

Dr Fiona Dean

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# Engaging equalities in collections



A Museums & Galleries Scotland  
funded project  
*with*  
East Dunbartonshire Leisure and  
Culture Trust

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## Acknowledgements

At the core of this project was a shared concern to identify and engage with harder to reach individuals and groups, as well as histories that were identified as under-represented within East Dunbartonshire Leisure and Culture Trust's (EDLC) Archive, Museums and Local Studies Collections (AM&LSC). The importance presented by such a funded opportunity as this, in enabling dedicated time and focus to begin this process of making relations and gathering wider views to inform ways forward cannot be overstated and we are hugely thankful for this support. Special thanks are due to those individuals and groups for their time and trust in becoming involved and working with us: visiting, commenting, and feeding back on AM&LS Collections' materials, as well as inviting us to *their* spaces and communities to carry on conversations. All found ways not only of identifying and articulating Collections' gaps as they saw them but of donating and depositing something of *their* lives and work with us and in doing so, reinforced the value and potential of these new relations. These donations and what might grow from future work together now form a developing part of EDLC's Archive, Museums, and Local Studies Collections, highlighting their important role in ensuring representation of all its communities.

For privacy, while staff names are credited fully, only first names and second name initials of participants are used in the report, where possible/requested. Our sincere thanks - in order of involvement - go to: Participants Sana'a A F and Heba W with support of Alice Mackenzie, former East Dunbartonshire Council (EDC) Head Librarian, local friend and supporter<sup>1</sup> and Walid Hassan, East Dunbartonshire Council (EDC) Resettlement Officer; Participants GRACE Hillhead: David C, Catherine M, and Clare T, and GRACES' Pins and Needles Group members; GRACE Auchinairn: Gillian F and Susan V, both communities with the support of Robert Smith Founder/CEO GRACE as a hugely valued, active participant, organiser and critical friend throughout - thanks for keeping it real Robert; Bearsden Academy *Equalities and Justice* Group students - the

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<sup>1</sup> 'Librarian' is how Alice liked to be known. It was one of her many roles. She was an incredible force within EDC for the work she did locally and internationally, and her extensive support of others, especially women in achieving their full potential. Alice very sadly died late 2021.

amazing young people from S1 and S5/6 who attended AM&LS Collections events and fed back so honestly and passionately on equalities: Téa W; Gemma S; Sophia S; Rachel M; Logan J; Maya S; Safa G; Charlotte T; Bronwyn S; Annam S; Anna M. The wider members of the Group who contributed and those additionally involved in the Group's Purple Friday event, which led to their donation: Evie T; Oisín O; Layla H; Megan J; Kirstin M; Gemma J; Konstantina S; Ottavia P; Hannah W; Samuel D; MJ P; Olivia G. Bearsden Academy staff who supported throughout, in particular, George Cooper, Head Teacher; Alison Mcloy, Depute Head Teacher, and Tony McKeown, Principal Teacher Philosophy and Religious Studies who made the impossible possible throughout.

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## Introduction

### *Aims*

The aims and approach of the *Equalities in Collections* project were shaped and honed through participant, partner and team dialogue, and in response to initial, agreed concerns to focus this opportunity on asking questions of Collections: Who they were for? Who was engaged with them? What and whose stories were missing? How do we best reach those individuals, groups and communities recognised as under-represented? How do we work together to shape a process that responds to how those individuals, groups and communities might want to engage and share their views on Collections?

The need to forge new relations and ways of working was a main driver of this project, in terms of focus and approach. We recognised that while the Collections resource was clearly well used by some sections of the community, it was however, also understood that there were people locally who were not as engaged or well represented. In terms of Equalities, concerns were to reach individuals and groups who were connected with areas experiencing the most inequality. For example 'Place' areas such as Auchinairn and Hillhead; New Scots - individuals and families who for example, arrived as part of a re-settlement programme; those with a protected characteristic, including, Young people, as their voices too were recognised as absent.

Over the course of the project, some 36 new community members, and 7 associated staff from very different backgrounds and experiences were involved - from schools to re-settled communities and locally based grassroots projects. This included a core group of 18 visiting and engaging very directly with us and the Collections *in* our venues over the course of the project. A further 12 young people were actively involved as extended members of the School's *Equalities and Justice* Group<sup>2</sup> and from within Hillhead, during follow up meetings, we engaged directly with a further 6 community members. None of those we worked with had

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<sup>2</sup> The numbers of those able to visit was shaped by Covid restrictions, however, all were met with directly at different points.

visited Collections, (including the staff involved and only one community member said they had 'loosely' heard of them). While some - not all - had visited or knew about the Library, none were aware that this was also the venue where Archives and Local Studies (A&LS) were based. Similarly, none knew that Museums Collections were held in the nearby Auld Kirk Museum, or that there was public access either of these spaces.

This was who we wanted to focus our work with and ensure that learning from this project could support:

- Increased awareness, widened reach, access, use and understanding of Collections by those communities most under-represented and experiencing greatest inequality
- Strengthened connections with/within those communities and their increased representation with/in Collections materials
- Future Collections development cognisant and reflective of the potential of Collections to those communities, and a re-defining of relationships and ways of working together
- Increased connections, sharing and reflection between the Collections team

### ***Approach***

The approach was open and about building the trust necessary for people to want to be involved - many of whom noted that they had often felt excluded from or let down by processes of engagement. Our aims were that:

- with their support as *co-creators* of the project, questions could be asked of Collections in terms of purpose and relevance to a wider body of the community
- through this shared process and reflections on it, there would be potential to re-define how to reach and develop new and necessary relations to engage and shape what future working together might be

This is discussed and exemplified in more depth via three short case studies or stories of our work with different communities:

- *New Scots*, Syrian families re-settled in East Dunbartonshire
- *Place*, specifically an area based community group, where high levels of inequality were experienced
- *Young people*, a school based *Equalities and Justice Group*, advocating and awareness raising on wide ranging equalities issues

Throughout this project, time and trust have been the crux of relationship building to support wider involvement and help determine the kinds of interests and roles people might want and need. Ultimately, one of the aims of learning from this project was to support *legacy and learning*, including the potential of a Collections Development Policy. As well as considering how Collections material might proactively be developed - which this report aims to demonstrate through the outcomes of the relations and donations realised - learning also has relevance for audience development and engagement plans, specifically informing future ideas on Volunteers and their roles.

### ***Key areas of work and ethical considerations***

The project began in July 2021, and within these early stages, many communities and work places - including EDLC and Council offices - were still emerging and managing the impacts of Covid and its remaining restrictions to both daily life and services. Many of the potential relations initially identified that we hoped might offer contacts with individuals and groups were affected, and a number of local projects and venues were either closed or not fully functioning on-line or face to face. As such, as ideas and focus developed, we frequently re-shaped and re-honed our plans in response to the realities of these different situations.

Our process from July 2021 to June 2022, included the following:

1. Meetings with the Arts & Heritage Manager and Collections team (via teams) to share, develop and hone ideas - *what* we hoped to achieve, *how* we might do things, and *who* we might work with as potential partners
2. Meetings with identified EDC staff, in particular, those working within a ‘place approach’, such as Community Planning and Partnership (CPP) and Re-settlement<sup>3</sup>
3. Research into relevant practice-based examples of Collections and Equalities, researched together with the team, highlighting examples of projects such as North Lanarkshire Council’s Collections work around LGBTQ+<sup>4</sup>
4. Researching and reflecting on EDLC Collections’ materials, identifying gaps in representation as well as potential to link to identified local *Place* communities and equalities issues<sup>5</sup>
5. Introductory contact and communication with a range of identified community based partners and groups
6. Community Collections visits, preparation, facilitation and reflection, including photography, documentation and relevant permissions

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<sup>3</sup> See The Place Approach <https://www.eastdunbarton.gov.uk/place-approach>, working within areas that ‘experience the most inequality’ through a way of ‘working with communities’ that aims to move towards ‘making local people central to the process’.

<sup>4</sup> This was a particularly influential example of how Collections could be proactive in addressing issues of representation through engagement and Collections development. It pro-actively addressed issues of representation, as well as developed necessary relations. In this case working with schools. <https://www.culturenlmuseums.co.uk/story/invisible-lives-lgbt-culture-in-north-lanarkshire/>

<sup>5</sup> An idea of internal audit was initially raised to confirm the assessments of gaps. Through discussion, focus shifted from the idea of audit as an external act to how the act of engagement with wider communities could offer a vital and relevant form of ‘audit’ as the team reflected and researched their materials. The shift from external audit also suggested the potential of simple survey development, directed via partners to identified groups. As noted, many local groups were not operational at this point, however, the survey was devised and this enabled a process of question shaping together, as well as clarity in articulation of terminology and could have future potential for use as part of these new relations and partnerships. <https://www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/EDLC-Collections-survey>

7. Ongoing contact and relationship building with individuals and groups, including arranging donations, permissions and documentation for sharing
8. Reporting and sharing, including follow-up and feedback meetings with all taking part, finalising photographic documentation and sharing via Flickr.

### ***Ethical considerations***

As noted, trust was crucial and within this programme of work it was highlighted often to us that people sometimes felt they were asked to be involved when funding would come along for a specific reason or group. They'd find themselves the focus and then at the end, the relations and their value would end, with no sense of how things might go forward.

