Communities of Culture in fairness
Acknowledgements

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Without this huge outpouring of support and enthusiasm this project would not have been possible and our sincerest thanks goes to all who engaged with ‘In Fairness’.
About Restorative Practices
Building Relationships

By Caitlin Lewis, Restorative Practices Development Officer

The Limerick Restorative Practices Project is run by the Children and Young People’s Services Committee and managed by Céim ar Chéim Youth Probation. It aims to embed and sustain Restorative Practices (RP) within education, youth, community and justice settings in the Moyross, Ballynanty and Southill areas of Limerick City. In context of the Limerick Restorative Practices Project, RP can be defined as:

“A framework for building, maintaining and strengthening relationships and responding to conflict through authentic conversations, that facilitates a shared understanding of what happened and how things can be made right”.

RP is an approach that empowers people and communities to build positive relationships and resolve difficulties and conflicts fairly, using specific communication skills, ways of interacting and facilitated meetings. RP helps to break down barriers between people and groups through open, respectful communication. The bedrock of restorative practices is fairness: ensuring that all people are included and treated with respect.

Through the ‘In Fairness’ Project, we wanted to build connections with the community and hear their ideas for what would make the places they live more fair. We wanted to make the restorative practices model accessible; showing how RP works by ‘doing’. To achieve this, we decided to focus the project on one of the key elements of restorative practices, fair process. Fair process is based on three principles: (1) that all participants are involved and engaged in decisions that affect them, by asking for their input and allowing them to voice concerns and disagreements; (2) that everyone involved and affected should understand why final decisions are made as they are; (3) that once decisions are made, everyone knows what to expect for the future.

We also modelled other key restorative approaches throughout this project. ‘In Fairness’ discussions were facilitated through circles. Group priorities were chosen democratically, planning was done collaboratively and transparently, and every stage of the project was based on the FRESH principles: Fair, Respectful, Engaging, Safe, and Honest.

For more about FRESH and Fair Process see the International Institute of Restorative Practices.
About “In Fairness”

During this project we talked about the idea of FAIRNESS

This project took place over six months with groups from Limerick’s regeneration areas. The groups came from a wide range of backgrounds, ages and abilities. Groups included a women’s group, a men’s shed, young people living in direct provision, a disability awareness group, young people on probation and a number of youth groups. The aim of the project was to open up conversation about what would make their communities fairer. It gave the participants the chance to share ideas about what they felt was fair and not fair about where they live. It also allowed them an opportunity to reflect on the idea of fairness, and how perceptions of what is fair or unfair can vary from person to person and situation to situation.

This project has been informed by a Restorative Practices approach. This approach is one that enables people and communities to build positive relationships and improve communication, by preventing and resolving conflicts and difficulties as they arise. The project endeavoured to create a sense of shared community and understanding within the groups, allowing them to freely express their opinions, emotions and ideas. These are essential elements for change and reconciliation in a community, and key to a restorative approach. ‘In Fairness’ hoped to give participants the opportunity to contribute to the dialogue about their communities in a constructive way through discussion, problem-solving, ideas-generation and creative process.

Through facilitated workshops the eight groups discussed the idea of fairness and produced suggestions as to what would make their communities fairer places to live. The groups came up with many ideas, questions and points for debate on this subject; from these initial starting points we worked with the groups to identify priorities.

Workshop with Limerick Printmakers in John’s Square
Outline Of Project Process

Housing, public amenities, public transport, youth facilities, garda resources, the legality of marijuana, horse programmes, green areas, anti-social behaviour, isolation, life within the direct provision centres, wheelchair access are just a cross section of the topics that emerged throughout those initial workshops.

By Richie Hannafin, independent artists and facilitator

The ‘In Fairness’ project started as a community and museum art project in which the original vision was to collaborate with a wide variety of community groups based in the regeneration areas of Limerick City in order to discuss the concept of ‘Fairness’. From the outset the primary focus was to give participants a ‘voice’ or at the very least a modus operandi where the concerns, views, opinions and ideas of groups could be explored at a local level with the ultimate goal of hopefully moving local concerns on to public agendas. This project was underpinned with a Restorative Practice approach, which became an invaluable tool in addressing the issues raised throughout a series of workshops conducted in a variety of sites across the city. After a false start a method of meaningful engagement was developed and delivered to eight community groups across the city.

The initial meeting with all the groups took place for the most part at the venues where the individual group would meet on a weekly basis.

Introductions were made through a series of icebreakers and restorative circles where everyone got an opportunity to introduce themselves and ask questions about the ‘In Fairness” theme. At this stage the initial development of a trusting relationship was the priority. The theme was introduced through an informal discussion (usually with tea and biscuits) around issues ranging from the fairness of same sex marriage, the leaving cert, television licence and water charges. These topics helped to frame issues of ‘fairness’ that impacted on the daily lives of the participants within their own communities.

The response from participants within the individual groups was positive and engaging. Housing, public amenities, public transport, youth facilities, garda resources, the legality of marijuana, horse programmes, green areas, anti-social behaviour, isolation, life within the direct provision centres,
wheelchair access are just a cross section of the topics that emerged throughout those initial workshops.

