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**HARRY MEADLEY**

**FREE-FOR-ALL**

# KNOWLEDGE EXCHANGE FRAMEWORK DATA COLLECTION

February 2023

The University's Research & Enterprise Service has requested information on knowledge exchange and engagement with the public and communities. Please complete the form below and return it to Professor Simon Morris ([S.DC.Morris@leedsbeckett.ac.uk](mailto:S.DC.Morris@leedsbeckett.ac.uk)) and Dr Tina Conkar ([t.conkar@leedsbeckett.ac.uk](mailto:t.conkar@leedsbeckett.ac.uk)) by **21 February 2023**.

Many thanks for your support with information gathering for this submission.

<b>Name:</b>	Harry Meadley
<b>Job Title:</b>	Lecturer
<b>Email:</b>	<a href="mailto:h.meadley@leedsbeckett.ac.uk">h.meadley@leedsbeckett.ac.uk</a>
<b>School:</b>	Leeds School of Arts

Please use the template below to detail information on all projects you have undertaken since 1 January 2019 that involved public and community engagement. Please use one form per project.

<b>Project Title:</b>	Free-for-All
<b>Project Date(s):</b>	22 July – 11 September 2022
<b>URL Link to Project:</b>	<a href="https://harrymeadley.studio/free-for-all">https://harrymeadley.studio/free-for-all</a>
<b>Brief Description of Project</b> (250-1000 words max.)	
In the field below please give a brief outline of the project and what it entailed.	
Excerpts from exhibition texts:	
<p>Artist Harry Meadley likes to turn whole art galleries into artworks. Instead of just filling galleries with things he has created, he is interested in the potential of art spaces becoming sites of public discourse, and in this case, by offering the gallery spaces at Touchstones to the people of Rochdale - to become a site of self-led public activity. For everyone, by anyone.</p> <p>Following a call-out to the people of Rochdale community groups, artists, schools and, well, everybody, Free-for-All has blossomed into a programme of family events, crafts, film, wellbeing and more, all devised and delivered by you. You've brought the ideas, we've provided the space, time and the support of our team, and the result is a packed seven weeks of events, exhibitions and activities, celebrating the creativity and ambition of the borough of Rochdale.</p>	

But it doesn't stop there... whilst the exhibition is on, we are still welcoming members of the public to talk to us about staging their own events, displaying their own artworks, arranging meet-ups, rehearsals, playing games, or using the galleries in other ways no one else has thought of. This is a very different type of exhibition where the boundaries between audience, artist, participant or performer have been purposefully broken down.

Free-for-All is very much a trial, a starting point and a chance for Touchstones to begin making hundreds of new connections with people in the borough. The hope is that regular 'free-for-alls' can start to fit within the wider Touchstones programme in the years to come, leading to the gallery becoming a new type of civic institution.

#### Gallery 1: Take Over

This gallery space was offered up to local organisations, including staff from Touchstones itself, to occupy and use for their own exhibitions or events. These exhibitions celebrate not just the wonderful work and artworks created by the members of these organisations, but the importance of working together, mutual support and actively contributing to our own communities. Just as important, this space will also play host to a series of training sessions, key services and private meetings delivered by organisations such as Action Together and Healthwatch Rochdale.

#### Gallery 2: We Want Your Art

This gallery has mainly been handed over to anyone from the borough of Rochdale to have their own artworks displayed. People are bringing their works of art to be shown in an expanding and evolving exhibition of paintings, prints, drawings, photographs, or anything else they may deem to be a work of art. No hierarchy, no judgement, just a chance for anyone to share their creations with the world. Alongside this we have set up a permanent 'open mic' where visitors are invited to speak, sing, perform, recite or entertain their fellow visitors, for themselves, or an advertised event. Please let us know if you would like to arrange a performance to be added to the Free-for-All events listings.

#### Gallery 3: Shared Space

In 2019 artist Harry Meadley worked with Touchstones to realise the exhibition *But what if we tried?*. This project involved the gallery displaying as much of its 1500+ artwork collection in a single exhibition as possible. Though we managed to fill the gallery with hundreds of artworks, one unrealised part of that project was the idea to send many more works from the collection out into the community.

Since then, Touchstones has explored this idea which has led to initiatives such as taking Lowry paintings around Rochdale in the back of a white transit van (recently seen on The One Show). In the lead up to Free-for-All, Touchstones has staged a series of mini pop-up exhibitions and creative workshops with partners such as Deeplish Community Centre, Hare Hill House, Rochdale Leisure Centre and Wardleworth Community Centre.

