 UK – Creative Impact Fund

Making a Museum of Homelessness in a Global Crisis

Reimagining the role of and
possibilities for museums in
a global polycrisis



Making a Museum of Homelessness in a Global Crisis: Reimagining the role of and possibilities for museums in a polycrisis

Summary

Our Creative Impact Fund (CIF) project with CIRCE was to radically re-imagine what a museum can be. Having existed for eight years, in 2023, Museum of Homelessness (MoH) opened the world's first physical museum dedicated to homelessness.

Opening the world's first museum of homelessness was a unique opportunity, and we wanted to ensure that it was done in a way that allowed us to continue our important work. We are committed to creating a space that not only explores the causes of homelessness and shares stories of creative survival but also actively works towards creating change and addressing the issues perpetuating homelessness.

MoH seeks to go beyond traditional museum functions, actively engaging with the causes of homelessness and working towards tangible change. The innovative approach involves running the museum community-oriented, tapping into the creativity of a community that has historically faced barriers due to marginalisation. This community, united by shared experiences rather than a common identity, includes individuals at the forefront of austerity and media attacks, such as trans people, migrants, those in the asylum process, and working-class individuals. By

welcoming individuals based on their experiences with homelessness, inequity, poverty, and addiction, the museum fosters solidarity that transcends identity categories.

The project's timing is significant, considering the increasing homelessness crisis in the UK, an 80% spike in non-COVID-related deaths among people experiencing homelessness, a troubling trend of suicides within the community, and an addiction crisis. The root causes of these polycrisis-related issues can be traced back to austerity, anti-immigration, and anti-welfare policies implemented by the coalition government, particularly impacting vulnerable groups. The establishment of the Museum of Homelessness serves as an opportunity to address these issues from the ground up.

It was important to us that we used a solidarity-based economic framework for the project. This framework has five key principles that we have applied and scaled in the way we operate during this journey:

1. **Pluralism** - Our team is led by people who have lived through the experience of homelessness. In focusing on a shared experience (homelessness), we can bring in people from various identities who may not usually work together. This approach encourages diversity and solidarity.
2. **Solidarity** - We are part of a broad network of grassroots collectives doing similar work across London and the UK. The best example of this is our Homeless Task Force, which was established during the pandemic. We also operate all relationships on a solidarity basis as much as possible. Augusto Boal said, 'Solidarity means running the same risks,' and we try to live up to this.
3. **Equity** - Sharing resources and power within the organisation and with our partners. We have a flat pay policy and a democratic structure that supports flattened power. Together, we build creative activities to support collective healing from trauma, recruiting and paying people from the community to deliver the activity. Furthermore, we offer coaching and a therapy fund to help broaden our team of people with lived experience.
4. **Participatory Democracy** - Devolved Decision Making. Designing solutions with the community (e.g., direct access to rehab and recovery community work), genuinely co-producing all elements on the site, rethinking traditional roles (removing the architects and curators), and opening up the museum design process to the community.

5. **Sustainability** - Focusing on a triple bottom line of social, economic, and environmental sustainability threaded through everything we do. Implementing a generative approach to growth that can nurture a lived experience led the team to deliver this radical new site.

Using this framework, the key innovations we implemented were:

- We scrapped an architect's traditional role with a museum capital project and replaced this with the community working directly with the building contractors and structural engineers.
- We applied doughnut economics to our scaling and rewrote the project plan, disregarding the constraints and deadlines that often play a role in cultural projects.
- We implemented consensual governance processes and held spaces where trustees, community members, and our artists in residence could work on organisational development.
- We contracted a delivery team with experience in homelessness, addiction, trauma, and recovery to deliver the pilot community programme in Autumn 2023.
- With excellent results, we implemented a compassion-based design into the site rather than hostile architecture.
- We flipped the notion of a VIP opening, and rather than aiming for celebrity endorsement, politicians, or people who occupy powerful places in society; we have opened the site for the first six months exclusively to our community, people who are homeless, in poverty, and struggling with addiction.

Undertaking such ambitious work required replacing academic expertise with lived experience, rewriting stakeholder plans, employing community members, and relinquishing control over spatial design. Challenges arose during the process, introducing a hierarchy in certain aspects, simplifying complexity, and the need for additional resources to address trauma-related dynamics on-site and within the organisation.

Despite these challenges, the project yielded valuable insights, emphasising the importance of integrity in this innovative approach. The outcomes included rich creative outputs, strong social connections among individuals with diverse identities and experiences, and effective responses to the overarching polycrisis. MoH is a groundbreaking example of reimagining museums, challenging traditional models, and embracing inclusivity, creativity, and community-driven solutions.



Journey



David Tovey's Man on Bench Fairytale, 2018

After being set up in 2015, our first public launch was at Tate Modern in 2017. Since then, MoH has staged artistic productions in Glasgow, Liverpool, Manchester, and London. Our emphasis on producing unforgettable creative work is not separate from our campaigning. We carry out investigations and seek to influence policy in areas such as the criminalisation of poverty, the UK's hostile environment, and the deaths of people experiencing homelessness.

We also take direct action. From the earliest moments of the pandemic, we repurposed all our activity and resources to provide emergency support, forming a Homeless Taskforce with our partners Streets Kitchen, the Outside Project, and the Simon Community. This blend of creative producing and social action has taken various forms and is distinct from a traditional museum model that emphasises audience development and destination-based marketing.

In this context, we have set out to rewrite the script of what a museum can be and experiment with a radical new model. We firmly believe museums must be political and actively engage with their communities, amplifying their voices and advocating for issues that impact them. This approach has both responded to and influenced broader museum debates.

In 2019, we embarked on a search for a permanent site. We had a vision of a space that would not only serve as a hub for all our activities but also challenge the traditional neutral operation of mainstream museums. Our search for a site has also been informed by practical considerations such as making our collections more accessible. Our approach to how a space would look and feel is influenced by years of needing a site - in essence - being mobile, flexible, and responsive to the social crisis we face.

We explored various options, including disused prisons and abandoned shop fronts. We were then made aware of Manor House Lodge, a disused former gatekeeper's house on the outskirts of Finsbury Park. The building dates back to the park's opening in 1869, and for much of its life, it was lived in by a park superintendent. More recently, in the last 30 years, the lodge has struggled to find a permanent use. It has been occupied by the park constabulary and community organisations and faced spells where it has fallen into disrepair. This site is different from where you would immediately imagine a museum. However, our community fell in love with it.

The site is in Haringey - a borough in the top 15% of the UK's deprived wards. In 2020, the homelessness charity Shelter reported that Haringey has the highest rate of child homelessness in England. The park and its surrounding areas are not only a place where people sleep rough but also where lots of people are placed in usually unsuitable temporary housing while the council works on finding them secure long-term accommodation.

The area also hosts a large number of people who are in the asylum process, awaiting a decision on their case. Manor House Lodge is at the centre of many issues we are actively campaigning around and is home to people with whom we build solidarity. The site choice also prevents us from entering unethical relationships that often harm a museum's reputation. Unlike numerous large museums that establish connections with property developers, fossil fuel companies, or pharmaceutical corporations to obtain naming rights or substantial influence over their operations, MoH refrains from such associations due to our ethical concerns and the strong opposition from our community.