This feedback during these initial conversations was fully taken on board. We wanted to make sure that no one involved should feel they were taking part for any reason other than the value of their voice, knowledge and experience. This was what we wanted to listen to and understand. We spoke openly together about the longer term hopes of those taking part and what might happen beyond the life of this project. Their voices and ideas are firmly foregrounded in this report to help inform potential future relations and ways forward.

## **Stories: Building equalities in collections through engagement**

### **Introduction**

Our focus on re-settlement, place and broader equalities issues as well as our approach came about through reflection and honing of ideas and processes, as we quickly realised that often the more ‘formal’ routes to reach something or someone didn’t work. We hit many dead ends. One of the groups we eventually worked with outlined that ‘official’ routes were sometime regarded with caution. Some of our communication was not responded to, mostly as groups and individuals were not operating due to Covid or some contacts had left etc. The three communities we worked with all emerged through a process of reaching out and reaching out again until we made contact with those willing to meet and talk about what this project was hoping to do.

The preparatory research within Collections sharpened understanding of what was missing, not only in terms of Collection items but the kinds of information linked to some of the materials held. As we met and talked with communities who were active now, there was a greater sense of the importance of making connections between past and present, as well as considering how Collections materials themselves might be from ‘now’ and not only the ‘past’.

Sometimes, as some of the communities worked with observed, there were 100 year gaps in materials relating to local places, as well in relation to wider equalities issues. This wasn’t a criticism, just observations and a search for why that was and what could be done. As well as commentary on what was in Collections that seemed valuable and useful, what was missing was highlighted and what could or should be there in terms of representation of ‘now’. How in the future people wanted others to see and understand their communities and actions, all shaped direction.

The reality of all of our meetings and discussions was their incredible richness and generosity. It was a complex and often emotional sharing. None of it happened quickly - it took time - to find the right routes in

and to people, often through trusted links. Then, if folks were willing, talking together and trying to shape understanding of what this was and how things might work - if they could work.

There isn't scope here to offer all of this detail and so only a selection is possible to present something of the process; what we did together and what we learned from and with each other. Each story is presented slightly differently. Sometimes images of selected objects are shown with a brief, factual description alongside some voices in italics, paraphrased from notes taken on the day. Other times images are woven into and referred to within narratives, more reflective of the shifting focus of discussion. These voices are not designed as direct quotes nor are they assigned to any one person but rather aim to add some sense of the richness of observations.

One of the things this process led to was new Collections materials, donated to us as a direct consequence of these relations and these are also highlighted here.

## 1. Building Equalities in Collections

New Scots, Syrian families re-settling in East Dunbartonshire

Participants Sana A F and Heba W; initial contact partner Walid Hassan Re-settlement Officer; accompanying initial visit, Alice Mackenzie former Librarian EDC, friend to Sana'a and Heba (and many others on the team) and with Sana'a, a founding member of Jasmine and Thistle, supporting Syrian and Scottish connections

*When you document, the most important thing to be a New Scots here, is to be accepted*



Sana'a A F, Alice Mackenzie, & Fiona Dean outside William Patrick Library. Sana'a and Heba's first visit to Collections. Photo by and used in report with permission of Heba W.

## Background and initial meetings

Early on, as a team we agreed we wanted to make links with the Syrian community as we understood a number of new families had been re-homed within East Dunbartonshire. We recognised the strong history of migration within the area, with the canals offering channels to bigger rivers and oceans, however, that story was often of departure and not arrival, historic and not present. Working with EDC's Re-Settlement officer Walid Hassan, we were very fortunate to meet Sana'a A F and Heba W.

Early and initial meetings via teams with Walid allowed an outline of what the project was, (including what Collections were and where), and the desire to reach within the community to those not involved or represented in these Collections. Sana'a's family was suggested by Walid and he made initial contact to establish if there was interest in meeting. In a short space of time a zoom meeting was set up with Sana'a, Walid and myself. While we knew there were other Syrian families, Walid stressed that a wider reach was something that would be much slower and needed more time, possibly beyond the life of this project. The advice was to focus on one family. Sana'a had been involved in a project, *The Trojan Women* as well as with *Jasmine & Thistle*, and it was felt this offered a stronger basis of understanding for meeting and talking together.

I remember being excited to meet Sana'a but also thinking 'how will I explain what this project is?' I was concerned about language and its barriers. Conscious too that we had never met before and were about to do so for the first time via zoom, where I was trying to talk about a process that we wanted to shape together, so didn't know exactly what it would be, or how we would do it. Sana'a immediately understood. For Sana'a, the representation of New Scots, as she referred to herself and family was important and she agreed to meet again and send some links to other projects she had been involved with, including *Jasmine and Thistle* and *The Trojan Women*<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>6</sup> <https://www.culturesummit.com/people/sanaa-al-froukh/> and <https://www.arabnews.com/node/1736326/lifestyle>

Our next meeting was in person at the Town Hall, with Arts & Heritage Manager, Esmee Thompson-Smith. I was very mindful of something Sana'a had said when we first spoke, about '*wanting to focus on normal life*' and so when we met, we talked about what was *here* and *now*; what we might do together to look at representation; how we might record history as it happens, or as close to it happening so it doesn't get lost; what this might offer to others.

Sana'a shared her interests in Women's histories - lives, struggles, education, rights and work; Scottish crafts and parallels with traditional processes used by Syrian women; places, histories, beliefs, food, gardens, music. All formed the basis of the team's research and drawing together of a huge range of materials from across all three Collections. Our work with Sana'a and Heba - who we met through Sana'a - began early in the project and ran through to June 2022.

## The Collections visit

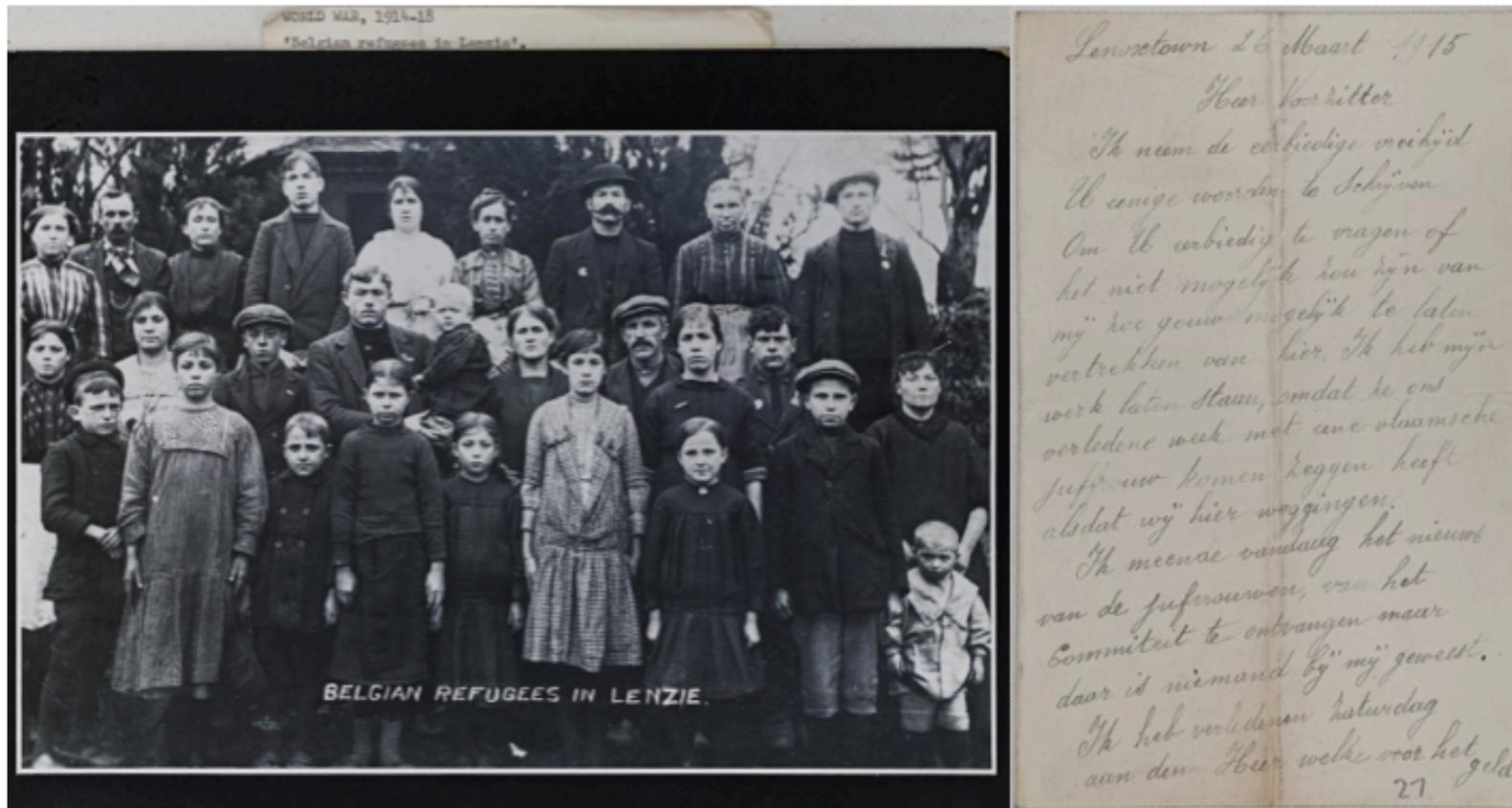
*The historical aspects - to see how people were living it helps a lot to know more about the culture - you want to find things that make you feel the same or are more familiar [...] to feel you can live here [...] you need to know about the place its history.*

The full items we looked at together during the visit form part of a planned on-line Flickr sharing by East Dunbartonshire Heritage and Arts. There are too many to illustrate here, however, of important note is the cross-over between Collections that happened and the wide range of materials identified. From Belgian refugees to teachers, women in leadership roles, workers in industries, official records and everyday social documents, objects, journals and diaries - all were laid out to reflect the history of the area and its people.