Presented here are a series of large-scale photographs taken by Harry Meadley of these outings printed on mesh banners usually used to cover scaffolding. This gallery space has been 're-skinned' to bring all these artworks, objects, archive materials and community spaces together into one single shared space.

Gallery 4:

Ultimately, Free for-All asks the question "As this is your civic space - how would you like to use it?" This large gallery space has been re-imagined as a form of civic hall, a space in which people can get together for events and performances - without having to pay a hire charge. Already we have a programme featuring a ceilidh, a vogue ball, a petting zoo, a tea dance, gong baths, yoga, a circus, and more. We are open to other last-minute ideas as well.

When events aren't taking place, this space can also be a youth centre or sports hall. Feel free to bring your own equipment or toys, play and have fun. In that spirit, a group of young people have worked with local artist Dani Burke to produce the large-scale wall painting you see before you - inspired by artworks and objects from the Touchstones collection. And lastly, though most of these events are free and open to everyone, it is also important that sometimes events take place in private. We are honoured to be hosting events such as Asian LGBT Pride and a celebration day exclusively for Cared for Children & their foster families.

**Organisations Engaged with:**

Please list the names of any organisations engaged with, such as Schools or Community Groups.

Touchstones Rochdale, YourTrust, Action Together, Healthwatch Rochdale, Wardleworth Community Centre, Deeplish Community Centre, Hare Hill House, Rochdale Leisure Centre, Ghetto Fabulous, Red Bobble Arts, Ebor Studios, Asian LGBT Group (Rochdale), Skylight Circus, Nigeria Community Association (Rochdale), Soul Sisters, Voice Assembly, Theatre in Flow, Cartwheel Arts.

**Total participants:**

Please give an approximate figure for the number of people who engaged with your project.

3,685 visitors (including 465 children on the holiday activities and food programme)

**Knowledge Exchange Outcomes:**

If relevant, in brief, please describe any knowledge exchange outcomes such as new approaches to working with a community.

In the development of *Free-for-All*, artist Harry Meadley worked with Touchstones to bring artworks and items from their collection to several community centres, creating a series of themed pop-up shows. These displays were used as ways to engage multiple community groups and open up discussions about how they might contribute or participate in *Free-for-All*. Large format photographs of these displays, in situ within the community centres, were then re-exhibited within *Free-for-All*.

A 'Final Celebration' event was held on the last weekend of *Free-for-All* that featured an entire programme of live performances by different people and groups who had come forward during *Free-for-All* with suggestions of what they would like to contribute.

*Free-for-All* was partly undertaken as a learning experience for the gallery for how to better integrate community

programming. Touchstones will later this year be closing for a capital redevelopment – which in part has been informed and consulted upon in relation to the learnings from *Free-for-All* – and will re-open in 2025 with another *Free-for-All* – something they intend to host annually within their future programme.

**Quotes**

In the field below please include any relevant quotes that you would like to share which evidence the knowledge exchange and engagement your project received.

Visitor / participants quotes gathered by Wafer Hadley:

“Everyone were invited and everyone had their own little space, and it just felt like a big party for Rochdale! And it was a great opportunity for artists and artisans to mix ... and my mum came to the tea dance even! And she never would’ve gone to ‘owt like that. It were brilliant. I thought it were a fabulous thing for Rochdale – I can’t speak highly enough about it. The kids were buzzing.”

“We’ve got a big Asian community in Rochdale, and my Asian friends said they wouldn’t have dreamed of going to Touchstones, but we all came and did our art on the wall and they loved it! Arabic writing on the wall! And the little Asian kids came in and said look that’s our language! And now they all come on a Saturday. And it should be open to the whole diverse community, not just middle-aged white people. And I’ve never seen Asian people in here before. It’s like bonding.”

“I think these events are a necessity, especially now. Being able to see so many different ways of being creative and experiencing it first hand is wonderful”

“All events showed a good cultural and diverse mix. The exhibition of artists work from around Rochdale was my favourite”

“Engaging and creative, allowed a range of ages to join in the variety of activities”

“I liked the fact that the space was being used in the community by the community so many different things to do and choose from. A great idea”

**Images**

In the field below please include any relevant images you would like to share.





















