



## Royal Museums Greenwich

Highly Commended – Family Learning  
Innovation Award

[Royal Museums Greenwich](#) (RMG) brings together four heritage sites: the National Maritime Museum, Queen's House, Cutty Sark and Royal Observatory Greenwich. Together, they welcome around two million visitors each year, with approximately 100,000 children and adults participating in facilitated family learning programmes.

RMG creates inclusive, creative and welcoming experiences that help families explore themes connected to the sea, space, time and the natural world. Its family learning offer combines hands-on making, storytelling, sensory exploration and playful learning, inspired by the extraordinary objects and stories in the collections.

The organisation works closely with community partners to ensure activities reflect the lived experiences and needs of local families, particularly those who may feel excluded from traditional cultural spaces.

Environmental sustainability is embedded throughout RMG's work through the use of recycled and sustainable materials, alongside sessions exploring climate change, ocean health and our relationship with the natural world. Staff also participate in carbon literacy training to help reduce waste and support environmentally responsible practice across the museums.

### Family Learning Innovation: Message in a Bottle

Message in a Bottle was a creative exchange project designed for foster and adoptive families who can often face barriers to accessing creative and cultural activities. Through their Safe Harbour programme, RMG had identified that many children and young people with experiences of trauma, neurodivergence or additional needs found traditional arts settings overwhelming or inaccessible. Families also spoke about feelings of isolation and the difficulty of finding safe spaces where they could connect with others who shared similar experiences.

In response, RMG partnered with [Seaglass Collective](#), an organisation dedicated to making the arts more accessible to the adoption community. Together, they developed an innovative postal creative exchange linking families in London and Yorkshire.

Inspired by Yinka Shonibare's artwork Message in a Bottle outside the National Maritime Museum, families collaborated on large-scale textile artworks using mark making, screen printing and natural photo-reactive dye techniques. The artworks travelled back and forth between the two regions, with each group adding layers and creative responses before posting them on again. This slow, reflective process allowed families to build connections and communicate creatively without the pressures often associated with in-person participation.



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The workshops were carefully co-designed to be trauma-informed and sensory-friendly. Open arrivals, shared lunches and optional activities helped create calm, predictable environments where children could engage at their own pace. This flexibility aimed to reduce anxiety and support participation for children with sensory sensitivities or additional needs.

The project acted as a pilot for developing co-created displays in public spaces, which was a new venture for the museum. RMG worked closely with conservators, visitor experience staff and exhibitions teams to rethink processes around authorship, conservation and community collaboration. The artworks were displayed publicly at Cutty Sark, the National Maritime Museum and Leeds Playhouse, giving children and families the opportunity to see their work celebrated in major cultural spaces while maintaining appropriate safeguarding and privacy measures.

*“The expression on her face when she saw the work displayed was priceless.” – Parent*

### Impact and next steps

Message in a Bottle created meaningful opportunities for foster and adoptive families to connect, create, and feel represented within cultural spaces. Families reported increased confidence, stronger social connections and improved wellbeing, with many describing the project as unlike anything they had previously experienced.

Children who previously struggled to participate in mainstream creative activities engaged confidently with the sensory friendly workshops, while caregivers valued the calm, understanding environment. One parent shared that their child was inspired to join an art class for the first time.

The final celebration event at Cutty Sark enabled families from Yorkshire to visit London, with several describing it as a memorable experience they would never otherwise have accessed. The project’s innovative approach introduced a sense of anticipation and excitement associated with receiving post, and seeing their work displayed publicly gave children a powerful sense of pride and visibility.

RMG and Seaglass Collective have continued their partnership since Message in a Bottle, and further groups of adopted young people from Yorkshire have travelled to London to take part in joint arts activities with the Safe Harbour group.

*“An experience we will always remember.” – Parent*