We negotiated with Haringey Council to secure a tenancy in late 2020. This process lasted 32 months in total. In the meantime, we set up a base on Seven Sisters Road with our partners, Streets Kitchen, to be closer to the park and immerse ourselves in the community. It became clear that to open the Museum of Homelessness on this site successfully; we would need to cultivate solid relationships with all stakeholders involved. Each existing collective and community we want to work with at this new site has its radical history and story, and the longer we spent in the area, the more it became apparent that there was a need to navigate these relationships respectfully and with care.



When we began our journey with CIRCE in the spring of 2023, our project concept was to use our new dedicated site and expanded team to address racism and xenophobia within homelessness in the UK. Our objective was to strengthen relationships, provide resources, and make policy recommendations to change public perceptions. This work was driven by the poly-crisis facing the UK, including austerity, housing shortages, and social fragmentation, which has led to a rise in racism and far-right activity. There is considerable overlap and shared aims for the potential of creative impact.

Unfortunately, the UK government's response to polycrisis has been characterised by policy failures, socio-economic difficulty, and rising inequality. Within this, the scapegoating and targeting of minority groups and the denial of structural failures have become normalised. This rhetoric has further fueled moral panics stoking the already rising far-right in the UK regarding marginalised groups who are more likely to experience homelessness - such as trans people, people in the asylum process, people in active addiction, disabled people, and people who have migrated to the UK. The new site needed space for those disproportionately affected by the polycrisis.

Given these circumstances, it was crucial to get our launch right. As a team and community, we decided to change our launch process and focus on opening the site slower, ensuring that we were building community and working sustainably to ensure a longer-lasting impact.

This shift led us to think about creatively intervening in the local area to foster a space for healing and recovery. We adapted our project plan to focus solely on our community to achieve this. This involved two iteration cycles: one focused on community building and one on bringing the community in.

Through this journey, we have established a new paradigm for operating a museum. Mainstream museums have a colonial history and typically function to extract from communities and preserve histories from a supposed apolitical and neutral perspective. Through our work, we have challenged this way of operating, but as we open our new permanent site, our objective extends beyond challenging the traditional practices of museums. We are proposing a radical reshaping of museums as sites of healing and justice, led by people with experience. The motivations driving this transformation are rooted in the shared experiences of our team of

individuals who have lived through homelessness, trauma, addiction, and recovery. Our first-hand understanding of the challenges faced by the community we represent extends beyond theory, providing insights into the sometimes exploitative nature of certain museums, services, and spaces. The innovation process enabled us to expand our team significantly, ensuring that all individuals contracted through this process possess lived experiences related to the museum's reason for being.

Our overarching goal has been to create a museum capable of addressing individual, structural, and systemic traumas during the global poly-crisis. Throughout the innovative process of developing the spatiality of the site, scaling in a generative way, trialing creative community programmes, and developing our mutual aid work, our innovation stemmed from the two cycles of activity, which were rooted in our economies of solidarity framework and our existing co-production and co-design models that we have run since our inception in 2015.

Innovation

Innovation lies at the heart of our journey as we transform the traditional museum model into something new. This section details the unconventional approaches that distinguish MoH from the standard museum practices - with community, recovery, and healing at the centre of the process.



Iteration One

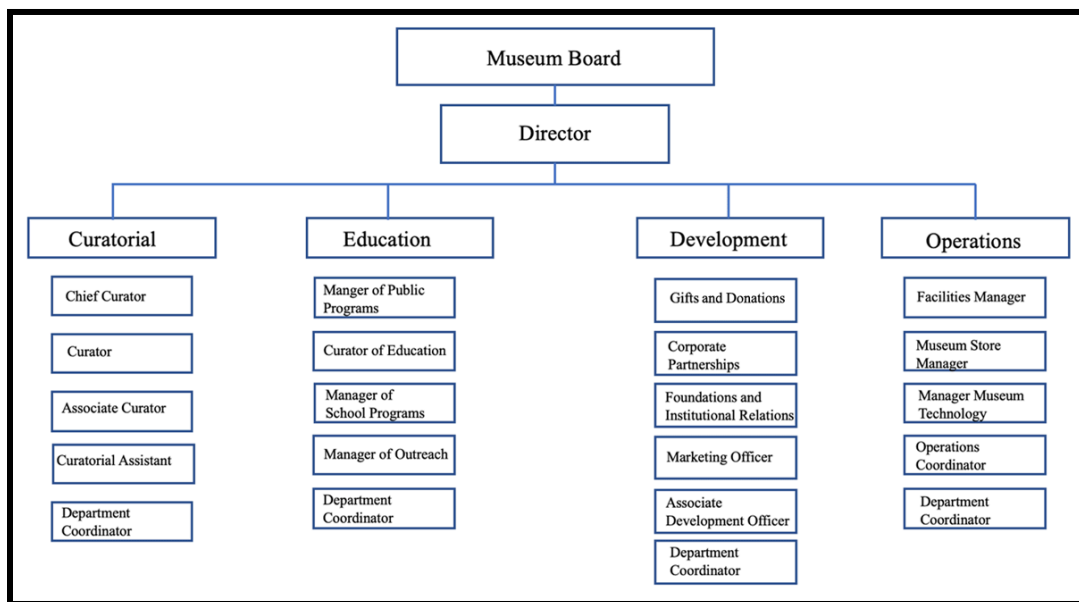
Our first iteration cycle began in June 2023 and ran until August 2023. This phase focused on preparing the site and strengthening the relationships needed to bring the site to life. We also wanted to ensure that people in our existing community were part of designing and implementing these iterations and creating our new site.

Ideation 1 - June 2023

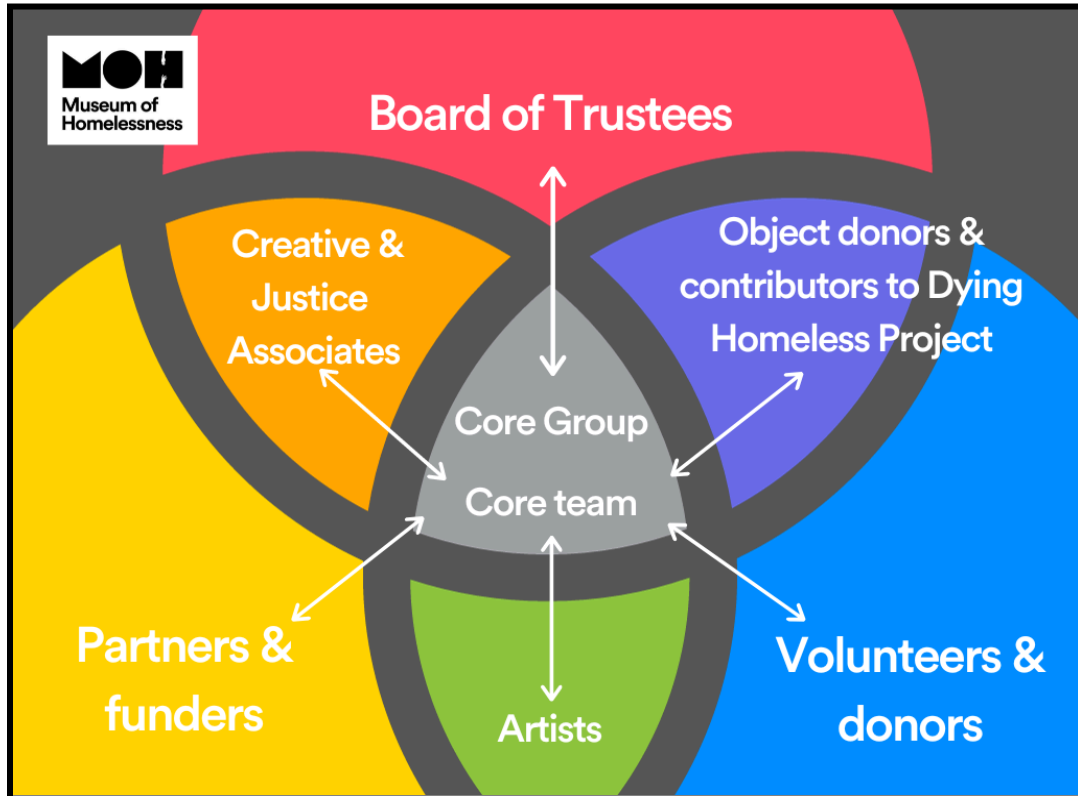
Key innovation for this phase: Scrapping the architect role and replacing it with community design.