What was highlighted during discussions as *missing* was a lack of stories: who were the people in these historical, often nameless photographs of workers or historical family portraits? What were their everyday lives like? The objects, images and items still had a power but there was a desire for detail and stories in people's own words that seemed missing from the life of many of these objects and images.

Amongst the many items we looked and talked about together, four are highlighted here. All form part of a selection by Sana'a and Heba made during a further visit to Collections, where we looked together again at images of all the materials and reflected on what they felt was most important and poignant. The anticipation was that this selected curation by Sana'a and Heba could support a future idea of exhibition, beyond the life of this project, where physical objects from Collections, visual documentation of Sana'a and Heba's donations alongside their *own* words and descriptions would be possible. This forms part of notes on ways forward that reference each project, and which try to lay out immediate and longer term ideas for further relations and their development.

## 1. Belgian refugees photograph and letter



- These images form part of records of Belgian families displaced by war in their home country who came to East Dunbartonshire in 1914. Most returned to Belgium after the war ended in 1918. The small but important range of items in the Archive are mainly an 'official' record with only one photograph, and one letter in their own words.

*To hear something from the people who were the story is very important, I carry that in my mind from today [...] it's a really really important thing to do and now, with you, we might do something for that.*

*I love the photo of the Belgian people and the letter written. I appreciate it's really important to keep something from them because they were part of this community, it's important to document your being part of a community. To write or do something, it's important.*

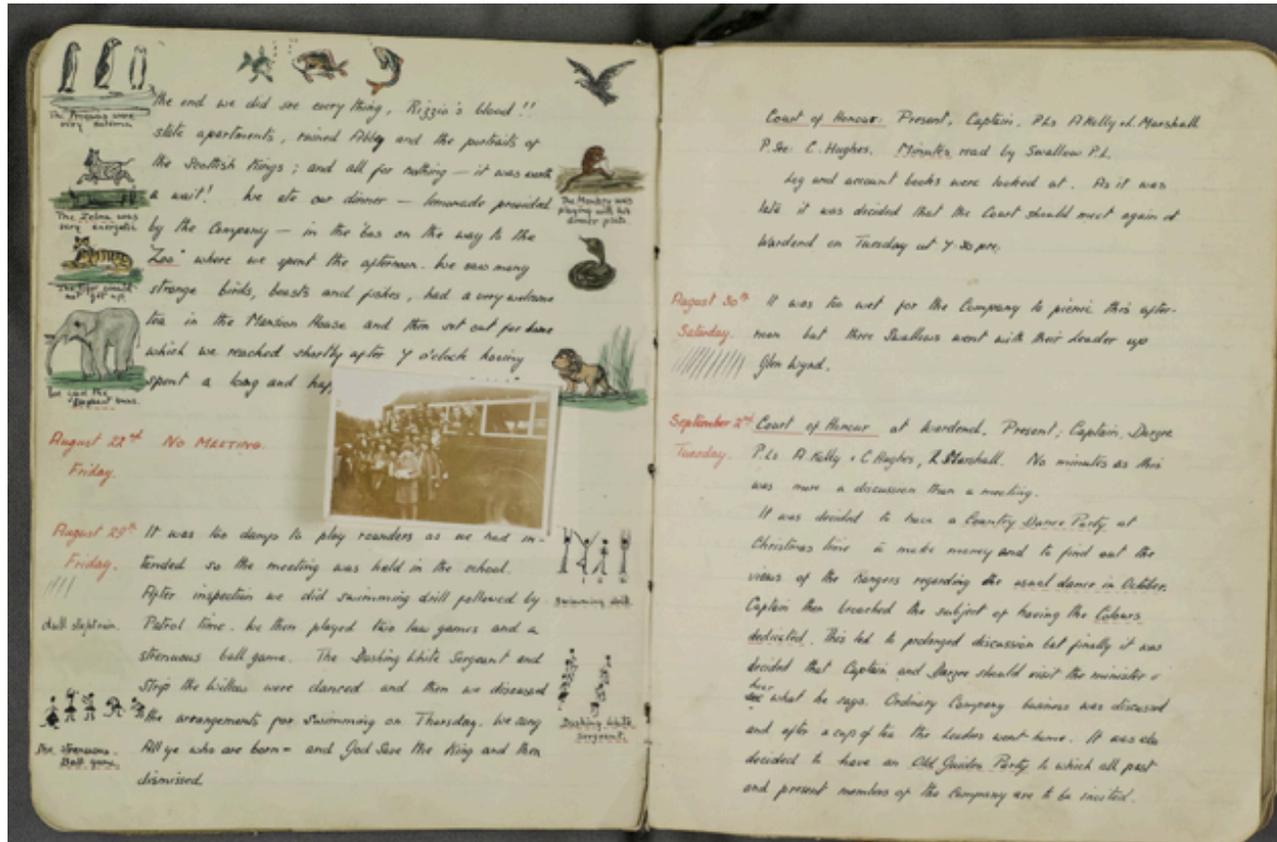


The news-cutting about Sana'a and Heba was 'discovered' during the research for Sana'a and Heba's visit and was selected by Gillian Kealey (Local Studies Collections Officer), and purposefully set within a wider range of selected articles on East Dunbartonshire women and their contributions and achievements, including those of Alice Mackenzie and Rita Cowan. This is discussed more under reflections.

Images, from left to right:

- Alice Mackenzie – One of a selection of newspaper articles on Alice Mackenzie and her work over the years. Including her humanitarian work with Romanian children, her library career and her community involvement over many decades.
- Sana'a and Heba – Newspaper article on the *Trojan Women* project with a photograph and interview with Sana'a and Heba.
- Newspaper and magazine cuttings on Rita and Masataka's marriage, family life and work. Rita Cowan was the daughter of a Kirkintilloch doctor and his wife. When Rita's father died, they took in a lodger, 24 year old Masataka Taketsuru from Japan. In April 1920 the two were married in Glasgow then moved to Japan. Rita's story is one of leaving her home country and family to move to a completely different place where, in many parts of her life, she adopted the culture and traditions of her new country.

### 3. Miss Pirie notebooks - Log Book 4 1930



Everything has a history, even little children have a history, so when you see a historical thing it lets you wake up [...] I liked these diaries a lot - how they documented every little thing - the dance, how they visit the zoo, every little detail - sometimes you feel in daily life, you feel these are little things, why do I need to document them but here they become history and they preserve their lives back then.

- Miss Pirie, log books. An extensive social document of hand written notes, photographs and drawings that show the activities of girls and young women in the 1920s and 1930s as part of the Torrance Girl Guides. The log books are not an 'official document' but a very personal diarising of activities, and everyday images that show young people as they grew up, amongst friends, family, dogs, picnics, away days, country dances, traditional games, a visit to Edinburgh Zoo with drawings of the animals. The impact of War is also documented.

#### 4. The Buchanan Family records



*The teacher and the Belgian people moved me and gave me an idea to the future [...] even back then, someone appreciated their existence and documented their letters, their lives, their existence.*

*I was fascinated with this teacher - her lifestyle was simple - only to teach children - I love how she was as a mother with the children.*

- This photo of Maggie Buchanan with her school children, is part of the family records of a local family living in the same village as some participants. What's unusual is this is a family record that shows what life was like in East Dunbartonshire at a particular time. Maggie was a teacher and headmistress at the village school for 50 years. She never married, and if she had, at that time, she would have had to give up her vocation to teaching.

## Reflections

What was so poignant about the visit was not only Sana'a and Heba's focus, responses and questions but the unexpected emotional sharing of experience - this was the case for all of us. Sometimes as one of the team noted, we are so familiar with our Collections that they lose some of their power for us. These other perspectives and what resonated and why, allows the unexpected and shows how Collections can connect with people's lives, and support a sharing of experience. It brings the power back in new ways and refreshes the potential in how we might see and understand these objects, images, and writings.

We all talked about what was missing - what more we would want to know about the lives of those Belgian refugees that wasn't officially recorded and the importance of the one piece of writing in someone's own hand and words. What might those families have wanted to tell us about their lives, in their words that they never got the chance to do?

Everyday objects - sometimes only guessed at as there was no information on them - like, what was agreed was possibly a small wooden butter mould was suddenly reminiscent of Syrian sweets. Richly described in all their beauty of ingredients and taste, it showed that these connections may be unexpected ones but can give rise to a sense of familiarity. Or with the annotated log books, what emerged as important was the value again of what seemed like small things in life that we can let go unnoticed. These books instil a value on the everyday through their careful writing and drawings and commitment to almost daily journaling (Appendix 1 Items 1-3).