Responses from the groups were gathered by allowing participants to contribute vocally or alternatively by writing their ideas down on paper anonymously. This ensured that less vocal members of the different groups were able to raise an issue for discussion without having to take centre stage themselves. This was done in order to be as inclusive as we possibly could without putting individuals under pressure to contribute verbally. This approach produced an array of issues around the theme of fairness. (Figure 1)

The volume of diverse contributions created a need to prioritise the most important issues from each group. This meant that a second workshop was developed where the groups would filter all the ideas by arranging them into three categories: issues which could be tackled by the community, ones that require getting some help from relevant local bodies and major social issues which would need interventions at a national level (Figure 1). This was a democratic process where the most important issues were identified using a voting system (Figure 2).

The issues or ideas with the most stickers would then be analysed by the group with the assistance of the facilitators. This brought a problem solving element to the workshops where all involved worked collaboratively in order to identify the steps needed to address issues of fairness within their respective communities. The FRESH principles approach (see About Restorative Practices section for more information) helped the facilitators and participants imagine potential routes to addressing the findings from the groups.

A decision was made to develop wallpaper where issues, topics and ideas from each group could be seen by everyone, responded to by anyone and acted upon by individuals or organisations with the means to do so. All contributions would be public and anonymous at the same time. Contributors to the wallpaper could gauge reactions to their ideas by reading these responses. The wallpaper acted as a tool which enabled ideas to be prioritised within individual groups and the project as a whole.
Due its anonymous nature the wallpaper served as a tool to put ideas out in the public domain without fear of being rejected. The interaction with the public proved invaluable in progressing conversations around the issues raised by the groups and it is hoped that the project is not coming to an end but is the beginning of a new collaborative process between the museum, community agencies, community members and the wider public.

Figure 3. Liam Madden’s Hexagonal Wallpaper Design

A hexagonal pattern was developed for the wallpaper (Figure 3), this allowed an idea to be placed around the light bulb which hovers over a silhouette of Limerick City. In the “what do you think” space around it, people could comment on or react to different central ideas. The “how can we make this happen” space prompted individuals, community groups, businesses, organisations, public bodies and decision makers to react and consider how they could be made a reality.

This process over the course of two workshops with each community group facilitated a filtration process where the issues and ideas around fairness were eventually narrowed down to three ideas from each group. These informed the three weeks of workshops, conversation cafes and talks in the Hunt Museum. These events were designed to build capacity of the participants and people from the local community providing them with the tools and means to address community concerns. All contributions to the wallpaper were displayed in the education wing of the Hunt Museum for the three weeks where anyone could respond to ideas they felt strongly about (Figure 4 and Figure 5).

Figure 5. Wallpaper in the education wing of the Hunt Museum
Creating an Action Space
within communities: locally, nationally and internationally.

The workshops with the groups resulted in three weeks of programming at the museum centring on the issues raised by participants. These included discussions, networking, relationship building and skill building events. The programme was structured as a journey where each week built on the next. The first week focused on Conversation, the second week focused on Action and the final week focused on Reflection and Resilience.

In all, there were 18 public events held at the museum with over 200 people attending. Each of these people actively participated and contributed to these facilitated events and therefore were not just passive visitors to the exhibition space.

In addition to these more engaged experiences Culture Night brought approximately 1,500 visitors to the museum. These people had the opportunity to interact with the space; there were dialogue walls where people could add comments and suggestions to the groups’ ideas, a space to commit an action to better your community and the Limerick Printmakers ran a workshop to create posters with messages of fairness.

The following pages offer a summary of the events that took place at the museum, all of which resulted from the input of the original project participants.
Week 1 – Conversation

The first week of events at the museum centred on creating dialogue; workshops looked at creating open spaces for conversations where participants could debate big issues, build relationships and become conscious of the importance of language.

One of the most successful aspects of the programme was the Conversation Cafés which happened during the first week. These were a series of constructive, facilitated conversations which brought together people on important issues. The Conversation Café format was started by three Seattle friends, Susan Partnow, Habib Rose and Vicki Robin, who believed a "more spontaneous and drop-in public dialogue would serve democracy, critical thinking and neighbourliness" (http://www.conversationcafe.org/history/). Since that time conversation cafés have been held all over the world bringing people together to talk about big issues.

We decided to blend the existing conversation café model with a restorative approach, using circles. Circles are used in restorative work as a way of building community, discussing issues and solving problems in a collaborative, egalitarian way. In a circle, there is no top or bottom, and no corners; everyone has an equal position. In restorative circles we use a talking piece. Whoever has the talking piece gets to speak, while others listen respectfully. There are many types of restorative circle structures to choose from. It is an ideal format through which to have a conversation. Conversations create jointly constructed knowledge where people can exchange ideas, debate points and learn from the experience of others.
The Conversation Café circles were structured around questions raised by the project participants. After a general circle discussion on one of these key questions, groups worked to identify actions their community could take on the issue, and actions decision makers could take on the issue.