We secured the site by finishing lease negotiations with the council. We signed the lease in mid-June 2023. This was a significant milestone for the project, and we held ‘Meet and Dream’ sessions with our current community members who have been invested in the development of the site throughout the lease negotiations. ‘Meet and Dream’ sessions are our community organising and innovation spaces designed so that a wide range of community members can creatively shape the space, activities, look, and feel of what MoH does. These summer sessions specifically focused on shaping design ideas for the outdoor and indoor spaces and initial activities.

Meet and Dream sessions offer a radical form of engagement that differs from regular lived experience ‘forums’ or ‘panels.’ They are porous and generous spaces that enable people to come in and out of the organisation on terms that suit the individual and contribute to the strategic work of the museum by using creative processes. This way of working on terms that suit the individual, not the organisation, is reflected in the MoH's broader organisational structure, which differs significantly from a traditional museum.



Traditional Museum Organisational Structure as outlined in Tanga, M., 2021. Let's Imagine a New Museum Staff Structure. *Journal of Conservation and Museum Studies*, 19(1), p.7. DOI10.5334/jcms.197



MoH Organisational Structure

During this ideation period, we approached the capital and construction elements of the building very differently from how other museums might. The UK's heritage field has a developed ecology of processes and agents for capital projects. In 2021, the UK heritage sector contributed £7.5bn to the construction industry and £2bn to the architectural and engineering services sector. We have long noted that the heritage sector tends to overextend itself on capital projects, with museums operating at a deficit post-capital project. In our opinion, this is an inherent problem with the growth model being applied to museums.

For MoH, this was an opportunity to 'do' capital differently, albeit on a much smaller scale, but with the chance to innovate in spatial design and delivery. In this ideation period, we replaced the architect role with the community. The community made design decisions, and we then worked with contractors, structural engineers, surveyors, and building control to make the vision a reality. This included significant structural works on the interior of the site, such as removing walls and opening up the space, reshaping the ground floor for accessibility, the installation of a new kitchen, and more minor details, such as choosing the floor type and paint colours.

We were working on bedding in the new core team of the Museum Manager, Community Coordinator, and Creative Project Manager. The co-directors were evolving a leadership style from founder to director, requiring more delegation and trusting the new team to deliver a scaled organisation.

During this phase, we began early-stage planning around the programmes and activities needed once we relocated to the new site. These were heavily informed by feedback from the 'Meet and Dream' sessions, CIRCE summits, and conversations generated in the section below.

Additionally, in this phase, we contacted a variety of potential creative partners that we wanted to work with on the project. This included multiple community garden projects, community gardeners, community groups, local services, and trauma-informed musicians.

We contacted various potential partners we want to work with on the project's mutual aid and solidarity aspects. This included our existing homelessness Taskforce, The Outside Project, Streets Kitchen, African Rainbow Family, and the Simon Community, and new organisations such as the People's Recovery Project, NAACOM, Decolonizing Economics, and Haringey Migrant Support Centre.

Offsite, we trialed a groundbreaking new approach to working with trauma and creating survivor-led spaces of collective care and mutual aid using our museum objects as a locus in a live installation called 'riotlab' at a punk venue in South London. This was enriched by the broader process of training up to 7 members of the MoH crew as certified Trauma-Informed Coaches (TICC), developing survivor-led mental health responses to be implemented on the new site.



Screening 1

Key innovation for this phase: Applying doughnut economic principles to our scaling and re-writing the project plan to open the museum later.

We worked with contractors to screen community suggestions for the new site and ensure feasibility.

When screening what we had initially wanted to achieve, we decided to redesign our two-part launch, spend more time building community and relationships, and slow down the plans to open the building to the public, postponing until Spring 2024.

Screening our community ideation process in June and July resulted in our decision to postpone the start of our initial programmes. Community members wanted to prioritise connection and relationship building with the communities and stakeholders involved in the new site and Finsbury Park. Furthermore, ensuring that the new staff team had time to settle into their roles and deliver their responsibilities safely and at the right pace was essential.

Our Creative Project Manager and Community Coordinator began designing a range of creative community programs that would engage our community, focusing on accessibility for people who have experienced homelessness, trauma, addiction, and recovery. A crucial part of delivering these activities would be recruiting a team of expert creatives with experience with our community's issues.

We began relationship-building with key stakeholders in the park, people from the community who were either living in the park or using the park in the daytime. This included introducing ourselves to Edible Landscapes and Finsbury Park Arts Club, two established community sites in the park.

Implementation 1

Key innovation for this phase: Consensual governance day bringing together trustees and community members

The Meet and Dream suggestions guided us in instructing contractors to carry out essential building works requested by the community to make the site compliant, functional, and a blank canvas.

These works included:

- Design and construction of a new community kitchen.
- Wall removal to transform the ground floor into an open community and hospitality space.
- Creation of a fully accessible therapeutic and sensory overwhelm room.
- Install outdoor hot and cold taps for park visitors needing water access.

We focused on ensuring that these building works would be completed in time for the launch of our community programmes.

Despite the move-in date being postponed to August, collaboration with the contractors on the additional building works revealed that August was no longer feasible due to supply shortages resulting from post-Brexit complications and the RAAC concrete crisis. By the end of this phase, it became evident that a September move-in date would work best. We aimed for a move-in on the 12th of September, with community programmes launching at the end of September.

This phase marked the transition from iteration 1 workflows into tangible activities for developing programmes on the site. This included:

- A series of partnership workshops were piloted with Hackney Playbus, a small charity dedicated to providing play opportunities for marginalised families off-site.
- Initiating the contracting process for freelancers to deliver programmes, including an interview process for landscaping and gardening with ten applicants.
- Outline scheduling and team discussions for creating a safe and inclusive site for programme hosting.

We continued to foster our relationship with Naccom and People's Recovery Project, as these would be the two organisations we bring onsite for our initial community launch and programmes.



Consensual Governance in Action, Summer 2023

Creative Programme Highlight, Garden: We collaborated with Community Landscape Gardeners Ellie Prichard and Dan Badger to create a six-week garden programme running from our new site. This programme was educational, as we learned about the garden space together and a co-design process involving the community and understanding their desires for our garden space. This programme exemplifies how we integrate creativity and community work to design our space, a museum built by 100 hands.



