

CREATING ACCESSIBLE MUSEUM EXPERIENCES FOR CHILDREN WITH NEURODIVERGENT NEEDS IN INDIA



9 KEY FINDINGS FOR MUSEUMS

COMMUNICATION IS DIFFERENT FOR CHILDREN WITH NEURODIVERSE NEEDS:

- Non-verbal communication toolkits.
- Frequent pause points.



MANY CHILDREN WILL NEED INDIVIDUAL ASSISTANCE WHILE IN A PUBLIC PLACE.



HAVING QUICK ACCESS TO A CALM-ZONE AND A SENSORY ROOM IS CRUCIAL, WITH A GUIDE AVAILABLE TO SUPPORT THE PARENT.



OFFERING EXCLUSIVE GUIDED TOURS TO PARENTS WILL BUILD ENGAGEMENT.

- Small groups of 3 to 4.



CHILDREN WITH NEURODIVERSE NEEDS REQUIRE CAREFUL TRANSITIONS BETWEEN ACTIVITIES OR SPACES.

- Kinetic, auditory and visual.
- Ringing a bell, using a hand signal or clapping.



PUBLIC VISUAL COMMUNICATION SAYING 'WE ARE NEURODIVERSE FRIENDLY' WILL BUILD RECOGNITION.

- With images of people with disabilities.
- With testimonials.



9 KEY FINDINGS FOR MUSEUMS

MULTI-SENSORIAL, CUSTOMISABLE EXHIBITS AND ENVIRONMENTS WITH EASY VISITOR CUSTOMISATION ARE IMPORTANT:

- A safety audit to check for sharp edges and possible hazards.
- Multilingual visual cues for exhibits.
- Interactive screens with visual instructions on how to use them.
- Visual interactives should have subtitles.
- All auditory exhibits with and without headphones should have volume controls.



THE MUSEUM ENVIRONMENT NEEDS TO BE CAREFULLY SET-UP FOR SENSORY SENSITIVITY.

- No background music, including noise-spill from other rooms and floors.
- An even temperature throughout (20-25° C).
- Lighting should be warm and bright.



ADVOCATING FOR INCLUSION WILL BUILD COMMUNITY.

The museum can identify a space or a wall to develop into a celebration of diversity in various forms.



KEY FINDINGS FOR MUSIC



CHILDREN WITH NEURODIVERSE NEEDS OVERWHELMINGLY (OVER 85%) ENJOY MUSIC, USING IT FOR CALM AND ENJOYMENT



CHILDREN ARE MORE FAMILIAR WITH POPULAR, FILM AND FOLK MUSIC THAN CLASSICAL, AND ENJOY UPBEAT MUSIC WITH STRONG BEATS

TUNE AND RHYTHM OF THE MUSIC ARE THE MOST LIKED ELEMENTS IN THE MUSIC THEY LISTEN TO. Some children enjoy the lyrics as well.

THE MOST PREFERRED MUSIC IS THE MUSIC THAT IS FAST AND POPULAR. THE NEXT PREFERRED GENRE IS FILM MUSIC (40%). SOME CHILDREN ALSO REPORTED LIKING SOFT MUSIC, CLASSICAL MUSIC AND RELIGIOUS/DEVOTIONAL MUSIC.



KEY FINDINGS: LOGISTICAL NEEDS

PRE-VISIT INFORMATION

Send a pre-visit information pack to prepare the children, and their caregivers, including:

- A photo story of museum from arrival to exit, or a video walkthrough.
- A pre-visit form for language, food requirements and accessibility needs.
- A visit schedule.



WASHROOMS

- Washrooms need to be disability and child friendly, with clear directions for use.
- Washroom spaces to be dry and clean.
- Washrooms need soap and paper towel dispensers.
- Washrooms need automated flush and automated taps.

INFRASTRUCTURE

- A private waiting area.
- Access to safe open space or ground.
- Remove large stones or protruding sharp edges.
- Soft anti-slip carpeting like rubber or grass mats to prevent injuries.

SENSORY NEEDS

- It is necessary to have a dark, quiet break room for rest and recovery from overstimulation.
- Unnecessary sensory stimulants must be avoided, like harsh deodorants, strong-smelling sanitizers, paints, or loud ongoing maintenance.

STAFF TRAINING

All museum staff members and volunteers will need regular training on neurodiversity and how it impacts language, social, emotional, academic, and sensory abilities.

Museum staff members and volunteers will need to be trained:

- In activities to engage children, such as music, movement & role play.
- To use the communication toolkit and gestures.
- To assist children with activities.
- To support parents and caregivers with meltdowns or sensory overloads.