*Three* cafés were held at the museum:

**What would make our Public Healthcare System fairer?**
**Who was there?:** CEO of HSE Limerick, Director of Nursing at St. John’s Hospital, Director of My Mind, two hospital heads, researchers, Leaving Cert Applied class from Limerick Youth Service

**What would make Life in Direct Provision fairer?**
**Who was there?:** Doras Luimní, researchers from University of Limerick and the Limerick Institute of Technology, people living in Direct Provision (including youth residents), Community Activists, Council representatives

**How can we make better use of under used spaces in Limerick?**
**Who was there?:** Artists, Architects, a Fine Gael Councillor, Limerick City and County Council’s Officer for Derelict Sites, Fab Lab Limerick, members of Ormston House

*A fourth café was scheduled but did not have enough participants to take place. Therefore it ended up being an informal chat: What would make Access to Sports and Fitness Activities fairer?*
**Who was there?:** A Fine Gael Councillor, Head of Limerick Sports Partnership, museum staff, Restorative Practices Officer
To disseminate the findings from the Conversion Cafés posters were created with illustrations by artist Jacob Stack. These are available on request from the Hunt Museum.
COFFEE WITH A COP brought Gardaí and community members together - over coffee - to discuss issues and learn more about each other. This innovative initiative was started in America. This was the first Coffee with a Cop event to happen in Ireland.

The larger proportion of adults to young people caused some anxiety for the only youth participant. It was recommended that going forward events should be targeted at either teens or adults rather than a general drop in event. Aside from this, the community members who attended were impressed that the Gardaí were willing to give up their time in this manner to meet with them. They also talked about the importance of getting to know the human side of the people on the force.

Feedback from the Gardaí involved was very positive. They would like to run more events like this in the future and felt it offered them a useful model to connect with the community. Limerick is currently offering a new Victim Liaison Service and they reported that the event was a useful platform to spread the word about this.

Who was there?: Two Victim Liaison Officers, one Sergeant, one Community Garda, members of Southside Disability Awareness Group, members of Extern Youth Diversion programme.
Week 2 – Action

For week two the theme was on ‘action’. These workshops focused on capacity and skill building. A variety of people attended these events including: primary school teachers, community artists, Céim ar Chéim, Southside Disability Awareness Group, community activists, Transition Year students, museum staff and volunteers, Le Chéile, Head of Nursing from University Hospital Limerick.

Being Heard

This workshop, which was led by Limerick Toastmasters and focused on building confidence with public speaking. Many of the groups in the planning phase had expressed concerns around not being heard. This was one of the workshops which tried to address this issue from a skills building angle.

Treating People like they Matter: Restorative Workshop for Leaders

This was a workshop targeted at managers, decision makers and other leaders. It aimed to build their capacity to create environments in the workplace which foster a sense of dignity, respect and fairness. The workshop was based on evidence that using restorative approaches enhances productivity and relationships in the workplace and community. This workshop was co-facilitated by Elaine Slattery, Manager of Céim ar Chéim, and Caitlin Lewis, Restorative Practices Development Officer.
Effectively Communicating Issues to those with Power to Change

This was led by Kieran Clifford, Campaigns and Activism Manager at Amnesty International Ireland. The workshop was very interactive and addressed ways to effectively approach and influence decision-makers such as governments and councils. It was designed to build skills that would allow people to communicate and campaign about issues they are passionate about. It also considered how to research the right people to communicate with in order to effect a change. The workshop emphasised a human rights approach.

Local Community Action Circle

Facilitated by Caitlin Lewis, this was an action-focused restorative circle which brought together people who aspired to effect change in their communities and people who had already been involved in actively working to address issues of fairness in their communities. The circle was an opportunity to share ideas and learn from each other. The event included two problem-solving circles, in which participants collaborated to find solutions to barriers which they are facing while trying to effect change in the community.

Raise Your Voice

The Raise Your Voice workshop, led by Music Generation Limerick City, enabled participants to respond to the interactive exhibition space. The workshop focused on how to raise issues you care about through music and voice. During the workshop the participants created two original songs with music and lyrics; one about stereotyping due to appearance and the other about discrimination from two different perspectives.
Volunteers from Music Generation Limerick running a workshop in response to the ‘In Fairness’ space
Week 3 – Reflection & Resilience

The final week focused on ‘reflection and resilience’. This was an opportunity to reflect on the project to date and how the learning might be used in the future. It also focused on building resilience at a professional and personal level. Many of the issues raised by the groups were ones that require long term interventions to create change. These included the Direct Provision system. For this reason, it was felt that it was important to address resilience as a key competency in effecting positive change.
‘In it for the Long Haul’:
Resilient Communities

This workshop was aimed at communities who wanted to learn ways they could build resilience. It explored how to keep going and not get depleted when trying to improve the community and how to ‘stay sane’ in a system, when it can feel like change is impossible. It looked at ways to keep yourself energised and interested when your campaign or project is going to be a long haul one. The workshop was run by Partners Training for Transformation and facilitated by Maureen Sheehy.