The teacher who dedicated her life to education and a commitment to others resonated with new perspectives on what it means to direct your life, not just for your own sake but for others that you care for. The images of Rita that were shared moved from traditional Japanese dress to very Western, contemporary images, and the different sense of identities portrayed was an important observation (Appendix 1 Item 4). It showed that lives may seem very different but there was a shared understanding of being in a new, sometimes strange place and

having to integrate. It led us to a book recommended by Sana'a and Heba by an Arabic writer, Amin Maalouf on identity and fractured identities. Rita it was suggested showed this re-writing of cultures and in her photos while she looked at home in the landscape, she seemed at the same time isolated.

There were many other observations: the camaraderie of the images of women working, even in their more formal poses, the sense of friendship was felt. A photograph of a worker with head scarf at the Lilyburn Pulp Works in Milton of Campsie and the aprons worn by women in the Vindanda Laundry, caused discussions on links between clothing choices and Syrian women (Appendix 1 Items 5-6).

As an added but important aside, while looking through materials, found in a 'news-cuttings (unsorted)' box, was the photocopy shown here, of a piece from the Evening Times 2019 on the *Trojan Women*. Sana'a and Heba were there already in the Local Studies Collection still to be 'sorted'. Amongst other stories of local women such as Alice and Rita, the *find* (now re-catalogued), illustrated that Sana'a and Heba and what they have done and are doing, already formed part of East Dunbartonshire's local history, preserved alongside others.

The visit was a movement between the different Collections that emphasised the connections between them and that is important too in terms of working and sharing together. But most impactful was the potential of objects, artefacts and associated ephemera to orientate and connect the present with and to the past and the value of that in helping to find your place within a new community.

## **Sana'a and Heba's donations**

These notes on the objects Sana'a and Heba wanted to share with us were made during the last meetings for this project with Sana'a and Heba in late May/early June 2022. We wanted to meet to talk about the objects rather than do by email or zoom, and also to discuss what they both saw as the legacy of this project. This is discussed in the last section of the report.

The items were Sana'a and Heba's idea - nothing like this had been anticipated. After the Collections visit, Sana'a and Heba wrote with an idea of these objects and wanting to show and share. On the day we met again to look at the Collections items images together, they brought the items with them and we arranged for Paul Monaghan to photograph. The objects remain with and belong to Sana's and Heba. All of the items show concern with identity and the power of objects to convey this, something that was clear from our meetings together and discussions and responses to Collections objects.

The portrait images and those of the objects are used here with Sana'a and Heba's permission. This permission is specifically given for donation within Collections and access within these, as well as for this report, and any planned, related exhibition on the MGS funded *Engaging Equalities in Collections* project. Through discussion together on different uses, they have asked that these portraits are not used for any other purpose, on-line or social media and any such additional purpose would require a specific request to Sana'a and Heba.

These have been shared with us in photographic form as their chosen donation to Collections, located now within Local Studies Collection as part of the record of this project and those who took part. Their written permissions agreement is within Local Studies Collections.

## The Flag

*The flag will be something to pass on. We will wear it when we graduate. It is part of our identity and we are very proud of this.*



- The flag was a gift from one of Sana'a's Syrian friends. It was made for Sana'a to wear when she graduated. It's the 'old' flag of Syria, and the number of stars and colours are different - this has 3 stars. When Sana'a and Heba graduate here, they plan to wear the flag on their shoulders.

Images used with permission of Sana'a and Heba for this report. All other permissions for use as per written agreement with Sana'a and Heba.

**Flag (detail of star).**



## Mosaic platter, box and carved/painted wooden object

*All of these objects reflect something of Syria, and its handicraft [...] all of these objects are about our culture.*



*The box is from Damascus and a way of making that Syria is very famous for. Again this is an object that will be passed from generation to generation - the mosaic - all of these objects, these are about our culture and we want to pass always to our children to keep in contact with their identity.*

## 2. Building equalities in collections

GRACE badge and logo. Image Paul Monaghan

GRACE, Place based community enterprise organisation working across East Dunbartonshire, and directly within Hillhead and Auchinairn

Participants GRACE Hillhead: David C, Catherine M, Clare T, and 6 members of GRACE's Pins and Needles Group

GRACE Auchinairn: Gillian F and Susan V. Both communities with the support of Robert Smith Founder/CEO GRACE



*I didn't know this was here. That you can just come in? You don't need a reason?*

*You look at this past and nothing now, and you see the value of the history, your history. I think folks would feel proud to be part of that, especially for wee ones, schools. See themselves as part of history.*

## **Background and initial meetings**

GRACE - Group Recovery Aftercare Community Enterprise - is a local organisation based directly in Hillead and Auchinairn, two East Dunbartonshire communities facing some of the greatest inequality. GRACE specifically provides recovery after-care for people who have experienced bereavement, ill health, loneliness and isolation, mental health issues and homelessness and also those who are settled in recovery from addiction to alcohol, drugs or gambling.

Both communities have a strong history, and organisations such as GRACE provide rich programmes of work for community involvement. Having visited Hillead Community Centre and seen first hand the range of activity and interests that GRACE supports people to be part of, from walking to yoga, creative activities, fitness, gardening, the huge sense of local trust and engagement is palpable.

As a team, we had spent initial time looking for ways 'into' Hillhead via more 'formal' partner routes, however as noted there were Covid impacts at the time. We had thought about taking Collections materials *out* to Hillhead rather than asking people to come *into* Collections. However, we were very aware that without links and connections, this kind of 'in' reach made little sense and past experience with the team had shown that few people turn up to events they know little about or feel no investment in - why would they?

We began to email directly into the community and GRACE - who had continued operation throughout the pandemic - responded to the project's concerns about lack of representation of communities such as Hillhead and Auchinairn within Collections and agreed to talk more. Our first conversation was by telephone. I managed to catch Robert Smith founding member and CEO as he was rushing from one location to another. Robert, as he has continued to be, was open and direct, and throughout has offered feedback and direction on pace and potential. As with Walid, his advice was to go slow, take time, little steps; people had to understand and trust the process - this was all very new in terms of venues as well as what Collections were.

Robert saw clear potential for the community and also the barriers - of language and location - even the word Collections would need a lot of explanation and the venue of a library was not many people's first choice. We also spoke openly about the sense of people being 'connected with' for a one off project and then the link doesn't sustain. The importance of this understanding has been at the centre of all the steps we have taken with individuals and groups we have worked with and within this report, the need for openness, time, and trust is amongst the foremost learning.

Robert proposed a next step where he spoke to members, letting folks know a bit about the project, gauging who might be interested and suggested again that we go slowly - it might lead to something, it might not. Importantly, building towards coming to Hillhead and into the community where people may feel less vulnerable was something to aim for. In the end we arranged two visits to Collections for 5 community members from Hillhead and Auchinairn, who were willing to come and meet. There was one follow up visit by two team members and myself to Hillhead, involving another 6 community members within Pins and Needles, GRACE's knitting and sewing group<sup>7</sup>, focused on using 'life skills of the past for the future ahead'. Another by myself, meeting specifically with Robert to reflect on experience and talk about hopes and ways forward together.

Without Robert's support, it is very likely we would never have made these important in-roads. How this immediate and longer potential is to be managed and taken care of is important to discuss and plan, and a range of other potentially important satellite connections and links with Collections have emerged as a consequence of working together on this project. Some ideas on this potential and ways forward are discussed more in the concluding section.

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<sup>7</sup> The numbers dropped in and out as different members from other places popped by, however a core of 6 are noted here, one Catherine, we had met during her earlier visit to Collections.

## **The Collections visit**

With both groups - as with Sana'a and Heba - their first visit started over tea and coffee, finding out who we all were. One member had heard about Collections but had never visited. The others had never heard of any of the three Collection areas; they didn't know what or where they were, how accessed (or that you could access) or that much of the materials are made up of donations and they had a desire to know how this happened. Even the library, despite its many activities and programmes, was not a venue that was much visited.

The discussion over Collections material was informal, rich and lively, from long forgotten football teams, lost mansions, industries and schools, to maps and images of changing landscapes from rural to urban. What was highlighted was missing stories and those that were felt should be told, especially of the social - people - famous annual away days, and landmarks that had disappeared.

The full items we looked at together during the visit, again will form part of an on-line sharing and a selection are contained in Appendix 1 Items 7-15. The important potential of cross-over between the different Collections was even stronger in the materials researched and presented for the communities of Auchinairn and Hillhead. There was more limited material from within Archives, however, across the 3 areas, what was drawn together was poignant in that it firmly and pronouncedly highlighted significant things from the past that community members often had no idea of and the volume of this material was noted as 'exciting'. No one had 'expected so much to be there'. There was, however, lots felt to be missing, most observing that it was like "100 years have stopped". The following selection of some of the discussion we had together offers some insight to the questions raised and potential for future development - for the team, exploring and making their own connections and the value of this for a community in terms of engagement.