Iterative Development, Shifting Focus and Approach: Initially, we planned to hire a landscaping organisation to design our garden and carry out the work over the summer, preparing for our initial public launch in the autumn. However, we revised our project plan and incorporated the garden works into a community programme. This allowed our community to be involved in the design process, contributing their ideas at each step. By the end of the CIRCE project, we would have co-produced design plans to implement until our new public launch in April 2024.



Community-Centric Insights and Programme Refinement: Originally, we intended to work with one Community Landscape Gardener, but during the recruitment process, two standout applicants emerged. Their combined experience covered all aspects of what we hoped to achieve. One had extensive experience in running community garden co-design projects. At the same time, the other possessed hard landscaping skills and had lived experience of homelessness, previously using the garden as a sleeping site. We decided to collaborate with both to help design and implement the garden programme.



Screening and Adaptation: Feedback from our community revealed a desire for the space to be a site of calm and healing. While incorporating this into the programme design, we also recognised the existing local community using the garden space daily. Aligning the needs of both communities into the programme design became a central focus for us.

Implementation: We designed and led a six-week community programme to gather ideas and feedback for the garden design. This programme invited individuals from MOH's community to participate weekly in garden activities and share their thoughts on the space. Listening to people's wants and needs guided the designs and recommendations for our next steps. We also conducted practical workshops, including propagation, bulb planting, and seed bomb-making. A visit and tour of our neighbours at

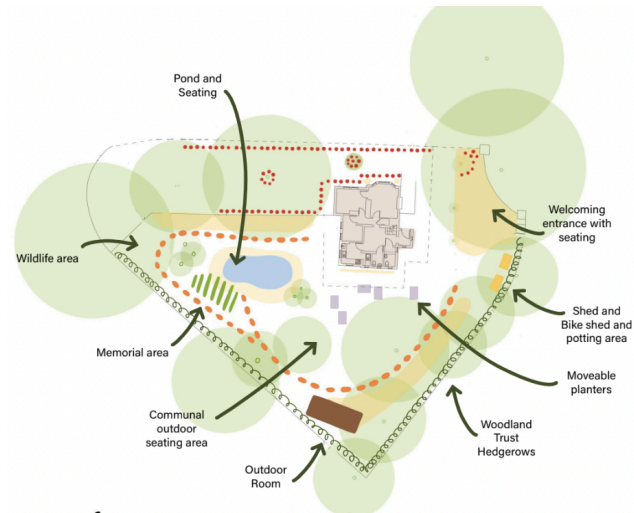
Edible Landscapes inspired the group - this group was one of the key stakeholders in the local area that we wanted to bring inside. Edible Landscapes have been very welcoming!

Fostering Participation: Alongside the workshops and design process, it became clear that some community members wanted to get involved and get their hands dirty as soon as possible. Since starting the programme, the community has played a considerable part in developing the garden and helping with practical garden jobs such as clearing areas, weeding, planting bulbs, wood chipping areas, mapping paths, laying paths, pruning, and creating a shed base.

Community Ideas: Throughout the process, the community has contributed many ideas towards the project, from colours they want to see in the garden to particular plants they like. We have also spoken with participants who have shown specific knowledge in areas of the garden; for example, someone with experience in ponds, and we have now created one. A community member who previously used the site daily became a significant part of the garden's progress, contributing time and energy to clearing the garden and suggesting ideas for the space. He has provided beautiful garden drawings, documenting our work and ideas for the next steps. His involvement and enthusiasm will be vital in moving the project forward!

Link to Museum's Ethos and Healing Practices: The programme aligned with the Museum's ethos of creating a safe space. The garden provided an accessible space for people of various abilities to work collectively. Three attendees of the gardening programme have now joined the People's Recovery Project's weekly meetings. The programme not only fostered creativity and personal growth through gardening and provided a safe space for trauma-informed work and recovery.

Conclusion, A Space for Designing, Building, and Healing Through Creative Practices: This programme was developed through trialling different approaches and community feedback. The six-week programme created a space for community members to explore creativity, innovation, and personal growth through gardening. It offered a safe environment, aligning seamlessly with the Museum's vision of trauma-informed work through creative practices.



Iteration Two

Our second iteration cycle began in August 2023 and ran until November 2023. This was a continuation of the work that had started in the first iteration. Still, with an extended team, the learning from iteration one, and the keys to an almost-ready building, we could begin to trial our ideas with the community as we designed the rest of our creative programmes.

Ideation 2

The key innovation for this phase: is contracting a delivery team of people with experience in homelessness, addiction, and trauma to run the pilot programme.

In Iteration 2, an interior spatial narrative titled 'Museum Under Construction' was installed, transforming the concept of the architects or designer studio. Traditionally, architects or designers conduct workshops with the 'client' and produce designs privately. Our idea opens up the entire site, turning it into a live studio to which anyone can contribute anytime.

Continuing discussions with existing park users, we sought input on the garden transformation and the activities and services the new museum should include.

Another innovation involved exploring the understanding of thresholds. The community selected the site for its extensive outdoor space. During the pilot, it became evident that being inside the building was unsafe for some, and the garden felt much safer. Designing activities focusing on the outdoors as a gathering and working space has been crucial to relationship-building. This ongoing effort includes an application for funding to build an 'outdoor room.'

A freelancer team was contracted for the next phase of our CIRCE project, including:

- Two Community Landscape Gardeners to design the outside space and run workshops on growing and building in a green space.
- A yoga teacher specialising in broadening access to yoga and healing work.
- A trauma-informed musician leading our music and recovery programme.
- A filmmaker documenting the next few months in a way that reflects our values.
- A Solidarity Structures specialist supports incorporating mutual aid into all CIRCE work.
- Various artist freelancers running workshops during our Open Studio art sessions.

To ensure a safe environment for our team with lived experience, MoH offers crew access to a therapy fund for health and wellbeing needs. We adopt a flexible approach to management, allowing individuals to work at a pace that suits them. Integrating new crew members into our existing team is done in a way that values and respects everyone.

The team started working on creative ideas for their areas of focus. Internal discussions guided the promotion and accessibility of our programmes. Through community consultation, we decided not to implement a ticketing service or record details and data of people accessing our space. These ideas culminated in a programme launched at StreetsFest (05 September), an annual festival for people who are homeless and precariously housed in the local area. Despite the delay in building works, we restructured the next phase to ensure all elements proceed at a different time.

Screening 2

Key innovations for this phase: Taps, not fences, designing compassion into the site and using delays in the construction project to just 'be' in the community and build relationships.

We conducted an induction day led by our crew, covering our approach, work, and history. It was crucial to ensure that new individuals understood MoH's unique culture. We provided space for the latest team to lead workshops and sessions. We chose these freelancers for this work for their leadership in their respective fields.

Additionally, we assembled a team of individuals with lived experience of homelessness or in recovery from addiction, ensuring that our community programmes are trauma-informed and recovery-oriented.

We faced delays from the contractor, and our team could not meet compliance requirements in time for the site to open as planned. Consequently, we announced the community programmes on September 5th and postponed them until September 21st, posing significant challenges with a wide-reaching impact.