Mindful Communities

Facilitated by Orna Cooke from Inner Landscapes Mindfulness and Creativity, this workshop looked at personal wellbeing and how it can positively impact on the wider community. It was based on the idea that to take care of others we must learn to take care of ourselves first. A mindful community is one in which residents practice genuine self care, yet at the same time participate in making their communities better, fairer places for all. The workshop included some basic mindfulness meditation practice and discussion.

Random Acts of Kindness Day

On the final day of ‘In Fairness’ we teamed up with Random Acts of Kindness Limerick to spread a little kindness through The City. The day was very simple; people were encouraged to consider how their actions impact on others and to make this impact a positive one by performing Random Acts of Kindness. We are grateful for the support of students from Newport Convent Primary School and Mary Immaculate College who brought the day to their campuses.
Museums are complex institutions, they are not neutral spaces but ones which “participate[s] in the social construction of culture and in the legitimization of power”\(^{i}\). This positioning of museums within our society gives them a power that should not be underestimated, as Donald Preziosi tells us they are “one of the central sites at which modernity has been generated”\(^{ii}\). However, this position of privilege is fraught with complications and negotiations; who is, and who should be able to harness this power of construction?

It was in the early 1990s that audiences began to be viewed as active participants in the gallery experience and to be recognised as having their own agendas for these experiences\(^{iii}\). The idea of a “new museology”, is one which focuses on the function of museums as encouraging new styles of expression and requires changes in “value, meaning, control, interpretation, authority and authenticity” of the institution\(^{iv}\). It necessitates a redefinition of the museums relationship with its public, giving them better access and a more active role to play within the museum. This implies a social responsibility on the part of the museum; it asks staff to take risks and to relinquish some control. It is a vision of the museum which is democratic and fair, it is one that requires sustained collaboration with the communities it serves. Though straightforward in principle it is by no means an easy task.

The Participatory Museum\(^{v}\) outlines successful collaborative projects in museums as ones that are built on mutual trust and create new relationships that may span over many years. It also describes how these collaborations can afford new offerings for the museum’s audiences which have the potential to present “voices, experiences, and
design choices” that are different from the institutional norm. John Berger tells us, “[t]he way we see things is affected by what we know or what we believe.” By reaching out to different groups in an attempt to better understand their world view, museums can learn how to become increasingly relevant in the rapidly changing society in which we now live.

This ethos was at the heart of the ‘In Fairness’ project where the participants led the programming of the public events and gave the museum visitors something that would not have been possible without their input. The process was challenging on a number of levels, not least because the final output was an unknown entity.

As we gathered ideas from the groups we talked at length about representation: how their ideas would be presented, how the groups would be presented, whether we should divide issues between north and south, whether they wished to be identified or kept anonymous, what it meant to place these issues within the museum context, how the public might potentially receive this information and importantly what it meant to allow people to respond to their ideas. We deliberated between the concept of a visual exhibition which didn’t feel right as the project progressed, and the idea of a ‘live’ space where people would be able to have facilitated and interactive experiences with others.

Having multiple constructive conversations meant that the groups learnt more about the museum and what it could offer them, and the museum learnt from the groups what the key issues are in their communities. The challenge now is how the institution integrates this knowledge to make itself more relevant within these communities.

“We must make sure that our construction of culture within the museum is considered, conscious and inclusive as possible.

i Rice, Danielle & Yenawine, Philip (2002) A Conversation on Object-Centered Learning in Art Museums, Curator, 45:4, p289-301


Eoin Barry at the Limerick Printmakers studio explaining different methods of print making to one of the participating groups

Members of the public reading and replying to ideas from the ‘In Fairness’ groups

Members of the public reading and replying to ideas from the ‘In Fairness’ groups
Figure 12. Wallpaper designed by Liam Madden and printed by Eoin Barry of Limerick Printmakers

Figure 13. Raise Your Voice workshop at the museum

Figure 14. Questions and Answers board in the museum education wing
Conclusions

In 2014, Communities of Culture Phase I set out to uncover, highlight and share the unique cultures, heritages and perspectives that existed just below the surface in the City’s regeneration areas. It was designed to be inclusive, to build capacity and to increase learning opportunities and resources in these communities, so that the tremendous potential for civic engagement could gradually become unlocked.

Two years on much has been achieved and communities who previously had a limited history of engaging with the museum have collaborated with us to deliver events, exhibitions and learning resources which capture their knowledge, their experiences, their histories, diverse cultures and their perspectives. Throughout Communities of Culture, they have been empowered, their confidence has grown and they are now beginning to speak collectively with one voice to express their concerns on issues that impact them and to identify solutions. These successes and outcomes offer the essential ingredients for the next phase of Communities of Culture, which will see project participants, consolidate their learning, enabling them to cultivate and contribute to civic engagement opportunities in their communities.

Phase III 2016/17 Communities of Culture will see participants take on the role of cultural ambassadors in their communities by becoming both advocates and facilitators of civic engagement opportunities which will support regeneration in their areas.