## Reflections

The need for *social stories* was amongst the most strongly felt observation of what was missing. Looking at photos of Auchinairn and Hillhead children from the 1950s (Appendix 1 Image 11), the sense was:

*There's nothing of now. It's like 100 years have stopped. It's too far back for reminiscing.*

*What about the annual away days, the shows, the weddings, you need stories?*

*The Hillhead Annual, we had a piper, remember? He piped you on to the bus, 100s of kids to Ayr and Burnt island, you should come and see us, meet folks, listen to them, have a cuppa, ask about the trips the shows, the social side.*

Looking at the mass of images and maps of *Housing* showing structural and historical developments and changes, the group struggled to locate their experience or communities on any maps or in relation to the past; nothing of the social side of housing or life as they knew it in Hillhead and Auchinairn was there (Appendix 1 Items 7, 10). This necessitated a physical and questioning movement between Archives, Museum and Local studies materials to try and fill in gaps.

Fragments of newspaper cuttings around the Community centre sparked discussion around *the old community centre* (not the new one) and is of note here - changes that take place that communities can sometimes feel distanced from; heavily consulted with, yet not feeling listened to. Even though understanding and agreeing that the building had required care and attention, many had wanted to keep the old building - there were so many stories around it that were more and more distant:

*Wasn't it built to house POWs, Germans and Italians? Do we know anything more? Was it a barracks or a hospital?*

Someone had a memory of a model railway in it:

*Is there a photo of the hall of the railway? It was used for weddings - are there family photos?*

Photographic images of Hillhead Rovers football team perhaps drew the biggest surprise<sup>8</sup> (Appendix 1 Item 12).

*We had a football team? Must've been a big population to support? Massive. Where did they play? Does anyone maybe know anyone who played? Wonder what the crowds and following was, where would hold that many people?*

Similarly, the many panoramic images of the Bings - remnants of Coal mining in the area - set within empty landscapes came to life through discussion (Appendix 1 item 13):

*We played on this! I remember it spontaneously combusted - do you remember? Puffs of smoke would come out, Queenzieburn bing there would be puffs of smoke and sparks would come out, do you all remember?*

As everyone spoke and recollected, it felt like the black and white images suddenly were being seen and described in Technicolor. As the group looked between Collections items, an undated Local Studies photograph - possibly of an early 20th Century family whose children had high, school attendance records was found. It was immediately connected to earlier objects they'd looked at - an actual attendance and Dux medal held in Museum Collections that now, on further exploration was not connected to the same family in the photograph as had been hoped (Appendix 1 Item 14).

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<sup>8</sup> At the Pins and Needles meeting, this image of the football team also triggered wide reaching discussion.

*I thought this might be the same people as got the medal? Why would you not have their photos? Maybe someone has them?*

*You have this from way back then? How do they get here? Medals for attendance and a dux? Amazing [...] could you maybe do more with schools? Find out about now? Do they still have a dux?*

Similarly, a small 1935 Local Studies image of a sketch by Winifred Campbell, demonstrated how the Collections material generated more and more questions, and the potential value of connections between them in seeking out answers (Appendix 1 Item 15):

*Was this an artist from Auchinairn? Were they famous? What was Loch cottage, why would they draw that I wonder? Is that a real drawing or a photograph?*

The potential that this artist might also be somewhere in Museum Collections was a possibility considered and again emphasised how, for example, a Local Studies image could spark an unknown link to a possible Museums item or Archive deposit and offered a possible next step in researching and taking back to each community. Another very pronounced observation was of the many photographs and postcards of the canal and Hillhead basin (Appendix 1 Items 8, 9).

*This is the original basin, you wouldn't know it would you, its history seems ignored. Was there tourism there? I'm thinking because of the volume of people moving around there must've been?*

*There's just not a lot about Hillhead is there? It seems to be all about this part here and nothing above it? How did Hillhead and Auchinairn end up how they are? All the landmarks lost or ignored?*

It was clear that these objects and images were interesting, sparking discussion and conversation and exchange and so many questions to explore. Fundamentally though, they were stuck - back in another time; missing stories attached to them and without these, the sense was that the materials didn't reflect the social side of the community and the connections between people living back then and now was either lost or harder to imagine because of this. As with Sana'a and Heba it was clear that the value of what seemed like small things in life was important and yet for these two communities, the thread of history seemed to stop and lock into a past that was rich but also reinforced for many that so much was disappearing from these areas that hadn't been recorded.

### **GRACE donations and associated items**

The objects shown here were given to the Collections team on our subsequent visit to GRACE in Hillhead where we met with the *Pins and Needles* group as part of a follow up visit<sup>9</sup>. Robert had gathered flyers and pin badges to represent GRACE as part of the Collections. On the day of the visit, the group was having a sale of work they made to support their material costs for the sessions and a small knitted baby's cardigan was purchased by and for the Museums Collections.

This was an impromptu addition to the Collection that hadn't been anticipated and only came about through the serendipity of the visit and who Robert had arranged for us to meet. The flyers and pin badge were also unexpectedly donated, along with jewellery and a needlework book, all giving a sense of the range of activity within GRACE. Cookery books were also gratefully accepted and while not taken into Collections, now form part of Museum handling objects accredited to GRACE.

This was an unexpected and important step, as the materials donation from GRACE was instigated by GRACE in response to their visit and initial reflection on what GRACE had to share - how they might be represented

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<sup>9</sup> This is discussed further under ways forward

in Collections and how that representation might grow through time. The understanding that grew from the visit was that history starts now. Everything that someone does, no matter how small it might seem has value for those in the future looking back in order to learn and understand. Seeing these gaps in Collections about their community, and the knowledge of donations and how these might happen, led directly to this important beginning. Each development such as this, opens potential for new dialogue. For example, the location of these materials in Museums Collections and understanding of how these will be presented and accessed offered a next stage opportunity for further discussion with GRACE about the nature of accession: what is meant by associated items, or handling materials, and how donations are shared, accessed and conserved, including thinking about the sustainability of materials and their conservation.

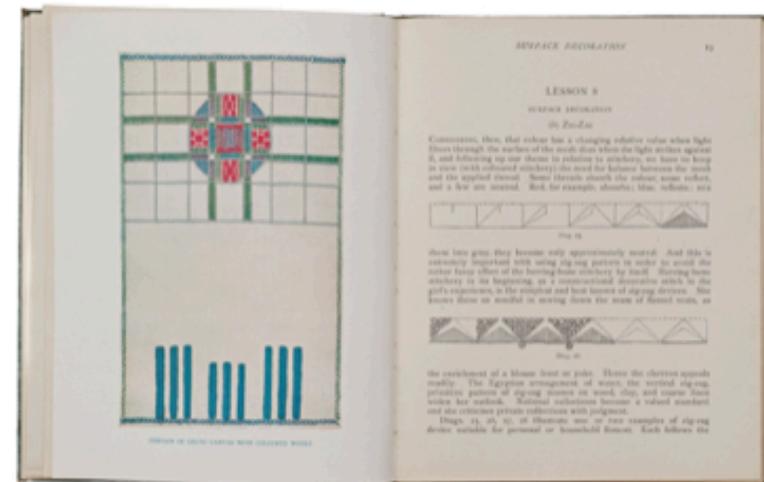
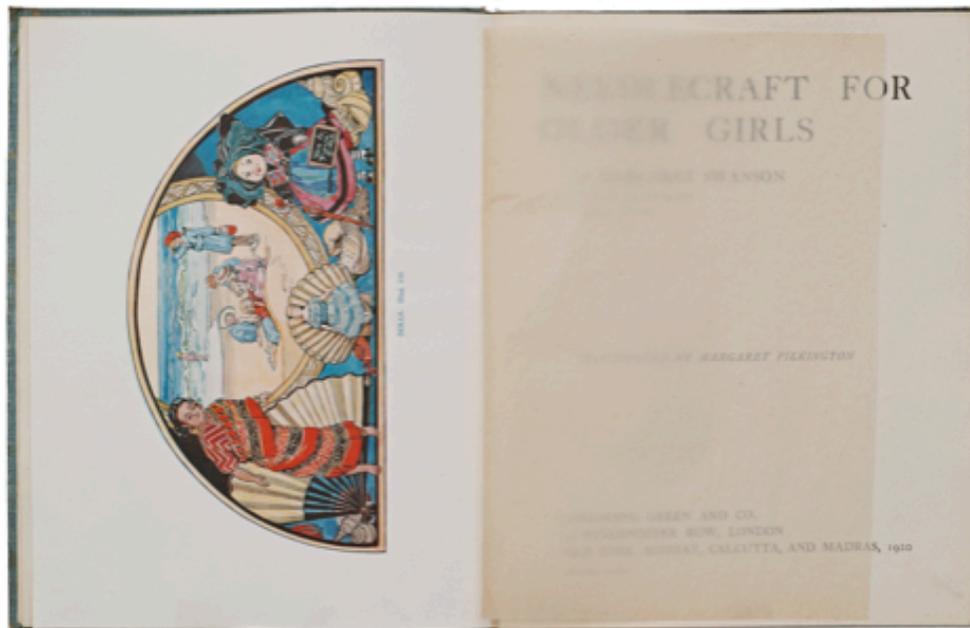
1. Pins and Needles, hand knitted baby's cardigan and 2 associated flyers



## 2. GRACE session flyers x 8 and 1 pin badge



### 3. Needlework for older girls, 1920, book donated by Pins and Needles Group, part of associated material



#### 4. Selection of hand made jewellery, GRACE Creative production sessions



**5. Cookery books x 2 used by GRACE members, deposited within Museum handling objects**



### 3. Building equalities in collections

Young people: school based *Equalities and Justice Group*

Participants visiting Collections:

Téa W; Gemma S; Sophia S; Rachel M; Logan J;  
Maya S; Safa G; Charlotte T; Bronwyn S; Annam S;  
Anna M.