KEY FINDINGS: LOGISTICAL NEEDS

EXCLUSIVITY

- 54% of children surveyed are sometimes uncomfortable with strangers around.
- Exclusive hours for these children are required.
- *A customisable booking form on the website including:*
 - Timing
 - Group size
 - Sensory issues
 - Accessibility needs
 - AAC tools
 - Food



LANGUAGE

Museum visits and tours cannot be excessively language-dependent:

- Information must be given in multiple ways (text, speech and images).
- Volunteers must be bilingual.
- A communication kit must be provided for children who may require it.
- Children should be allowed to use their alternate communication devices.



FOOD

- Parents will require a menu with ingredients from the museum cafeteria in advance.
- Parents can be allowed to bring small snacks, toffees and food items.
- Utensils used in the cafeteria need to be no-break and no-spill.

SAFETY

- Visible directions to reach the nearest exit point, either the terrace, or ground floor, and access to the washrooms, calming zones etc.
- No protruding objects due to possible hazards.



TOURS

- No longer than 2-3 hours.
- Multiple breaks throughout, after 30-60 minutes.



IMPACT SO FAR

62

NO. OF MUSICAL KITS
DISTRIBUTED

70

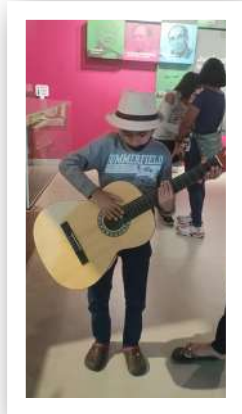
NO. OF NEURO DIVERGENT
CHILDREN ENGAGED

2

NO. OF TOURS
CONDUCTED

12

NO. OF VOLUNTEERS
INVOLVED



TESTIMONIALS

“ We are also using the tool kit with our child. It helps him to try new patterns, sequences which makes him think differently. That will definitely help him in future to adapt to changes and in turn helps to reduce the meltdowns when routines are broken. The daily listening songs that are provided in the pen drive are also very useful. By using it same time can develop kind of schedule in our kids life. Quick fix songs can calm them when they are having tantrums.

- Shony, Parent

“ The Museum tour for the Neurodivergent kids and us Volunteers was an incredible experience. My motive was to see things from their perspective which made it easier to bond with them and make them feel comfortable. They were so full of curiosity, excitement & spontaneity. It was very reassuring and heartening to see them enjoy and feel safe in the museum space. The highlight of the tour was when their parents expressed gratitude for this initiative by IME. They said there are very few people who think about Special kids and curate such a wonderful experience for learning, expressing and rejoicing.

- Meghal Sharma, Project Svaritha Volunteer



ABOUT THE PROJECT

Project Svaritha, an initiative launched by Indian Music Experience Museum (IME) and funded by a Kotak Mahindra Investments Limited CSR Education and Livelihood Grant, aims to provide children from socially disadvantaged backgrounds with access to a safe, inclusive public space – the museum – to promote in-depth engagement, learning and enjoyment of music. An enjoyable and educative musical immersion experience was designed to build exposure to different genres of music for the children. In order to develop this experience, secondary and primary audience research was commissioned by IME, and undertaken by ReReeti's project team, and this report highlights the findings of the research study, which is a unique insight into the relationship that children from this group have with a space like a museum. The musical therapy workshops and kits for children with neurodiverse needs were developed by Project Partner Svarakshema Foundation.

PROJECT OBJECTIVES

- Create awareness about music among children
- Engage with children from underprivileged backgrounds through music based educational activities
- Facilitate music immersion for children with intellectual disabilities like Autism
- Provide non-medical therapeutic support to Autistic Children through music

PROJECT TEAM

Ms. Sonal Raja

Licensed Clinical Psychologist, Teacher Trainer, & Special Educator.

Ms. Shivani Shah

Architect, Anant Fellow, currently pursuing her masters in Clinical Psychology.

Ms. K. Nitya Devayya

Undergraduate history student at Ashoka University.

Ms. Sookthi Kav

Final-year undergraduate student of History and Economics at Lady Shri Ram College for Women, Delhi.

Ms. Ayadi Mishra

Final-year undergraduate student of Architecture at School of Planning and Architecture, Bhopal. Ayadi designed the illustrations used in this report.

Ms. Varsha Anand

Art Historian and Freelance Writer.

PROJECT LEAD

Ms. Tiggy Allen

Operations Manager at ReReeti Foundation for Museums, Galleries and Heritage Sites.