This goal will be realised through the design and delivery of a bespoke programme of training through which participants will access skill development and capacity building opportunities so that they can facilitate sessions using the historical and cultural resources they have delivered. Working in this way will increase knowledge of and access to these cultural resources while maximising ownership of them locally. This in turn will increase community cohesion and challenge negative attitudes. As these resources are locally relevant, created by the community for the community, it is also anticipated that Phase III of Communities of Culture will see these resources being harnessed in the schools operating in these areas, where they will be used to increase civic awareness in students. This is just a flavour of what is planned for Phase III, which will commence in 2017.

The Hunt Museum and the Communities of Culture team look forward to Phase III and to collaborating once more with community participants and stakeholders. Great successes have already been achieved through our project but now it is time to capitalise on them.

Maria Cagney, Curator of Education and Outreach at the Hunt Museum
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The Hunt Museum and the Communities of Culture team look forward to Phase III and to collaborating once more with community participants and stakeholders. Great successes have already been achieved through our project, but now it is time to capitalise on them. This is also anticipated that Phase III of Communities of Culture will see these resources being harnessed in schools operating in these areas, where they will be used to increase civic awareness in students. This is an innovative approach to Phase III of Communities of Culture, and is also anticipated that Phase III of Communities of Culture will increase community cohesion and challenge negative attitudes. As these resources are locally relevant, they will increase community ownership and challenge the misconception that regeneration areas are no longer relevant or important to the community. These exhibitions and learning resources will be accessible to these cultural resources, and the museum will collaborate with us to deliver events, workshops and exhibitions that have previously had a limited history of engagement with the museum.

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people consider it as part of our heritage.

These resources aim to encourage loan box users to think about the challenges facing hearing impaired users how to sign words such as 'revolution'. These objects are designed to spark conversations around how childhood in Limerick and Ireland is changing.

Sign of the Times - 1916 in Sign Language

by Mid-West School for the Deaf

The women of Kings Island Over 55s Womens' Group are avid bingo enthusiasts. Weekly bingo provides a chance to engage with their local community. They decided to include a bingo game with a difference. Players are encouraged to reflect. It is hoped that its inclusion in the loan box will encourage users to think about the challenges facing hearing impaired people. Experiences are designed to encourage an understanding of Irish Sign Language in their lives.

The Go4It initiative was set up between St. Munchin's School and local schools to provide additional educational opportunities at primary level for identified young people from the school. The members of this group wished to include objects that were significant to their heritage, such as the May Eve fires, and a jar of May Eve ashes are included with the loan box. They also created a guide to 1916 in Irish Sign Language, which they then staged and filmed as a resource for the loan box. They also created a resource for the loan box. The Mid-West School for the Deaf worked to create an ISL version of the National Anthem, which they then staged and filmed. The Go4It initiative sets out to highlight the significance of Irish Sign Language in their lives. With this in mind, they decided that they wanted to highlight the Sign of the Times - 1916 in Sign Language.
The Loan Box Project

Over 55s Womens’ Group

The women of Kings Island are avid bingo enthusiasts. Weekly bingo provides a social occasion where the community comes together for tea, crafts and a little bit of competition. Siobhán Clancy worked with the group to record their stories of life in Kings Island. These stories were then used to create a bingo game with a difference. Players are asked to listen carefully to stories on a CD provided by牡丹 Group. The tea set represents an opportunity to take a break and reflect. It is hoped that is inclusion in the loan box will encourage dialogue and relationship building.

The Go4It initiative was set up between St. Munchin’s Family Resource Centre and Limerick Institute of Technology (LIT) in 2008, as part of the Follow Your Dream Project. Working together with local schools and the LIT, the aim of the programme is to increase participation in third level education for identified young people from the St. Munchin’s and Moyross areas.

The Go4It Youth Group Moyross

Go4It is Not a Laughing Matter

LOL is Not a Laughing Matter designed by Siobhán Clancy

The cover of LOL is Not a Laughing Matter designed by Siobhán Clancy.

Threads of Conversation - Lace Making and Tea Breaking by Moyross Treads

Moyross Treads is a group that meets to swap skills and make work to raise money for a number of charitable causes. Having worked on lace making techniques in 2014, the group was ready for a new challenge. They decided that what was most important about their group was the support they received from one another and wanted to represent this in the loan box. The tea set represents an opportunity to take a break and reflect. It is hoped that its inclusion in the loan box will encourage dialogue and relationship building.

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This section will take you through the Loan Box objects that celebrate the Southside of Limerick City. Members of the West End Youth Centre decided to explore their Viking past.

**Vikings of Limerick - A historical insight**

The first Vikings in Limerick are thought to have settled on Kings Island and Athlunkard. Positioned on the Shannon estuary, Athlunkard was attractive to them because they could fortify themselves from enemies. The Long Shannon River allowed them to travel to the Irish Sea and the Atlantic Ocean. The children used their Viking research to create a new game called ‘Vikings of Limerick’. This game teaches fun facts about the Vikings in an interactive way.