Participating wider members of the Group:

Evie T; Oisín O; Layla H; Megan J; Kirstin M;  
Gemma J; Konstantina S; Ottavia P; Hannah W;  
Samuel D; MJ P; Olivia G.

Bearsden Academy staff: Accompanying and  
facilitating, Tony McKeown, Principal Teacher  
Philosophy and Religious Studies. Additional  
support and advice, George Cooper, Head Teacher;  
Alison Mcloy, Depute Head Teacher.



Equalities and Justice Group badge and logo  
designed by group member, Ottavia P.

## Background and initial meetings

When we set out to work with young people, initial contact had been aimed for with East Dunbartonshire's LGBTQ Youth Group. From research and one of the team's experience, there had been previous links and there was knowledge of a Purple Friday event held by the group at the Town hall in 2019. However, the links we had and followed didn't enable contact and again it was unclear whether the group's operation had been affected by COVID.

At this point, Schools were returning and approaches were made internally to identify EDC's Development Officer (Equalities). Again, from our research, we understood that North Lanarkshire Council had used this initial route in developing their LGBTQ+ Collections. However, there was no equivalent contact at this time<sup>10</sup>. We were very conscious that there could be many factors affecting young people's potential to be involved and without a facilitating and mediating contact for advice and support, we decided against an open call out and instead approached a School that had been involved in previous Arts and Heritage projects. Through their guidance and support, an *Equalities and Justice Group* within Bearsden Academy was highlighted as a potential way to engage with young people around a broad range of Equalities issues that the group themselves were researching and developing advocacy around.

After initial discussion with the Deputy Head Teacher, follow up contact was made with Tony McKeown, Principal Teacher Philosophy and Religious Studies who was working most closely with the group. Our initial meeting was via zoom. Tony was enthusiastic about the project's potential for the Group and explained the wide ranging research and advocacy work the group were undertaking and the kinds of impacts it was having.

Later, the students explained that the group started 6 years ago informally, however, the past 2 years had been most active. The students ascribed this directly as a consequence of COVID, and the restructuring of lunch

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<sup>10</sup> It's understood that this post has now been re-appointed.

breaks (when the group met), which meant that others were able to join at different times. A greater mix beyond the initial group of friends developed, with its work supported by the School. *This came from students*, asking for this to happen, and wanting to ensure everything was being done to be inclusive.

*It grew arms and legs, looking at articles from around the world, disabilities - visible and non visible - mental health issues - the work is varied and has gotten more varied as it's progressed.*

Tony suggested he would firstly meet with the Group, gauge their interest in the project and our hopes that they would work with us to question Collections' materials in relation to Equalities. In particular, how well they felt Collections represented the many issues that the Group were engaging with, and if and how they might support development.

We were very conscious that this route did not necessarily mean we were working directly with anyone identifying with a protected characteristic, and also that the school itself was not in any of the PLACE based areas we aimed to focus on. However, the work of the young people was about critical advocacy for equalities, inclusion, and access, as well as active campaigning work that was calling to question issues of representation. In their direct engagement with us, they took the responsibility of this questioning very seriously, and were open and honest in their critical feedback on Collections materials.

Confirming their interest to be involved, A next stage meeting was planned. As we were still operating under lighter COVID restrictions, an on-line meeting was offered, however, there was unanimous and overwhelming feedback from the students that a visit was preferred and a lot of excitement after two long years of limitations on travel to use this opportunity to fully engage with us off-site from the school. The support and planning of the students in nominating and selecting who could attend, and the school in arranging permissions and staff cover, was incredible. In the end, two highly focused and prepared groups of six were arranged, with Tony also freed up to work with us all day.

As had been the case with almost all others involved with us to that point, none of the young people we worked with knew about Collections, what they were, where they were or that within their local catchment library there were specific Collections materials relating to their part of the local authority.

## **The Collections visit**

After a brief introduction to Collections - what they are and what the team do - we spoke about our aims in working with them to bring their expanded focus on equalities - LGBTQ+, visible and hidden disabilities, women's rights and health, amongst many other important concerns - to question these Collections. We also gave background to who we had worked with so far; the ways we were trying to engage with very different groups, and the importance of their voice to a re-examination of these materials.

Leadership roles of women, women's rights and votes, protest, radicals, approaches to mental health, specialist mental health hospitals and the kinds of treatment they developed, were all laid out. We knew the materials were mostly historic, with a modest number of items - predominantly Local Studies materials - addressing more current equalities representation via authors, books and newspaper cuttings focusing on



LGBTQ+, some of which had been actively researched and brought into Collections as a consequence of research for this visit. Just by agreeing to be here the group had already challenged everyone to re-direct thinking about materials - already the group were having an impact. Our hopes in working together were that their activism, knowledge and awareness, would allow more questions to be asked, in particular, in relation to more current equalities issues. What was missing? Was this historical material useful in setting a context? Could it be helpful to the group's work going forward.

The structure of the day was supported by Tony who had a clearer sense of what the group were used to and how they worked. We followed advice on how long to look, talk, rest and at Tony's suggestion we started work right away - the students were ready. They were given time to engage critically on their own, observing with a completely fresh eye, no grounding other than what was there in front of them, and a desire to give their response to it.

From materials on conscientious objectors, WW1 refugees, women's roles, parish relief records showing levels of poverty and artefacts made by disabled soldiers, the students read, photographed and made notes. After a short break - the students were in a bubble, and so we were able to keep everyone together as a group - Tony and I sat with them to hear their initial thoughts and feedback before we gathered with the wider team.

## **Reflections**

The feedback from the group was highly constructive, critical and direct and they followed up in writing after some further reflection. These notes are attached in Appendix 2. Their observations focused strongly on questioning the kinds of representation that existed historically and evidenced in the material laid out. These were it seemed, second-hand accounts of people's experience and overall their sense was that these representations were mostly 'negative'. For example the early story of Petticoat Dan was highlighted; a resident or 'worthy character' of East Dunbartonshire who was never directly described in terms of their disabilities, but was explicit in the imagery, terminology and language of a very different time (Appendix 1

Items 16, 17). Some of the older, accompanying notes that sat with other items (not the current teams' notes ) also echoed another time. The painted coffee cup 'by an arm-less patient of Broomhill Home [...] who works by holding the brush with his toes' was a descriptor picked up on by the group (Appendix 1 Item 18). The team had selected these objects and been very conscious of these questions and representations. The group didn't only reinforce the observations, they added to them. Reflecting on the value of history:

*Where were the positive representations from now, as well as historically? These other stories have to be shared to achieved a balance - one of positive representation and contributions that countered the more negative, historic forms and language?*

More so, it was not only more contemporary representations that were needed, but:

*Historically too, another balance could be achieved in how they were presented for interpretation - understanding what equalities stories were attached to those people who could afford health and those who had to take what was there?*

While this wasn't an interpretative exercise on the part of the team it raised important ideas of how this material might be used to advocate for change through its critical questioning. The array of more contemporary writers and books with local connections written by people of colour and identifying as LGBTQ+ were noted as important. However, diversity was also limited in their view. Again, the group not only reinforced team observations but in their reflections added:

*More role models of people of colour are needed to strengthen representation of what is missing but these should be stories not only written by those who identify with protected characteristics, but autobiographical writing and personal stories of lived experience.*

This idea was of perspectives often being the experience of an 'other', and this needing to be challenged not only by who is writing the story, but the focus of the story itself, the voices and stories of lived experience.

There were two important questions asked by the group about the process of collecting, one of which had been asked previously during GRACE's visit.

*How do Collections happen? Where do they come from?*

In considering the response to this, where items might come to Collections from someone donating, often but not always for example, someone managing the effects of a family member, thoughts were *did it have to be reactive or could it be proactive?*

Further curiosity was in:

*How many visited Collections, and asked about equalities? What did people come to look at?*

The response of supporting people to research and find out about areas such as family history, burial registers, home history, and independent research, also raised a question from the group - a wondering - of *why was that the focus?* Inviting discussion and thinking about how and what you might add to that focus.

We talked together about their thoughts for 100 years from now - or even 1 or 5 or 10 - *what should Collections tell you about equalities?*

There was unanimous observation of the need for broader representation of race, and inclusion of other ethnicities. Those with protected characteristics had representation as they recognised (Appendix 1 Item 22), but in terms of race, those voices were *still mostly white, and were not the voices of those identifying for example, as trans or non-binary. These voices had to be represented too.* In terms of religious representation, the Jewish resource material was noted. Again, it was asked where the representation of Jewish faith was more specifically to local communities, alongside *those of other religions, Sikh, Hindu, Muslim, Buddhist?*

The idea of a proactive collection practice was talked about in relation to what the group and other young people were involved in: climate marches; COP 26; LGBTQ charters; plans for Purple Friday events, but they also raised ideas around the potential of re-presenting what is there now in Collections through how questions are asked of the materials. *What is this Collection not saying about its diverse communities?* That seemed really to be the crux of their questions and part of their response to that is reflected in the richness of their donations.

