

Case Study:

'Breaking the Cycle', The Wilson Case Study

Green Grants Programme 2022-23



Engaging diverse young people with fast fashion

The Wilson Art Gallery and Museum in Cheltenham reopened to the public in July 2022 following a refurbishment which created several new spaces. The Break The Cycle project was the first exhibition to be shown in the new Community Gallery following the reopening.

The project's aim was to work with a diverse group of young people to explore the environmental impacts of fast fashion. The exhibition focus was on denim because it is the most resource-draining textile on the planet.

The Wilson worked with young people from National Star College and Gloucestershire Carers, reimagining unwanted denim into new pieces which were displayed in the Sir Charles Irving Community Art Gallery. The ground-breaking free community exhibition Break The Cycle encouraged fashion lovers to break their dependency on fast fashion and take a more environmentally friendly approach to clothes.



Top Green Tip

Sourcing all elements of this project sustainably took time, but taking the time to do this gives your project authenticity.

The team at The Wilson community gallery, Rhia Davenport (Creative Producer), Oliver Tipper (Community Engagement) and Megan Humphreys (Creative Producer – Collections and Exhibitions) ran the project based on clear sustainable principles of zero waste and carbon neutrality.

One of their key aims was to engage a diverse range of young people and the team were clear that finding the right facilitators to lead the workshops would be critical to the success of that aim. Grant funding from the Green Grants Programme allowed the team to offer a fair wage for this work and funded materials, photography and exhibition materials. Their recruitment process for facilitators offers a good model.



Recruitment process for facilitators to work with young people

- Start with a clear remit for the type of person you want. The museum wanted:
 - local people – to reduce carbon emissions of travel
 - young people that the participants could relate to
 - people with a good audience reach through social media used by young people
 - artists who would inspire, engage and enthuse
- Speak to the organisations that you will work with, for The Wilson that was National Star College and Gloucestershire Carers, to ask for their recommendations for workshop leaders
- Research the applicants to check their credentials and their social media
- Invite young people to have a say – having made their choices The Wilson then asked the young people if they wanted to work with these facilitators, gauging their enthusiasm to make sure they had the right people before confirming appointments.

What was learnt

- The zero waste and carbon neutral principles prompted them to return the exhibition labels and the large-scale prints to the participants and partner organisations, alongside the garments. The labels were more highly valued by participants than expected. The large-scale prints are now on display at the organisations' buildings providing a fantastic legacy for them from this project.
- In order to facilitate a visit to the gallery for the students from National Star College, The Wilson were guided by their staff on how to make the gallery more accessible for students who are wheelchair users. This input allowed them to redesign the gallery space to make it more accessible for a range of visitors. The staff learned the value of consulting on access at the planning stages of an exhibition.
- Modelling is a great way to encourage change across an organisation. In order to measure their carbon footprint in the community gallery The Wilson needed information about the wider carbon footprint of the whole building. This wasn't available, but it is now progressing. Colleagues were really impressed with the quality of the eco-friendly object labels used for the exhibition and they will now be used in other areas of the museum.
- Working well with diverse communities takes time as does working sustainably. So, The Wilson are starting their planning much earlier and their lead in time for next summer's exhibition will be at least 9 months.

Find out more:

- As part of the project a Short film was produced, [watch the film here](#).

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