The Loan Box Project

The Loan Box Project is an initiative that celebrates the Southside of Limerick City by collecting and sharing objects which speak of the heritage and culture in this area and other parts of Limerick. The Loan Box team has gathered items that are significant reminders of traditional fishing practices and life along the Shannon through the centuries. It offers some insight into fishing on the River Shannon.

**Looking Back - A reminiscence on times past: people, places and times gone by**

Members of the West End Youth Centre and the Southill Women’s Group and Men’s Shed gathered objects that are significant reminders of childhood memories in the community and two videos celebrating Irish sign language.

**Celebrate Irish Sign Language**

The Loan Box Project is an initiative that celebrates the Southside of Limerick City by collecting and sharing objects which speak of the heritage and culture in this area and other parts of Limerick. The Loan Box team has gathered items that are significant reminders of traditional fishing practices and life along the Shannon through the centuries. It offers some insight into fishing on the River Shannon.
The first Vikings in Limerick are thought to have settled. They gathered items that were significant reminders of their culture and daily life. 

What's in the box? 

Objects & Stories from the Northside 

This section will take you through the loan box objects which are dedicated to the Northside of Limerick City. Its contents have been collected and created by projects participants living in or otherwise connected to Moyross, St. Mary's Park and King's Island. This collection draws from traditional fishing practices and life along the Shannon through the centuries. It offers some insight into youth culture and concerns in the contemporary age. It also contains a tea set intended to encourage users of the loan box to take some time out and appreciate each other's company and stories.

A dug out was a hollowed out bank of a tree that was propelled down river with two oars. The Irish word for this is 'coite' which is perhaps why later boats became known as 'cots'. The sand cot was a heavy boat used to transport sand dredged from the river bed in The Plassey area into Limerick City. This sand was then used in the construction of buildings. The angling cot was a smaller, wider and deeper development on the sand cot that could travel in the shallows of The Plassey area more easily. The Bracaun is a traditional boat used by local people known as The Abbey Fishermen in the area of Kings Island.

We're All Happy Here - Friendship and Legacies 

Bingo Game by Kings Island Over 55s Women's Group

This is Our Amazon - Boating on Kings Island Waterways by St Mary's Parish Men's Shed

Andrew Duhig, at St Mary's Parish Men's Shed created four stunning hand crafted boats to be included in the loan box. These represent the evolution of boating and fishing on the River Shannon. It is believed that centuries ago, folk living along the Shannon area (now Limerick City) relied on fishing as their main source of food. They used what is known as a ‘dug out’ for both fishing and transport.

All objects were photographed by Kate Bowe O'Brien.
Limerick City Regeneration Agencies

Image courtesy of

The Loan Box Project

in Limerick City

Northside and Southside Regeneration Areas
In the concluding chapter of Touch in Museums the experience of object handling is described as an emotional one where people focus on “how they feel as opposed to what they think” \(^{iv}\). There is a value in this intimacy between person and object which goes beyond critical thinking to an embodied knowledge. By legitimising knowledge ascertained through touch, object handling places a value on lived experience as well as education gained through traditional means. Perhaps in this way we can begin to rise to the challenge of accommodating the complexity of sensory experience that can be found outside the museum’s door into the experiences that we offer our audiences.\(^{v}\)


\(^{v}\) Ibid.
The Communities of Culture loan box project created the opportunity for participants from eight community groups in Limerick City to curate their own object centred learning resources, ones which represented their culture and heritage.

The importance of local history for cultural identity and meaning making is that through our exploration of the past we can come to an understanding of our current position in the world, or as Thompson puts it, "[t]hrough local history a village, a town, a city is created by the people who choose to make meaning for it in their own changing character." For this reason local traditions, and the importance of community bonds, have wider appeal speaking to universal experiences of childhood, their own experiences of growing up in Limerick but also local communities members. The objects they have selected speak to the importance of local history as a village or town. These resources, ones which represent their culture and heritage, provide opportunities for participants from eight community groups in Limerick City to curate their own object centered learning experience.
The importance of touch in museums

Learning with objects: The importance of touch in museums

By Fiona Byrne, Acting Curator of Education and Outreach during the Communities of Culture Programme 2015/16.

Museums are places where we can go to explore our past. We peer at the wonders of times gone by through protective glass which keep our precious artefacts safe for future generations. This necessity of conservation means that we experience most of these objects visually and interpret them through text, or if we are lucky with a guide such as a museum Docent. Through these experiences we can learn a huge amount about the life of generations past, their values, skills, and appearance. However, programmes that allow us the rare opportunity to handle objects enable us to embody this knowledge in a way that no other experience can replace. Handling an object you feel its weight, discover its texture and perhaps even get a brief scent from the past. Touching objects offers us the opportunity to use our physical senses to explore a material; ascertaining something new to add to our knowledge of that object and the past it represents.

The museum has approached object handling in a number of ways; through its two replica loan boxes, Vikings and Archaeology, and also through summer handling sessions where visitors to the museum get the chance to handle objects from the collection. These resources and activities have shown us first-hand how important getting hands on really is.