## Equalities and Justice Group donations

### 1. Progressive Pride Flag



The Flag was made and signed by Equalities group members, wider school students and staff as part of Purple Friday, 25 February 2022. The signatories in these images for the report are obscured. From discussion with the students, they talked about the spontaneity of signature gathering and were aware that for some it was important to be mindful and sensitive to their representation. All the potential variations of use via reproduction were discussed and agreed on the group's permissions. Numbers of signatures have to be counted but on initial review some 200+ signatories of staff and students are represented on the flag.

In all 1 flag, 7 badges, 6 ribbons and 4 posters were donated. The posters were displayed on the day with the flag when it was signed. Some of these are associated objects that will be cared for as attached to the flag. The badges were designed and made by the group with monies raised from them donated to LGBTQ Scotland.

## 2. Pin badges made by Equalities Group members





### 3. The Group's sharing of their part in the project and planned collections development

Throughout, the School tweeted and shared news of their involvement and ideas, via social media media. This allowed the Collections team to re-share contributions.



**4. Follow up visit with the wider equalities group in the school:** this meeting with the Equalities group, with Jen Binnie, Collections Officer, Tony, McKeown and myself, discussed further ways of working together, as well as the group's completion of the accession information and associated permissions for their donations. Documentation of the handover was suggested by the Group/School and forms another important part of the associated material within Collections and the documentation of this project.



## **Ways forward, ideas and thoughts**

When you have been so engaged with people, the sense of how those relationships move forward becomes even more important for everyone who has been involved. Some questioned this at the very start of the project, asking what the benefits of taking part would be to their community - not the kinds of benefit that can come from a rich moment of engagement that is there and gone, but that can be sustained and reciprocally grown. For those we worked with, the potential of that growing relationship and what that might achieve over time was important.

Our discussions continued into the end phase of this project, meeting with each of the three communities we worked with as well as the Collections team to talk about experiences of the project and the potential for future working together. Areas we spoke about together were:

- how we might work further together to explore equalities across Collections
- how this might re-shape purpose and relevance - the who and what of engagement with Collections

### ***Time, trust, voice and identity***

As well as consciousness of the time and and openness necessary to build relations, the stories show that while not the same journey for everyone, working together had to be paced and about building trust. The context - in this case Collections - had to be opened up; relationships had to be developed; ways of doing things had to be shaped by and make sense for everyone involved; the value placed on those relations had to feel sincere for all those participating. For the communities we worked with, this was their introduction to what Collections were, and seeing what Collections meant in practice through a first physical step into Collections venues. As one person reflected, *that's massive*.

From all, it was clear that Collections offered a way of thinking about *voice* and *identity* - their own, their community, their place - and how that was represented and might be understood by others over time. That *you* could affect this future understanding - fill those gaps in *your* representation - was further new learning. It was this that gave rise to each community's consequent donations to Collections, beginning a process of shifting and adding to the dynamics of that representation, as well as their clear and stated desire to carry on working together to see how this might grow.

For the team too, learning from such very different experiences and perspectives within Collections was impactful. It affected emotionally: seeing the power of an object or an item evoke new kinds of meaning; the shared working with other team members, crossovers, overlaps and connections possible as Collections were presented, researched, questioned, experienced and reflected on together.

The following lays out some of this feedback from those we worked with. Again, these words are not designed as direct quotes attributed to any one person, but offer a re-presentation of the richness of some of what was discussed.

### **Initial steps**

*If people feel their work and input can make a difference, make a change that benefits them, and their community, this will work. If this stops even though we all have gained something, it will stand still - go on the back burner - and it needs work to keep this going.*

For all involved some initial plans are already in motion:

i. The *Equalities and Justice* group have asked for a new term visit to Collections. The anticipation includes seeing where their donations are being held, and how these will be presented, accessed, and catalogued. There have been additions to Collections, in particular to Local Studies Collections, as a direct consequence of this

relationship and there is opportunity here to share how this has impacted on what to Collect as well how items are catalogued.

ii. Team members have already returned to visit GRACE, and through their support of GRACE's 10th anniversary celebrations, venues for exhibitions will include William Patrick Library where Archives and Local Studies (ALS) are based. A simple idea is that visitors from GRACE and Hillhead/Auchinairn communities could be invited to Collections as part of their visit to the exhibition, with opportunity to see the donations arising from the MGS project, and how these are being presented, accessed, and catalogued.

iii. The feedback meeting with Sana'a and Heba offered similar reflection and discussion on their *donations* and how their portrait images and those of their objects would become come part of Local Studies Collections, alongside the narrative of their objects. Talking together about their objects, I had made notes around their words but really, each of them writing something about *their* objects in their own language would be a much more valuable part of this relation<sup>11</sup>, and an invitation to write and to visit Collections to view the photographic documentation of their *donations* in their *words*, as well as the wider documentation of the MGS project, again offers a very immediate way to further galvanise relations.

iv. There is also opportunity for materials related to the different communities to be presented and shared with and amongst one another, as well as more widely. For example, all 3 communities and groups, meeting and seeing each other's donations; invitations to Community Partnership Planning staff and those involved in Re-settlement so they might also be more informed about what Collections are and their potential to the many different communities they work with.

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<sup>11</sup> The power of the handwritten note in Flemish by one of the WW1 Belgian refugees had been an important part of our discussions around the Collections objects.

Preparation and research has already been undertaken as part of this project and such future visits offer opportunity to consider further awareness of where Collections are, including signposting to the upstairs Archive and Local studies space<sup>12</sup>.

## **Further ways forward**

i. From the final meeting with the *Equalities and Justice* group, time was spent talking about the nature of their donations and their importance. The idea that a relationship could be ongoing, opened up much potential for future development and impact on Collections.

### ***Return visit to the Equalities and Justice group and other schools' based equalities groups***

- One example suggested was that team members could give a talk within the school, involving others in awareness raising of what Collections are, opening up potential for use by a greater diversity of students and staff. The impact and implications of this are important. Some of this preparatory process has been undertaken through this project, and so the time involved is already clearer in terms of planning and preparation.
- Further local Schools with Equalities groups have been identified during the course of this project with potential for such visits and presentations to be extended to include them and develop relations with others with a similar equalities focus, aims and objectives.

As well as galvanising the relation with the current *Equalities and Justice* group, these ideas build a wider potential to increase awareness and relevance. For Equalities in Collections, this offers opportunity to

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<sup>12</sup> No-one who visited Collections as part of this project - even if they had visited the library previously, or when meeting directly in the Foyer next to the ALS entrance - knew where ALS was located or that they could access these parts of the building. A visible poster, banner or signage would be a simple initial step to help open up further awareness of Collections.

consider what *other* activities with *Equalities* groups might be possible. When underpinned by increased understanding of what forms donations might take - ephemera, associated items, accessioned materials, conservation and material implications - the potential for future donating becomes more strongly informed. In particular, consideration of what history of activity and actions might *Equalities* groups want to share? For example, can they show the impact they might make on the curriculum; changes as a consequence of new policies developed? Might the records of an *Equalities* group shift potential to encompass different Collections' needs and concerns, such as Archives? The longevity of relationships and benefits of shared understanding and dialogue offer diverse opportunities for how Collections might be proactively grown and developed.

### *Developing relations with GRACE and PLACE based communities*

- ii. A number of simple immediate, as well as future, developmental possibilities were discussed with GRACE.
  - There was a lot of interest in a return visit by GRACE members to see 'behind the scenes' of Collections - where materials live when they're not out on show. There was also interest in how the many questions they'd asked about Collections might be answered through further investigations - for example, who was Winifred Campbell, do Collections have an original artwork? Who were the unknown families and individuals in the photographs. All offer opportunities to revisit and further investigate, as well as for example, make a call-out for local information, further increasing and widening community awareness of Collections.
  - During the final feedback visit, we also talked about GRACE's donations and the cardigan purchased specially as part of GRACE's representation - how it was documented and photographed for Collections' sharing, and cataloguing. There was immediate interest - as with the *Equalities and Justice* group - to know more about what happened to donations - accessioning and cataloguing - what is this?

A simple and immediate next step was a suggested return visit *to* or *by* GRACE to share how their donations are being cared for, catalogued and shared on-line, what this involves and importantly what volunteering opportunities might be possible. For example, what would cataloguing of GRACE's donations involve?

*Would folks be interested in cataloguing? Yes, why not? We have so much skills here, there may be folks who would want to do that, (cataloguing) we don't know - but we can ask them.*

What is important is that through these relations and greater understanding of Collections - their management and development - people get to know about and understand what opportunities there are that they might want to be part of, including for example, more traditional, volunteering roles being offered within PLACE based areas.

- Another opportunity to re-connect lies with the Foundry project, which has also been undertaken with MGS support. This could also have strong links with GRACE. Hillhead was a location of the industry and also much of the work force. A return visit to Hillhead Community centre could share this work directly within this community base and in doing so, open up potential for opportunities such as volunteering directly linked to this work.
- A perhaps more ambitious idea was that Collections might work out of local hubs such as Auchinairn and Hillhead community centres. Team members might hot-desk in communities on set days of the week or over an agreed and workable time frame. The suggestion was: *why not here?*

The Collections team had already talked about the potential and hope for future, informal visits to GRACE to keep relations going. However, there was also consciousness of the need for a structure to support this.

