

Museum of Me: A Blog by Lead Artist Rebecca Denniff

I was delighted when Sophie asked if I wanted to be involved in *New Shores* at Springhead School. Having worked on previous projects with ARCADE, both at Springhead School and other locations in Scarborough, I would find the experience enriching and nourishing for my inner artist, as well as exciting and inspiring. Co-creation is embedded in the ARCADE model of collaboration, so amazing and unexpected things are always bound to happen!

During our preliminary conversations, we discussed the potential of working with artefacts from the Scarborough Museums and Galleries and using them as a prompt for our co-creative journey. I loved this idea, but it felt like a goal, or an aspiration for the future, rather than a practical and actionable reality for where we were, at the beginning of a creative journey. We discussed the value of everyday things, the things we hold dear and precious, or that we need to get through the day.

My own lived experience of being a parent of disabled children was a factor in my thinking around this idea. One of the things that has featured highly in my daily life is the 'hand toy', as one of my children named it. He had to have a special thing with him all of the time that would give him comfort, something to fiddle with, smell, or even taste. These items were a bit like a sensory touchstone that made him feel connected to the familiar, even if everything else was changing around him.

I knew through my extensive work in SEN settings that this was not a unique thing - many young people with a whole array of barriers and challenges in their lives have objects that travel with them wherever they go. Let's face it - lots of us have things in our bags or in our pockets that we don't need, but we carry them around anyway, just because they make us feel better. I know I do!

Before we could think about learning about special things that lived in special places like museums, it felt important to explore our own special things and what made them important. This is how the Museum of Me was developed. We learned about all of the special things that belonged to the young people we were working with, and we began to generate responses to them through shared creative moments. Some of these moments were musical, using voice and percussion to soundscape the

interactions we shared. Some were visual, using printing, mark-making, and modelling clay to create representations of the special things.

Once we had created a whole array of beautiful things, it was time to make the *Museum of Me*. We worked with one of the groups on what the exhibition should be like - what we should do, share, see, feel, hear - and all of these ideas were woven into a pop-up immersive experience. I created a soundscape drawn from the young people's ideas and musicking, using recordings captured in the classroom, developed into an ambient composition that was relaxing and soothing, supporting the sensory atmosphere we wanted to make.

The Museum was complete - but we needed a special visitor who would honor the work that the young people had made - and the amazing Tom from Kit Theatre was wonderful - 'Tommy T. Thompson' had never visited a museum before and needed all of the young people to tell him how he needed to experience the space. The visits from the young people were wonderful, and staff told us they saw responses they had not expected.

I learned a lot through working with ARCADE and the wonderful team at Springhead School. The need to change plans rapidly, to be agile and dynamic, and stay focused on the young people rather than on an outcome. Experiential, participatory moments are so impactful, and finding authentic, person-centred ways to capture learning moments feels like an important thing to explore for everyone in all settings. By exploring our shared curiosity and experimenting and testing our ideas together, we can find ways of measuring progress that show evidence of learning in new ways. I'm excited to see where ARCADE take this project forward - there are so many wonderful experiences ahead for the team!