Artist Siobhan Clancy facilitating one of the exchange days where the groups shared their progress, showing each other what they planned to include in the loan boxes.
Benefit encapsulated the spirit of Communities of Culture perfectly. To ensure the reach of the project, inspiration from the Northside of Limerick City and a library; Watch House Cross Library near Moyross the initial scope of the project with this new phase. More than that hosted at The West End Youth Club and St Mary's Community Centre. There, groups from the North and in progress and feedback on the final selections of These Exchange Days at a midway point of the project offered participants great incentive to complete their yet unfinished contributions.

With the support of Dr. Eileen O'Sullivan at Mary Immaculate College, I drafted a set of model representing books that were traditionally set of models representing books that were traditionally valued of Communities of Culture. This collaboration with the Mike of this project provided an opportunity to work on this stereotype. It has been my privilege to work on this collaborative project. Under the curatorial guidance of our ancestors and our neighbours, deeper insights into our histories and our relationships with each other. The loan boxes give us a glimpse of our past and our future. They bring us back to our roots. The loan boxes give us an opportunity to reflect on the history of the city and how itlop, shape, and influence us. In the way it just in the 

For the value of Communities of Culture, let's not forget the Loan Box Project.

Joyful Wrap Party.

The Loan Box Project is a testament to the power of collaboration. It is a project that has brought people together from different ages and backgrounds. It has inspired communities to come together and share their stories and experiences. The Loan Box Project has created a platform for people to learn from each other, and it has provided a space for people to connect and build relationships. It has also encouraged people to think about the history of their community and how it has shaped who they are today.

The Loan Box Project has been a shining example of what can be achieved when people work together. It has shown that by coming together, we can create something truly special. The Loan Box Project is a project that will be remembered for many years to come. It is a project that has brought people together and has created a platform for people to learn, laugh, and share their stories. The Loan Box Project is a project that is full of joy and happiness, and it is a project that will continue to inspire people for generations to come.
The Loan Box Project

As well as the unique games mentioned in the previous phase, there were many other original creations produced specifically for the Loan boxes. Each of these creations was also made possible with Fab Lab’s support as was the bespoke foam interior of the Loan boxes. The bespoke foam interior of the Loan boxes.

By mid-June, the loan box contents were complete and a launch was organised at The Hunt Museum. A special joyful wrap party was made some research trips, found artefacts that could represent the unique qualities of Limerick’s multi-faceted culture and created new artistic works. At the proposal allowed for two loan boxes: one Championing the spirit of Communities of Culture from the Northside of Limerick City; the other from the Southside. Each would be stored in Watch House Cross Library near Moyross and Roxboro Library near Ballinacurra Weston. It was accessible to local schools and community groups and truly go ‘beyond the walls’ of the museum.

With the support of Dr. Eileen O’Sullivan at Mary MacKillop Mental Health Unit, the proposal allowed for two loan boxes: one Championing the spirit of Communities of Culture from the Northside of Limerick City; the other from the Southside. Each would be stored in Watch House Cross Library near Moyross and Roxboro Library near Ballinacurra Weston. It was accessible to local schools and community groups and truly go ‘beyond the walls’ of the museum.

Southside of the city came together to share their work.

Through a series of workshops, we set to work on the timeline of this project...
Loan boxes are typically boxes containing material of historical significance that can be borrowed from museums and brought to classrooms, community centres or similar formal and informal education and social spaces outside of the museum.

Loan boxes support inquiry-based learning for all ages whereby the users are prompted to learn about a time period and culture through physical interaction with historical objects and discussion leading to collective knowledge-sharing and self-directed research to broaden understanding.

Often these boxes contain replicas of tools, garments, weapons and craftwork related to a particular era such as Medieval Times or the Viking Age. The interpretation of these objects is usually facilitated by an interpreter from the lending institution or guided through learning resources that might involve a publication with instructions for handling and institutional learning through guided or self-directed research.

The interpretation of the Viking Age objects is usually facilitated by an interpreter from the lending institution or guided through learning resources that might involve a publication with instructions for handling and institutional learning through guided or self-directed research.
The Loan Box Project: Building on Strong Foundations

"For me, the value of Communities of Culture lies not just in the engaging way it has collated and presented elements of Limerick's heritage but in the way it brings us back to our roots."

By Siobhán Clancy, Loan Box Project Co-ordinator and Facilitating Artist

The Hunt Museum’s Communities of Culture 2015/16 project built on the foundations laid in the first phase of the programme which started in 2014. Initiated by Education Curator Dr. Dominique Bouchard and facilitated by Sorcha O’Brien. In addition to this core team, Communities of Culture also engaged a team of artists, designers, cultural practitioners, historians and more who contributed to the success of the programme. Having secured further funding from Limerick Regeneration Agencies, the task of fulfilling this aspiration was taken up by myself with participating groups, Acting Curator of Culture in the form of two loan boxes. Having secured the relationship forged by Dominique and Sorcha across Limerick City, each of the groups are made up of diverse members representing a range of ages and experiences that ensures a richness of perspectives. The outcomes are so full of vitality and heart. This chapter is intended to give an insight into the process of Phase II and its contributors.
Intergenerational learning at the exchange day in St. Mary's Parish
About the Loan Box Project

Community groups from both Limerick Southside and Northside have created two unique loan boxes with artefacts relating to the local history, heritage and lore in their areas. The groups who took part are The Go4IT Youth Group in Moyross, The Midwest School for the Deaf, Moyross Threads, Southill Men’s Shed, Southill Women’s Group, St. Mary’s Over 55s Women’s Group, St. Mary’s Parish Men’s Shed and The West End Youth Centre 7-10’s Group. Each contributed to the curation of the resources by choosing, making and researching objects to be included in the boxes.