The value of more informal, regular, working *in* and as *part of* communities such as Hillhead and Auchinairn, has considerable potential in terms of organisations such as GRACE but also more widely. This project shows that the *informal* works. Reflecting on GRACE's visit to Collections:

*For many it was the informality that put everyone so at ease - tea, cakes, chat - the venue was not a good place for people here, many see it as a library with no idea of what else goes on.*

This relationship with GRACE had recognised these challenges and was possible because it was:

*[...] negotiated [...] it was an invitation and negotiation. No agenda was felt. You had self-critiqued - 'we have looked, we see where we are missing relations and representation, do you have interest in being involved?' - we said yes. Then, how do you want to work with us, how would you want to do that - you plan together after the relationship is rolling.*

When we returned to GRACE and met with their *Pins and needles* group, we had no idea that was who we would meet that day. All we had was an invite to come down and meet more members. A small tea caddy from Hillead Co-op was taken with us from Museums Collections, alongside a photograph of Hillhead Rovers football team from Local Studies Collections. The latter had sparked so much discussion during GRACE's visit to Collections. These were intended only to show how everyday things that might have meant little at the time of their making, form a valued part of Collections now.

Seeing the date on the football image, it was noted that these were young men living during a war, and the parallels were made with now. This led discussions to Collections material held on Belgian refugees who had lived here during WW1, as well as new communities living here now, also fleeing war. The lace-work associated with some of the Belgian refugees was talked about and possible links with the interests of this group in traditional skills and making was naturally and informally developed.

This visit also led to an impromptu purchase for Museums' Collections of a baby's cardigan, hand knitted by a member of the group. Every Tuesday Pins and Needles have a sale of work to support their activities - something that we only came to know about through this visit. This familiarity and regularity of being *in* a place opens up wider potential to connect in many different and unanticipated ways, and for people to find

ways into Collections through seeing their purpose and relevance to them. It shows the value of just being there, with *no agenda* other than working *in* a place, allowing new relations and understanding to develop through a simple passing by, dropping in or conversation that can lead to something more.

### ***Collections and re-settlement***

iii. The final meeting with Sana'a and Heba as noted, similarly discussed how their images would become part of Local Studies Collections. However, we also returned to an idea we had talked about briefly when we first met - exploring whether Collections might be helpful in orientating other new families arriving to the area, offering a way into the history and culture of a place.

Our starting point for our first meeting had been asking Sana'a to reflect on what had helped and what might have been helpful on their arrival to this new community. Our initial engagement had drawn on the support of East Dunbartonshire's Resettlement officer who had helped make sure the questions made a sense, however, it wasn't until after Sana'a and Heba had visited Collections and also over the time that our engagement grew that we were able to properly return to this consideration.

When we met for our final feedback meeting, we spoke about the process and their introduction to Collections, in particular their thoughts on the value of this for others, specifically other families arriving to the community.

*This is your new life so the first thing is to know the place [...] show where people live, what is the canal, what did it do, what were these buildings [...] how women were living, what were their duties were they similar to your family - you need this to make you feel connected.*

The potential of this *orientation* with place through Collections - especially a new place - is hugely important. For all 3 communities, there was a sense that Collections could reinforce identity and voice, feeling part of place. With Sana'a and Heba we became aware of connections between Syrian and Scottish identity and

culture, through both difference as well as similarities and cross-overs. For example, everyday objects like the butter former (discussed previously), provoked such strong nostalgia about objects we all knew and that reinforced a sense of connectedness. The familiarity of objects offered a kind of comfort as well as a focal point for conversation about things we share, understand and do. This was part of what gave rise to Sana'a and Heba's donations - the power of everyday objects to connect with us, our memory and identity and also to offer connections between us.

We talked about our very early meetings, wondering did we need our initial conversations. Taking things slowly to ensure understanding? Could Collections teams just select materials related to the area and invite people in?

*Perhaps it's possible [...] the visuals and objects can help break down barriers of language [...] But you need [...] to be with someone who understands [...] People don't know this is here, you have to let people know it's there - not just for people who are new but people who live here don't know and it's not no interest - they just don't know. They need an invitation and the invitation has to be about more than come and learn [...] it can be activities for children, food, tea, coffee. Change the invitation and more people will come.*

This is an important observation. We tried to change the invitation to ensure that everyone knew and felt that their knowledge and experience was the value of and to this project. Volunteering that knowledge was what confirmed and identified gaps in representation within Collections and highlighted future areas for research and ways of individual and community involvement. The development of a family experience has huge added value for ways of engaging with and across families. It had been noted before that *everything has a history [...] little children have a history*. Developing other ways of coming together and responding to Collections

through shared, family oriented meeting points and activities may make it even more comfortable and possible for people to take up invitations<sup>13</sup>.

### ***Concluding thoughts and questions***

In the course of this part of the wider MGS programme, 36<sup>14</sup> new community members, under-represented within and not using Collections became directly and actively engaged, volunteering time and knowledge to look, talk, reflect, and exchange ideas about equalities gaps in Collections, as well as how these new relations might be developed. A new bank of related on-line Collections images have been researched to be available for public access via Flickr. Important and relevant new materials have been donated to Collections by those we worked with, beginning the process of addressing identified gaps in representation. These will also be publicly accessible. We wanted to ensure that this project and learning from it would support:

- Increased awareness, widened reach, access, use and understanding of Collections by those communities most under-represented and experiencing greatest inequality
- Strengthened connections with/within those communities and their increased representation with/in Collections materials
- Future Collections development cognisant and reflective of the potential of Collections to those communities, and a re-defining of relationships and ways of working together
- Increased connections, sharing and reflection between the Collections team

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<sup>13</sup> There are so many ways of ensuring that a programme has opportunities that are family oriented. Access costs are essential considerations and were a key part of this project. Further ways to remove divisions in access, for example where events are neither only child-centred nor adult-centred could offer innovative developments, where adults and children and families can attend and fully participate together (See for example <https://motherswhomake.org/principles>).

<sup>14</sup> 7 further staff members also engaged.

Valuable and trusted new relations have been initiated with huge potential to build on. Even in the smallest steps forward, maintaining and developing relations needs further reflection and discussion. For example, could there be an Advisory or Steering group involving the lived experiences and knowledge of those worked with to further help shape direction and priorities? How would this be facilitated and managed?

### *Sharing or devolving responsibility?*

One observation was whether another role might be necessary to develop and maintain relations? Some organisations have moved away from this approach and looked at *shared responsibility* across all staff involved - Collections, Library, Volunteering, Outreach etc - for these developing relations. The focus is on knowing and understanding each other's work in order to support, join up, overlap and allow specific placement of skills and interests, as well as increased and shared Collections' knowledge. The value of these connections and conversations was an important part of this project.

Perhaps there are specific opportunities in this kind of approach? For example, to bring different people in at necessary points in order to support identified areas of work in ways that offer more flexibility of resource in how support might be targeted and developed? Team members may also want to develop their specific strengths that they can bring to these relations?

### *Continuing research, reflection and development: exhibitions, talks, guest curations, re-interpretations, loans, and call-outs*

In terms of under-representation of *Equalities in Collections* there had been an observation that the gaps were *not only about volume but content*. There is perhaps further opportunity in thinking about how existing Collections might be re-presented and interpreted in relation to these gaps. Might these *missing* components become about strategic ways of further reflecting and critiquing? For example, through exhibition where other specialist skills/knowledge might be invited to curate, present and interpret with the team?

Could gaps in Collections be borrowed from others - official collections as well potentially from within communities and groups? Would this open up potential for shared working and exchange? For example, might there be a future co-created exhibition, working with the different communities involved in this project to co-curate an exhibition, its content, focus and interpretation?

In amongst the research undertaken in the early stages looking at examples of practice that aim to address in/equalities in Collections, is there scope to continue this research and also to invite those identified people and organisations to come and talk about their journey and where the process of development has taken them?

### *Policy informing?*

Some of these ideas may seem harder to achieve, but all offer rich potential to think about together. If learning from this process is to be Policy informing, perhaps it's about Collections *development* specifically in terms of *Equalities*, where understanding from the relationships built can help shape awareness of access and engagement and how that might be developed with others. This has potential to impact further on Collections, not only in terms of broader representation within the materials held, but through positively impacting on the diversity of those who use and shape Collections.

There is clearly an array of options to consider in how this work progresses. What seems certain from this process is that pro-actively reaching out to communities, shaping ways of working responsively to people's interests and needs, can support trusted relations to be developed. These kinds of relations are necessary if the awareness, benefits, and meaning of Collections to different communities are to be increased.

Relationships are a process and they take time and trust to develop. So many important ideas have been offered on ways forward; donations have been initiated that add a contemporary, current reflection on equalities from within communities. Learning is there to develop and put back into different kinds of action in how Collections might continue this work, prioritising and strategising ways forward.

This value of lived experience and local knowledge to Collections is important to fully embrace, where knowledge of and within a community might be mutually and beneficially volunteered to identify gaps and areas for future research that are social, current, diverse and relevant to these different communities. Through shared moments of talking with and listening to individuals' responses to Collections' materials - relating them to *their* lives - every item took on new meaning and offered different understanding of value and potential. No matter what direction is chosen, the gratitude to everyone involved for taking part and their generosity of time and ideas, as well as the donations each community gifted to help address the gaps and imbalances in representation they identified, is what can shape a shared way forward.