Collaboratively, we restructured the next phase to ensure that all elements could proceed at a different time. We strengthened our relationship with people who use and live in the park during this period. Building a connection with the community that has long utilised the garden space

became a priority. Having two weeks solely focused at the front of the site, engaging with people without using interior spaces, proved beneficial.

While our programmes couldn't start as planned, this delay provided screening time. Setting up a gazebo outside the building for two days per week, we engaged with people who might have attended the pre-advertised activity. This allowed us to meet individuals, distribute drinks and supplies, and generate excitement about opening the interior spaces.

Implementation 2

The key innovation for this phase is a new model for a museum - a site with a foundation of community, trust, and respect and a space for existing, recovery, and healing. Flipping the VIP model on its head and giving our community access first.

We moved into Manor House Lodge on Monday, 9th October, and invited the community onsite on Tuesday, 10th October, which coincided with World Homeless Day and World Mental Health Day.

The organisation scaled from 7 paid roles (employed and freelance) to 19 paid roles (employed and freelance). The new team focused on delivering community programmes and adapting to inhabiting the site.

Over the six weeks, we delivered creative programmes for our community. Gardening and building in the garden, recovery-based groups and sessions, yoga, open studio, creative art workshops, and music were offered on Tuesdays and Thursdays.

Our Poet-in-Residence, Surfing Sofas, released "Objects and Concepts." We held a sold-out listening party at Rich Mix London, followed by a sold-out album launch at House of St Barnabus, with partners Lyrix Organix playing a crucial role in mentoring, producing, and promoting the album.

We applied a positive risk-taking approach to assess new activities and services, allowing us to take potential risks for more robust community work and creative impact.

An example is our open-door policy for most programmes instead of installing high fencing like other museum sites. This risk-taking approach, coupled with installing outdoor taps, has contributed to building trust with the community, resulting in a positive relationship.

Work with key partners, the People's Recovery Project and NACCOM (the no accommodation network), enabled the site to offer solidarity to people in addiction and addiction recovery, as well as those experiencing the asylum system, homelessness, and destitution. This involved providing space for significant activities, including regular meetings and an exhibition.



Scan this QR code to watch a film by Joseph Wilson, commissioned to document the second iteration cycle. The community decided on a concept that visually represents the building of the space without showing faces to respect the anonymity of many community members. The voices in the film are from various individuals involved in creating the space.

Creative Programme Highlight, Music: Lauren McQ, a specialist in Trauma-Informed Musicianship, collaborated with Harry Gay during outreach in the first iteration cycle. Their combined expertise in music, community work, and experiences with addiction and recovery shaped the development of the museum's music programme.

Iterative Development, Shifting Focus, and Approach: Harry proposed a "recovery choir" in the initial iteration, but community feedback suggested a broader programme. The focus expanded beyond recovery from substances to address various forms of trauma. The title was modified, removing "recovery," a more distinct, punk-inspired approach was adopted, celebrating imperfection and collaborative music creation.

Community-Centric Insights and Programme Refinement: Feedback revealed a desire for a space that embraces imperfect musicianship. The team rejected the narrative of homelessness as an individual problem and avoided reinforcing dynamics that emphasise personal transformation through participation in a community programme. Core tenets were identified: collaboration, accessibility, non-judgment, and a focus on the process guiding the programme's development.

Screening and Adaptation: Pilot sessions at The Outside Project led to experimentation with session structures. Overcomplicating sessions were avoided, emphasising simplicity and accessibility. The innovation process prioritised creating a welcoming space for people to exist without imposing specific goals.

Implementation: Core Principles in Action: Six weekly music sessions emphasised the healing and enjoyable process of music. The programme incorporated instrumental and vocal work, fostering participation and sharing musical passions in a non-judgmental space. The implementation aligned with core tenets: collaboration, accessibility, non-judgment, and a focus on the process.



Instrumental and Vocal Sections, Fostering Participation: Instrumental sessions focused on teaching various instruments and creating a non-judgmental space for improvisation. The second hour centred on singing, incorporating breathing exercises to soothe the nervous system. Community singing enhanced a sense of belonging and confidence.

Conclusion, A Space for Healing Through Creative Practices: This programme was developed through trialling different approaches and community feedback. The six-week programme created a space for community members to explore creativity, innovation, and personal growth in music. It offered a safe environment, aligning seamlessly with the Museum's vision of trauma-informed work through creative practices.

A quote from Lauren McQ: *“Even people who said they were going to come for the first hour and watch for the second were actively involved in the singing, and over the weeks, it was incredible to see how people’s confidence grew - the voices all grew in power and enthusiasm, and even the most nervous participants were singing freely and confidently by the end of the programme. It’s hard to describe the joy captured in the room when a group of people connected by music freely expressed themselves confidently and easily. The sessions ran longer than the two hours every week, with people wanting to stay longer and continue their music-making as a group. It is a magical and very improbable sort of circumstance to get a group of people who have never played music together to gel that immediately and create something that they enjoy so much they don’t want to leave.”*



Impact

This project created impact in the following ways:

- We nurtured an ecology of different groups, people, and institutions, solving social problems grounded in one site.
- We made space for creative survivors to develop their own solutions.
- We resourced our organisation and crew to become more resilient under pressure.

A note on data: We did not want to extensively document information about our community, who are some of the most monitored members of the British population. If you are homeless, you will tend to exist on numerous databases with meetings taking place about your life, which you often have no input. MoH is against this. We tend to gather data on services and systems relating to homelessness instead. Our community knows when they are being extracted from and when they are turned into numbers to hit specific targets. A monitoring culture runs counter-intuitive to solidarity, and we have tried to gain insights into what has happened on the site without collecting demographic data.

Co-produced Spatial Design and Delivery of a Museum Site **- *A revolution in compassion***

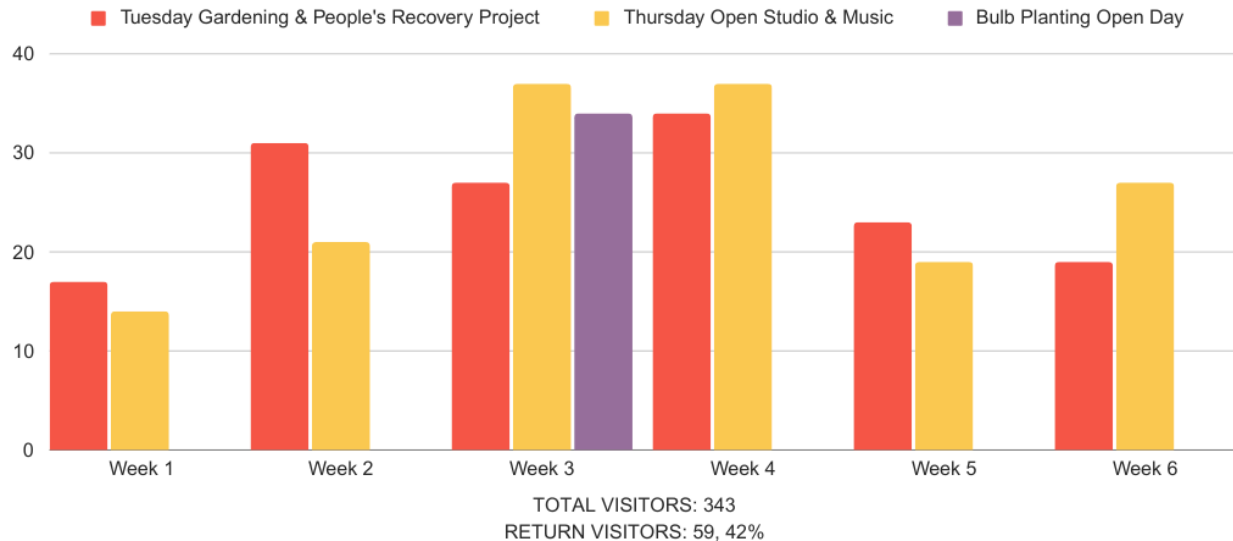
This was an area of the work where survivors could develop our solutions, in bricks and mortar. Through working with the contractors to redesign our space, one of our key objectives was to ensure that the building was accessible to as many community members as possible. This meant smashing down walls and redesigning corridors to ensure that our community members who use wheelchairs could access the entire ground floor and ensure that there was always a calm and quiet space onsite for people who were quickly overwhelmed or neurodiverse.