These boxes contain objects that can be handled, media works and printed material such as photographs and texts. Artist Siobhán Clancy facilitated the project and co-produced a number of elements. Fab Lab in the city centre has been very supportive of the project, facilitating design sessions and assisting in the production of a number of the objects which are included in the loan boxes.

The boxes serve as community resources for the people in Limerick City, allowing them to discover the history and culture of their area through objects. The contents of each box are accompanied by lesson plans and activities, which have been developed in partnership with Mary Immaculate College. These will support learning through story, reminiscence, play and creativity.

The museum is very privileged to have had the opportunity to partner with people from local communities to create resources that will bring object based learning beyond the restrictions of the museum building.

After a trial period the resources will be available from Watch House Cross Community Library in Moyross and from Roxboro Branch Library. If you are interested in using these resources with your school, club or community group you can contact the museum education office for further information on when they will be available. Email: education@huntn museum.com
Northside loan box, photograph Kate Bowe O'Brien

The Loan Box Project
Southside loan box, photograph Kate Bowe O’Driscoll.
Communities of Culture explores the different unique groups from these areas in expressing their unique 

The Loan Box Project

their publication 'Looking Back' in 2014

Southill Women's Group and Men's Shed at the launch of

Looking Back
About Communities of Culture

Since 2014 the Hunt Museum has been running a community engagement project entitled Communities of Culture. This project is funded by Limerick Regeneration Agencies and works with participants from the regeneration areas in Limerick City. Communities of Culture explores the different unique cultural experiences and heritages of each of Limerick’s regeneration areas – Southill, Ballinacurra Weston, Moyross and St. Mary’s Park.

Through a series of targeted community and museum based projects, Communities of Culture aims to support the regeneration process through the cultural landscape of Limerick and ensure a range of perspectives and voices including those of young people, women, men, older people and people with disabilities. The groups are from a variety of communities in Limerick and work with participants from the regeneration areas in expressing their unique stories and contributions to the cultural landscape of Limerick. This publication will provide an outline of both projects.

In 2015/16 Communities of Culture had two components, the first being the creation of loan boxes by the community groups from last year’s project and the second working with new groups on a project entitled ‘In Fairness’. This double sided publication will provide an outline of both projects.
The project also benefited from a dedicated team and the final stages of the project, for her interest and expertise in the financial management of the project.

We are especially grateful to Fintan McCarty, Larry Clancy, Noel Kelly and Richard Clancy. Special thanks to Helen O’Donnell and her team in the café. They would like to draw attention to the great team of interns who worked on the project: Mark Healy, Caragh May O’Mahony, and Rosie Clarke.

Last but certainly not least we would like to thank all the project participants who generously shared their time, stories and skills to create two significant resources for their communities. The groups that took part in the project were:

- Mid-West School for the Deaf
- St. Mary’s Parish Men’s Shed
- South Hill Men’s Shed
- St. Mary’s Over 55s Women’s Group
- Moyross Go4It Project
- Moyross Treads
- Ballinacurra Weston Youth Group from the West
- End Youth Centre

Blackberry stitch sample from Moyross Treads, photo Kate Bowe O’Brien
Acknowledgements

The Communities of Culture Programme is funded by Limerick City and County Council’s Regeneration Agencies. This project would not have been possible without this support.

The project also benefited from a dedicated team and the museum would like to thank Siobhán Clancy, project co-ordinator, artist and facilitator and Fiona Byrne, Acting Curator of Education and Outreach. We would also like to acknowledge the work of Maria Cagney who was instated as Curator of Education and Outreach at the final stages of the project, for her interest and support of the project. She will be key in bringing the Communities of Culture programme forward into its next phase in 2017.

There were many people whose insight benefited this project and we would especially like to thank Dr. Dominique Bouchard whose original vision provided a solid base from which to build and Sorcha O’Brien, project co-ordinator for Communities of Culture 2014 whose advice and assistance was invaluable. We would also like to thank Mary Immaculate College especially Eileen O’Sullivan and Maeve Líston. There were a number of artists, creatives, experts and historians without whom this project would not have achieved the high standards it did. Sincere thanks is due to Mary Conroy, Dominik Kosicki, Fab Lab Limerick, Brian Lavelle, Brian Hodkinson, Máiread Hegarty and Carri O’Donnell.

The project team would also like to thank all the staff, Docents and interns from the museum who supported the project. We wish to thank Naomi O’Nolan for her valuable support and Ger McCoy for his patience and expertise in the financial management of the project.