

Case Study:

'Small Change', Richard
Jefferies Museum Case Study
Green Grants Programme 2022-23



Inspiring everyone to make a small change to help tackle climate change

The Richard Jefferies Museum, in the suburbs of Swindon, is a small volunteer-run museum based in the nineteenth century home of the writer Richard Jefferies. The Victorian nature writer is increasingly recognised as one of the first nature conservationists and it is his message of our deep connection to nature that the museum is promoting through their public programming.

Building on their reputation for providing quality events for a range of audiences, the museum applied for funding to run a month-long festival of sustainability called Small Change.

The museum's active volunteer force, under the leadership of volunteer Museum Director Mike Pringle, had increased annual visitor numbers from 800 per annum to 16,000 with popular annual events now increasingly fully booked. Aware that the town's eco festival had closed a few years ago, the opportunity to create a sustainable festival was considered realistic. Funding from the Green Grants programme included payment for workshop leaders, funds for new permanent exhibition panels and costs for including more vegan options in the café.



Top Green Tip

Acknowledge that you are on the same journey and making changes alongside your audiences. "As we learned more about climate change, we realised just how little we knew" - *Richard Jefferies Museum*

Something for everyone – Small Change Festival

Using the umbrella of a festival gave impetus to a diverse month-long programme of events and activities at the museum and other sites across Swindon. The principle behind the festival was that whilst big changes are needed to tackle climate change there are small changes that we can all make. The aim of the festival was to promote those small changes by providing inspiration, information and motivation.

A broad programme operated under the principle of encouraging people to make a change, regardless of the start point or the size of change. “We were all learning together and we took the approach that there were no wrong answers to the questions we posed. This helped us to diffuse potential confrontation and turn challenging questions into informative conversations. The activity involving an electric car prompted some really interesting discussions about how environmentally friendly they are and left us all feeling excited but that there was more to learn”, said the Richard Jefferies Museum.

Unexpected Results

Using the principles of sustainability, they ran over fifty events including a dozen for children, but only using recycled or natural materials. There was some concern that because younger visitors, especially the under-five, are used to bright colours and plastic toys they would not be engaged by using items from nature. Those concerns proved unfounded as the tots happily engaged with the activities and thoroughly enjoyed playing and creating with the much more environmentally friendly materials. Parents appreciated the opportunity to play their part within the Small Change programme and we were all grateful that it had pushed them to try something different.



What was learnt

- Demand and interest in the subject matter was higher than anticipated. They ran more events, and on more subjects, because many people wanted to get involved as event leaders and speakers.
- The project gave the museum the opportunity to try out some ideas to see how well they worked. For example, they now have regular sustainable stalls at their events, and a richer offer in their cafe.
- Consumerism is a very deeply ingrained mindset in society, and it is difficult to challenge. This is why the museum set out to make small changes that were doable by anybody, conscious of the need to set realistic and achievable goals.
- It is easy to be overwhelmed by the scale of climate change and nature loss. Some environment organisations dismiss small changes as ‘too little too late’. The Small Change festival ran counter to this message, encouraging people to make small changes, giving them hope and empowering them to make a difference.

South West Museum Development
Bristol Museum & Art Gallery
Queens Road, Bristol BS8 1RL

0117 922 4653

www.southwestmuseums.org.uk

[@swmuseums](https://twitter.com/swmuseums)



This has been produced under
an Attribution Non-Commercial
Share-Alike Creative Commons
License (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0)



Supported using public funding by
**ARTS COUNCIL
ENGLAND**