The impact of investing in these structural works has been felt as we have had multiple wheelchair users access our site since launching our community programmes. Additionally, people use the quiet room regularly with one person taking a whole day to recover in there after a night of sleeping on buses around the city.

Previously, the site featured an outdoor tap frequently used by the community, serving as a primary source of running drinking water for some. We installed hot and cold taps and a sink in response to this need. Although seemingly a modest gesture from an organisation, it held significant symbolic value for the community. Since we put the taps in, there has been no drug use or defecation on site. Our approach to the opening of this new site is grounded in trust, compassion, and respect, in sharp contrast to the hostile environment elsewhere in the city's fabric, and people are responding well. Many museums have security guards who may move people on. Our museum will welcome people and meet people's basic needs.

The above example shows how to use creative and innovative museum design methods to address social issues at both individual and structural levels. It relies on environmental awareness, co-production, re-use, and different forms of participation found more widely in current thinking on Museum Practice. Creativity, in our context, extends beyond the realms of arts and culture; it is embraced as an approach to problem-solving across various aspects of life.

Programmes and Activities



This graph gives you an indicative insight into the number of people who came through our doors throughout the community programme phase. Our building has a capacity of 30, meaning that we were at capacity for many of our programmes throughout the six weeks.

Additionally, the return rate of 42% illustrates that we created a community space that people wanted to return to. However, these numbers only provide a snapshot count as they only share the people that came through our doors on programme days and do not account for all the days we've been operating. The number of people who have been to this site is far higher.

This return visitor rate was most prevalent for us when a community member would come for one purpose and then join in with other activities at the Museum. For us, this is community building. For example, we would have people joining us for gardening, which was the most open and accessible programme, and through being at the Museum, they would hear about the other available sessions. This led multiple people from our gardening crew to join the People's Recovery Project's recovery group - demonstrating that they are building their journey within MoH.

In a short span, MoH's new site has transformed into a vital space for many people, including those who recently became part of the community during the creative programme period.

The impact of these art-based programmes is evident not only in the positive feedback received but also in the tangible difference made in the lives of community members. By actively involving the community in the programme's planning and execution, we have created a dynamic and inclusive space beyond traditional museum offerings, fostering participants' sense of belonging and joy.

Naccom and the People's Recovery Project were crucial partners for our solidarity work. These organisations, led by individuals with lived experience, were already actively engaged in the work we aimed to accomplish in our local area. Collaborating with them during this period was mutually beneficial, allowing us to join forces with entities sharing similar objectives.



Demystifying the Curatorial Process with Refugees

Sharing Resources, Knowledge and Space

Resources, Relationships, and Solidarity Highlight: NACCOM

In museum practice, the curatorial process is heavily protected and unavailable to many people. We strongly believe that people should tell their own stories, and we have developed ways of making the curatorial process accessible to people without curating training. During Innovation 1, we engaged with The No Accommodation Network (NACCOM) to explore doing this with their community researchers. NACCOM operates as a UK-wide network striving to eliminate poverty among individuals seeking asylum, refugees, and migrants without access to public funds.

Iterative Development: Over the past two years, NACCOM has diligently worked on training and supporting individuals with lived experiences to conduct their research. The community researchers produced a report titled “Refused? Experiences following a negative asylum decision,” drawing on the firsthand experiences of individuals navigating destitution and immigration control. Seeking collaboration with a creative organisation, NACCOM aimed to produce an exhibition and event that showcases this significant report and celebrates the innovative community research team.

Workshop Series: Leveraging additional resources from CIRCE, we developed a series of fortnightly workshops to collaborate with NACCOM's community research team. The process, led by the community researchers, involved introducing creative methods and effectively communicating their research for an impactful exhibition and event.

The Event: While our official public opening is scheduled for April 2024, we facilitated the researchers in executing a secret installation of the NACCOM exhibition. The installation was unveiled to a packed museum audience, utilising our new site's outside and inside spaces. Ada Jusic's exquisite illustrations adorned textile hangings featured in the installation, which the Museum of Homelessness is donating to Community Researchers for installations at various venues across the UK.

Creative Impact: We take pride in the first creative installation on this site prominently centred on the voices and experiences of individuals in our community grappling with and resisting the hostile environment. This is especially significant amid the rise of far-right activity and government hostility towards migrants, accompanied by rampant disinformation and inhumane policies.



Nico Ndlovu said: “As a community researcher, our first time to be in the Museum of Homelessness was empowering, and we were able to empower others who attended. It took time to design the exhibition, but it felt so good and welcoming. We could see ourselves before we even started to talk. It is good to inspire other refugees not to sit on their talents while they wait for the Home Office's decision. We thank the Museum of Homelessness for collaborating with us on this project.”

