demography, i.e. we are all getting older; to promote energy and enthusiasm for the arts in themselves; to emphasize how the arts are of importance to all age groups and not an optional add-on.”*

*“It engages them in the society and nurtures the same interest in heritage and museums that we appreciate as older people”*

*“IT IS IMPORTANT TO BECOME AWARE OF HOW EACH ONE OF US, HOWEVER YOUNG, CAN HELP THEIR COMMUNITY BY GIVING THEIR TIME”*

*“Young Friends are our future, and we can offer fun and education and encourage life long learning through Young Friends”*

One response said: *“Our Friends are a fundraising organisation and we have discussed the idea of encouraging young members to join in the past. However, we very clearly target membership promotion and the programme of Friends' activities at over 50s as we think they are the most likely to have time/disposable income to contribute.”*

This raises an important point about the function of Friends – fundraising is very important and museums and galleries rely on this contribution, however, advocacy is also very important, and for future proofing Friends must seek membership from a wide demographic to ensure sustained membership numbers. Retirement age is increasingly getting delayed to an older and older age, meaning in the future a majority of those over 50 will still be working and so will likely have less time to commit to a Friends organisation.

What measures could you put in place to encourage young people to join as Friends?

Suggestions included:

- Position for a young person on the committee/council
- Involving young people in redevelopments
- Voluntary opportunities and skills development
- Events at accessible times – late openings
- Events and activities aimed at young people Free gifts
- Encourage young people to hold their own events programme
- Family events – for family membership
- Research activities linked to the school curriculum
- Presentations to secondary schools
- Annual competitions
- Advertise the Friends at events aimed at young people
- Social media opportunities to connect with young audience
- Student membership
- Partner up with national event – sleep overs, guides & scouts etc
- Free membership
- Discounts – shop, events, courses

Feedback from this question indicated that part of the programming should be aimed at younger audiences, with events and activities being scheduled at accessible times for this audience (evenings and weekends).

Involving young people in redevelopment projects is a fantastic way of not only ensuring consultation with younger, harder to reach audiences but also to provide learning opportunities. This kind of involvement will help to change perceptions of cultural and heritage organisations and encourage membership.

Likewise, having a position on the committee or council for a young person is a fantastic way of consulting and ensuring a young voice has a place in decisions. It provides an opportunity for the young person to learn about the committee/council process and gain confidence in public speaking in groups and in public, valuable skills which can be transferred easily.

Creating partnerships with national events aimed at young people was also seen as an opportunity to engage with this audience, along with purposefully using marketing to encourage membership.

Social Media was seen to provide opportunities for engaging with this audience, and an investment in time to set these channels up if non-existent would be necessary. There is a potential opportunity here to invite young people to share their skills in social media and digital marketing by coaching existing friends, providing intergenerational networking and learning.

Other measures to encourage young friends included presentations to secondary schools and directly telling students about the Friends and what they do along with offers including discounts on membership or merchandise.

#### What can young people learn from existing Friends?

We asked what young people could learn from existing Friends. The responses indicated that overwhelmingly, existing Friends felt they had a lot of experience and wisdom to share, whether this be professional work experience or life skills. It was felt that Friends could mentor younger members; encouraging active membership through joining the committee and supporting ideas.

#### **Experience & wisdom**

- Young people have the opportunity to learn from those who have/had professional careers and a wealth of life experience behind them. This is a fantastic opportunity to share skills, give advice and mentor those at an early stage in their journey as a Friend.
- Introductions to other people locally.
- Older Friends can also learn many things from young people, experience with technology and a fresh perspective.
- Intergenerational learning.

#### **Community ownership**

- Understanding of where you are from and how the museum and its collections came to be.
- The value of involvement in local culture.
- Appreciation of the cultural and heritage sector.

#### **Socialising & skills**

- Meeting like minded people (regardless of age)
- Learning how to communicate with a wide demographic of people.
- Management skills by being an active member.
- How to use a museum collection for research.