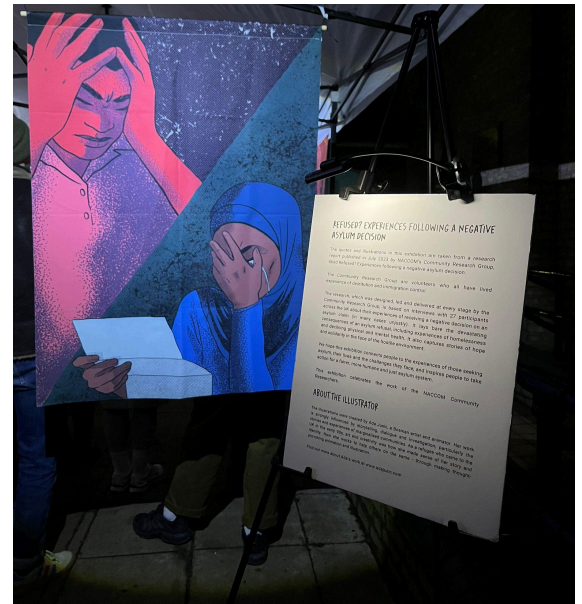
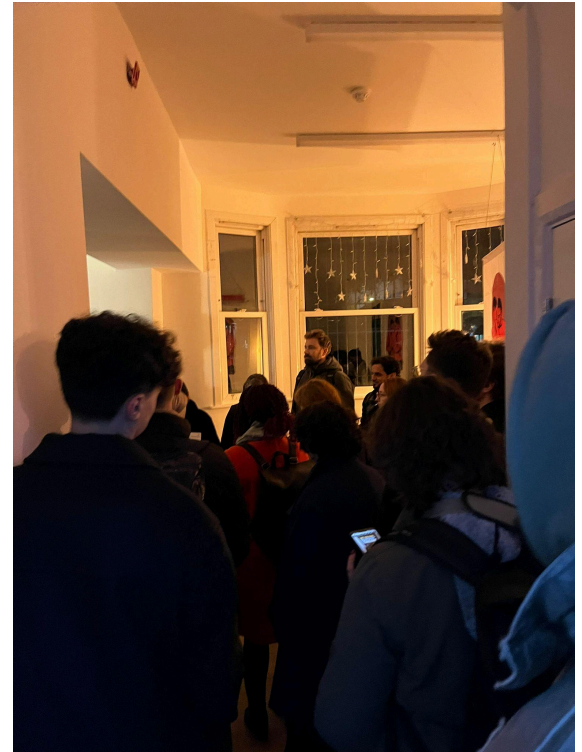
Eiri Ohtani, Director of Right to Remain, did a summary of the event on social media: “Tonight, one of Right to Remain's close friends, NACCOM, hosted an evening celebration of their Community Researchers - they wrote a report 'Refused,' documenting the experiences of people seeking asylum after a negative decision. A group of Community Researchers going through the asylum system who have been working together for two years gave us a guided tour of the exhibition, the first to be held at the Museum of Homelessness. 'Experts-by-experience' has been in vogue for some time in this field. While I feel not everyone gets it right, I find it difficult to explain how to define what's 'right' in this context. But as I listened to community researchers speak, I knew this was right. They spoke with grace, power, and humour. And compassion for everyone. When asked what's next after the report's publication, they said they would continue to fight for a home for everyone. I suppose it's their thirst for justice and dignity that shone tonight. So, congratulations to everyone who made tonight's event possible. And we look forward to continuing to work with you in the future. **Solidarity is unlimited, and solidarity will win.**”

Further impact: As a direct outcome of relationships created during the above project, we teamed up with the local grassroots group Haringey Welcome to respond rapidly to the sharply increasing numbers of people we see becoming homeless when their asylum claim is granted.

In Haringey and across England and Wales, this winter, we are facing a humanitarian emergency as the number of refugees becoming homeless is skyrocketing. This is due to new, one-week eviction periods punitively introduced by the Home Office this August.

Around £1,600 is needed for each individual for one month's deposit and one month's rent to top up what the council provides and give them a helping hand to avoid falling into homelessness and poverty. Haringey Council provides around £500 of one-off support per person who does not qualify as a priority need and, therefore, gets full housing support.

MoH can provide match funding of £200 per individual from solidarity funds. The remaining £900 per person is what we are raising through crowdfunding.



Starting with Recovery

A new vision for museums as sites of economies of solidarity

It is well established in the literature that museums are imbricated with toxic colonial legacies regarding their collections, epistemic approaches, and operational structures. In our community, we know the need to make a space where resistance to this ongoing violence is practiced. We might call this 'economies of solidarity.' Our new museum site is where workshops, groups, and survival guides on accessing trans healthcare, surviving the asylum system, or surviving rehab are produced and shared.

We started this work during the period by collaborating with the People's Recovery Project to establish a recovery group for our new site. Their primary goal is to enhance access to recovery for individuals facing homelessness and addiction, providing aftercare to support long-term stability. We intended to create a space at our new site that not only fosters engagement with the recovery groups but also encourages community members to participate in the programmes offered by the museum. Furthermore, individuals attending our programmes who are interested in recovery could be directed to the People's Recovery Project groups. The impact of this structure is evident in the number of people transitioning between the recovery groups and the museum's programmes.

Ed Addison, People's Recovery Project:

"Our community is based on helping people come out of that deep hole of isolation and we are starting to see changes. We are seeing people that don't want to be isolated anymore. They want to have a voice and they want to have a space where they can be heard. Their opinions won't be judged and they won't be marginalised. This is the beauty of TPRP pre-treatment groups at the Museum of Homelessness."

"I saw a different way of working in terms of a community approach because previously I'd worked in larger, corporate homelessness organisations, and though they're doing amazing work, there are limitations to that...I think MoH is absolutely astounding in terms of the impact that it has, as a collective memory and a response to the trauma people are suffering – it is a space for reflection," he continues. "They're essentially opening their doors to people who would otherwise have nowhere else to go."

Not only has this partnership allowed People's Recovery Project to pilot groups that offer additional and alternative routes into detox and rehab, without conditions or delay, it has also helped their attendees become active members of our community.

Nathan Roiser, People's Recovery Project:

"We couldn't have had a better experience. I want to thank the Museum in its wide sense, the people and the space, for offering us a space to build our recovery community in and embracing us into your community. We have been made to feel more than welcome; we have been made to feel at home.

From the hot tea and coffee already made to the warm smiles and authentic welcomes, warmth emanates from you all, which has lifted spirits on cold days.

It's been lovely to see the mixing of communities, people who came with us getting stuck in building paths with the gardening team, and people who came to build paths and plant flowers regularly coming to the recovery workshops.

It has allowed us to launch and provide a space where people experiencing homelessness and addiction can get away from the streets, get a taste of hope and a glimpse of recovery, and see and meet people who have already taken steps on that journey. A space where they can explore their recovery. This has allowed us to meet someone in that situation who wants to go to treatment, and together, we are in a position to offer exactly that.

It has been brilliant to have opened it the way you have, with a pilot phase to trial things and let them organically develop and then review. We will do the same. We would love to be part of this amazing project going forward."

Further impact of this partnership was included in a Huck article about our work:

"When you are on the streets you forget about positivity, you're surrounded by negative thoughts, you forget about everything in real life, [like] love, the good emotions, and [the MoH] show you that" Mariusz says. "When you go there, they treat you as a human being, and they try and support you with whatever it takes, and I'm so grateful for that because they helped me a lot."

Mariusz is in recovery after completing his rehab treatment and working part-time in a bar. He credits the community around the MoH and the support that Ed, Matt and Jess gave him for helping him reach the situation he is in now. "It's helping me to build my strength and courage and give hope," he beams. "I love it; now I enjoy love. Believe me, if you're in this building you feel the emotion, the vibes – it's a home sweet home."

Networks of Solidarity

Building meaningful connections during a social crisis

Throughout the pilot programmes, we have carefully listened to people who visit, aiming to discern precisely what resources are essential to store at the museum for distribution to the community.

Another illustration of how our flexible organising approach has facilitated the expansion of our solidarity networks is involving community members in shaping the museum's future initiatives. One noteworthy instance is when an attendee of our music programme shared their experience as a homeless single mother and expressed a desire to develop a workshop series on confidence-building to support other single mothers facing homelessness. We are collaborating with this person to bring their idea to fruition, with the workshop series scheduled to launch from our site in 2024.

We have actively engaged with various stakeholders throughout this process, incorporating their suggestions and feedback into developing our space creative programmes. The impact that we have been able to have throughout the process has depended on our successful management to keep these stakeholder groups satisfied, which has led to a level of engagement exceeding initial predictions. A unique stakeholder approach was implemented to achieve this, prioritising individuals who drink in the park and those living in tents rather than traditional politicians or councillors. This strategy has fostered solidarity and connection and positioned the museum with integrity.

MoH embraced the unpredictability of opening a new site and working with external contractors and numerous stakeholders. Community building and transparent external communications were prioritised, fostering trust and flexibility to take risks. MoH adopted a positive risk-taking approach, assessing potential risks and benefits to enhance community work and creative impact.

To conclude the impact section of this report, we are pleased to announce that on Friday, December 15th, we were honoured with the title of "Co-creation Champion of the Year". This award was presented by Arts & Homelessness International, marking the first awards ceremony dedicated to recognising achievements and projects in the international arts and homelessness

sector. Notably, the winners of this award were determined by an independent panel of judges comprised of individuals with personal experiences of homelessness. Our Poet in Residence, Surfing Sofas, also received the Creative of the Year award. This recognition is a significant honour and a testament to the collaborative efforts within our community and the impactful work we collectively produce.

Learnings

There are rich learnings around scaling these economies of solidarity with a lived experience-led team in place, and we hope these may be of use to other museums or cultural organisations who are trying to do similar work in the polycrisis.

An open design process and an open door lead to authentic engagement

Letting go of strict design sensibilities and inviting the community to contribute can achieve fantastic results. We have opened the design process and nurtured the community's natural tendency to recycle, save items, and make the best of any object. People are bringing in things from tips and skips that have been thrown away. Our garden furniture is discarded offcuts from fallen trees, our Hoover is reconditioned, having been found in a skip, and our crew has brought in casserole dishes used to feed everyone. The design of the space is being driven by our community's ability to make the best of any object.

No organisational structure can limit the impact

A non-hierarchical and devolved approach can lead to problems when applied to a construction project. This can mean that issues are not picked up quickly enough. In our case, compliance checks were not completed in time for our planned move-in date, and we needed to postpone the move-in date to open the site. We have learned, therefore, that stricter accountability, reporting, and more traditional managerial processes may be necessary at specific points in the organisation's life cycle.

More hands means more admin

We increased our team from 4 paid roles to 19 paid roles during the period. While this brought talent and energy into the organisation, on reflection, it was a significant scaling that put a strain on the team and the organisation's core processes relating to, for example, finance, contracting, management, and HR. This was a complex process with various contracts, commissions, and employment contracts across the team.

Trauma survivor-led work means taking extra care

Developing and delivering onsite activities for and by individuals who have experienced homelessness, addiction, and trauma is complex. We implemented structural supports, including individual therapy, group reflective practice, trauma-informed coaching training, and

specialised trauma development work to address this. However, despite these measures, operating on-site and running programmes presented challenges. Conflicts and dysregulated community members required careful navigation. London's current political, social, and economic climate, with the museum's stance on issues like homelessness and migration, attracted attention from far-right activists. We have ongoing discussions within the team to ensure safety while operating in a public park during turbulent times.

Working out our capacity

We have discussed with the team & trustees the need to scale back the complexity and ambition of the overall work to maintain a safe and enjoyable working environment for our precious team, and this, along with continued enhanced support, will be a vital part of the museum's future.

Creative community programmes help us connect with our community

The programmes and activities allowed us to test and trial various ways for people to become involved in the site. The range of activities, from yoga to creative arts to gardening, was fantastic for connecting with a broad range of people. This is the first time the MoH has programmed and promoted a 'community programme.' Previously, we have not distinguished between the community work and the museum's work more broadly.

Slowing down and prioritising our community was essential for our long-term goals

We were concerned about the two-phase opening which would condense our community programmes and public opening into the lifespan of this project. Slowing down and focusing on our community ensured that those experiencing homelessness would come to these activities and feel part of our community before the public opening in Spring. The 'Community Programmes' branding served well to ensure the right groups came, by which we mean people experiencing homelessness, poverty, addiction, mental health struggles, and immigration system problems.

Creative activities leading to authentic community connections

MoH has historically created different community organising spaces, such as joint campaigns and designing public activities. However, workshops for learning new skills have not been held before. It was important to provide various ways for people to be involved, as some prefer structured activities while others prefer informal connections. Recognising the mutual exchange

and solidarity in these relationships, where people give and receive simultaneously, is crucial. Our community members bring valuable skills and knowledge, such as gardening expertise or sewing skills for exhibitions, to building the museum and its culture. They contribute to both the physical site and the overall development.

Changing our focus means that other work areas are impacted

The organisational shift and scaling have affected our work in this area and changed its focus. We have previously been known for our rapid response on the streets and our focus and campaigning on criminalisation of poverty, racism, and xenophobia in homelessness and climate change and homelessness. During this period, we have been unable to carry out as much of this activity as we expected due to the increased responsibilities of running our site and a much-expanded team.

Instead of operating at street level, using our site has meant, for the first time, we can offer space and resources in solidarity with groups we are working alongside. One learning from this is that carefully choosing partners with the same values and purpose leads to compelling work on the site.

Link back to CIRCE

CIRCE recognises that cultural institutions and practitioners have a unique role in the polycrisis, which challenges traditional ideas about how culture is created, produced, and consumed. In contrast, the existing museums and heritage sector prioritises growth over innovation. This has led to problems such as funding cuts and a need for more confidence in the future. CIRCE emphasises experimentation, collaboration, and rethinking ethical considerations, offering alternative approaches and possibilities. Our museum project in 2014 followed a similar approach, starting with community involvement to shape the museum. CIRCE and our project prioritise starting from the polycrisis, but while traditional models focus on growth, CIRCE and MoH take a different direction.

Specific examples from our journey have been influential for us. We had various collectives and individuals visit our site, and the team has spoken at CIRCE-related and other participant events, facilitating valuable knowledge exchange. Noteworthy highlights include:

Marieke van Doorninck's talk at CIRCE's first Symposium on the Doughnut Economy -

The traditional venue-based consumption driven audience model is significantly affected by polycrisis. The holistic approach embodied in the doughnut economics model we first encountered in the May 2023 symposium has influenced us to change our project plan to open later. It has influenced our approach to growth and generative economics.

Fabian Frey's project within CIRCE's Fellowship Programme - unique work on building the community through shared food directly influenced our approach to cooking and catering in the space.

Club Coop's project within CIRCE's Creative Impact Fund - We have developed a close relationship with Club Co-op. We look forward to collaborating with Club Coop on a radio show and other future projects. Their governance style and organisational structure are very unique.

Aiwen Yin's project within CIRCE's Fellowship Programme - In conceptualising the idea of community wetlands, Aiwen Yin writes that “a community is fostered by its "wetlands," which are intricate networks of supporters that nurture the community's survival and purpose through various means.” This porous, malleable, and adaptable notion of community and the idea of

overlapping habitats is something we instinctively “get” and have been enacting. Still, we have found a theoretical home through working with Aiwen.

In 2018, the MoH launched Catalyst, a unique project to provide training and opportunities for 14 individuals experiencing homelessness. Although the project did not produce the immediate results we anticipated, it proved invaluable in creating strong connections, solidarity-based work, and long-lasting networks. Half of the Catalyst participants have remained closely involved with our organisation, achieving success in various areas, such as winning awards, initiating campaigns, and representing MoH at events. This project taught us that creative impact cannot be forced but can be nurtured over time. We are grateful to the CIRCE team for their support. We hope this network will continue to grow and innovate, providing solutions to challenges and supporting each other during difficult times.