Existing Friends can help instil a feeling of community ownership, and support a greater understanding of the work the Museum/Gallery and Friends group do for local culture and heritage. Active members can also benefit from developing communication, management and research skills.

### 3. Learning from International Young Friends

From my perspective it seems that Friends organisations internationally seem to have more confidence in approaching younger audiences and asking them directly what they want. Many Young Friends groups are run voluntarily by young people with a desire to drive the group, and for this reason they are very successful. They also maintained a very positive relationship with the wider Friends Group, as well as their museum/gallery and the World Federation of Friends of Museums.

Many of these Young Friends groups have only been started recently, but have a growing number of members. I believe this is in part down to having a willing member to start things off and promote the membership and their programming.

Many Museums and Friends organisations actively fund a young people programme. This investment and events attract the target audience, who then become advocates for new members, encouraging friends and colleagues to join.

Many of the Young Friends groups focus on art rather than local history, this seems to be more exciting/interesting to young people and more accessible as it is felt that art is easier to talk about with little or no previous knowledge. Internationally there seems to be more importance placed on volunteering and giving back to the community and a recognition of the benefits of volunteering to both the individual and the community.

The age of Young Friends groups seems to be wider, ranging from 11 – 40 years rather than in the UK, where young people are often classed under 24 years in the cultural & heritage sector.

#### Examples of programming from international Young Friends:

A majority of the examples listed involved opportunities for meeting new people and networking, doing new and fun activities, learning and doing something that felt exclusive.

Youth Panels were seen to provide an opportunity to gain skills and experience for CV's, and help the organisation in a meaningful way by potentially shaping the service.



*Guided Tour, Young Friends, World Federation of Friends of Museums, Verona, May 2017*

- Youth panel/initiative
- Conferences and seminars
- Late opening
- Parties
- Exciting activities
- Inventive activities
- Discounted events
- Guided tours
- Evening drinks



*World Federation of Friends of Museums, Verona Congress, May 2017*

### **Why is it important to encourage young people to join as Friends?**

Below are quotes from responses given by young people:

“Because museums are an important piece of our identity and we all must support them.”

“The importance of volunteering for the community life.”

“Most of the young people don't usually go to museums and do not participate in cultural activities especially because of institutional appearances. Our mission is to show them how a museum can be a place of sharing, meeting and comparing.”

“The museum is a friend, not an enemy!”

I believe it is clear that regardless of age, all Friends feel the same way: that Young People are the next generation of Friends, and early involvement will help to sustain membership in the future.

## 4. Recommendations

These recommendations are intended to give ideas to existing Friends groups of ways to encourage a younger generation of Friends to join. That being said, I do not intend to make Friends groups feel inferior for not having Young Friends. Each institution is different and unique, and members will be drawn to institutions because of the collections, the particular story it tells or simply because of the location and wanting to be a part of a voluntary group. In no way is the support that these Friends give undermined by the age of the members.

### **Make it easy to join and participate**

Many Friends organisations still ask for a cheque or cash to be sent to the membership secretary. Many young people will not own a cheque book, and will be put off by this request. Many will feel uncomfortable about sending money in the post to an unknown address. For this reason, bank transfer details or online payment such as paypal is recommended.

Many young people will be studying or working full time, this will mean they will be less likely to attend events in the day time. Make sure your event programme includes evenings and weekends and 'getting to know you' sessions so that young members can have an opportunity to attend, but also to get to know other members.

### **Marketing**

If you are offering a special membership for young people, marketing should be aimed at this audience. It should be fun and appealing and let young people know straight away that it is something for them.

Having an online presence will help to connect young people with the Friends. Using social media to connect with other organisations aimed at young people will help to make your group visible.

You could connect with local schools, colleges, youth groups and clubs such as Brownies, Scouts, The Duke of Edinburgh etc...

Promote Friends membership at Museum/Gallery events aimed at a younger audience. Let them know directly how they can get involved and the benefits of being a Friend.

Collaborate with schools and colleges, find out from teachers if they know of any students who might want to get involved. This could be a youth representative on the committee.

### **Networking**

Joining a Friends Group is an opportunity to meet new people from all walks of life with one connections, their support for their museum/gallery. People will join because they want to be a part of something and make a difference.

Friends groups should programme in plenty of opportunities for getting to know each other, as well as taking part in wider BAFM programming in order to connect with Friends from around the county.

Young People should have the opportunity to attend seminars and conferences on behalf of their Friends Group, but may need financial assistance to do so. Can the Friends help with travel costs? Can others attending offer lifts? Is there a discounted price for Young People?

Existing members can share their experience and knowledge with new members, ask questions of each other and start discussions around future proofing the Friends. Young People should be encouraged to put forward ideas, but should also be supported by the rest of the group to make them happen.

### **Skills Development**

Create a space for a Young Person on the committee, whether this be a member or a representative from a local youth organisation or school. It is important to have a range of voices on the committee. This also helps Young People to gain skills/experience for their CV or university/job applications.

Intergenerational learning is a fantastic way to learn from and pass on knowledge to young friends. Friends groups could organise development workshops where members can share their skills to the group, upskilling the whole group. This is particularly useful for digital skills, ensuring social media and website can be updated by many rather than relying on person.

Ask Young People what they want to get out of the Friends, you might be able to provide an opportunity. This should be asked of all new members, as hidden skills and passions could make a real difference to the promotion and growth of the Friends. For instance, is anyone a keen photographer? Writer? Computer whizz? A member might have a background in graphic design, marketing or public speaking? How could these skills and experiences be used to strengthen the Friends?

Ask your Young Members to share their skills with existing members, this is an opportunity to better get to know each other and make the Friends more resilient.

Support your new members so that they gain confidence to take on responsibilities as a Friend, eventually they will be mentoring new members for themselves.

Encourage Young members to write articles for the Journal. This is something they can show off and will mean a great deal to them. It also provides a different perspective.

### **Work with your Museum/Gallery**

The Museum/Gallery you support will have a range of staff with many different specialisms. What can you learn from them?

This relationship must always be maintained to ensure the Friends can properly support their organisation. Get to know their target audiences by speaking with the Audience Development Officer, or Marketing Team. This will give you tips of how to market the Friends to wider demographics.

Discover the collections, find out about recent acquisitions and help promote them. This is a great way of gaining interest in the Friends. You might even discover a new topic to inspire your events programme. Find out what needs conservation, is this a project your Friends can support.

Share your projects with them, get their support and make sure the Friends is being promoted in the building and online.

## 5. Summary

To conclude, through my research a series of recommendations have been put in place to provide existing Friends groups a starting point for diversifying their group and encouraging younger members.

There are small things that can be done that could have a positive impact on communicating to the community all the work that Friends groups can do, and crucially provide opportunities for participation and learning in younger people. The skills that can be developed through becoming an active member of a Friends group can help young people to start their careers in heritage and culture, and become the future of Friends of museums.

Perhaps most importantly, the relationship between the Museum/Gallery and the Friends needs to be nurtured. Communication is key, not only to be able to effectively work together, but to better understand the aims and objectives of each other, along with understanding each others target audiences. What projects are your Museums working on? What collections are in need of conservation? What can the Friends do to help? And too often Museum's forget to ask for help from the charities in place to support them.

## 6. Useful links

### **British Association of Friends of Museums**

<http://www.bafm.co.uk/>

### **Museums and me: Junction's top tips for engaging young people**

<https://www.theguardian.com/culture-professionals-network/culture-professionals-blog/2012/mar/13/museums-junction-engage-young-people>

### **Kids in Museums**

<https://www.keepandshare.com/doc/8192343/kim-tde2016-fs-schools-and-youth-groups-pdf-86k?da=y>

### **Young People At Home at the Geffrye**

<http://www.geffrye-museum.org.uk/Download.ashx?id=25293>