

News release

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Oxford University museums win Collections Trust Award 2019 for project working with forced migrants

An award-winning project at the History of Science Museum and Pitt Rivers Museum has received further recognition for its work creating volunteering opportunities for forced migrants.

Multaka-Oxford was named winner of the 2019 Collections Trust Award at a ceremony on Thursday 12 September. The annual award recognises the often unsung achievements of those who manage museum collections.

Multaka – which means meeting point in Arabic – uses the collections of the two Oxford University museums as a meeting point to bring people together. Working in partnership with local community organisations including Asylum Welcome and Refugee Resource, the museums have recruited a team of over 50 volunteers and have been supporting them learn new skills and gain work experience.

The volunteers – many of whom have recently arrived in the UK from countries including Syria, Egypt, Iraq, Zimbabwe and Sudan – are working with museum staff to run tours of the collections in Arabic and English, plan and deliver events, co-curate displays, enhance collections documentation and manage social media channels.

Since the project was established two years ago, Multaka-Oxford has welcomed 56 volunteers, who have given over 1,200 hours of their time. 20 new volunteer roles have been created, from tour guides to collection researchers, and over 1,800 people have attended events and tours run by the volunteers.

In just a relatively short period, the project has deeply affected the lives of everyone involved with it. 'Working with the volunteers has transformed our practice,' says Rachel Harrison, Volunteer & Community Engagement Coordinator at the museums. 'It's made us reflect on how we can be more inclusive in everything we do.'

And for the volunteers, Multaka has not only provided on-the-job training and work experience, but has also created a sense of inclusion and community. As Abdullah AlKhalaf, a Syrian volunteer, puts it: 'Here at the museum we see we share a human history and culture. We see we are similar. The museum really is a multaka, a meeting point for culture.'

The impact of the award-winning project is set to continue in the future. Thanks to the generosity of individual donors and The Barakat Trust, funding has been secured for a further year.

Presenting the 2019 Collections Trust Award, Amisha Karia, Collections Trust board member and Head of Collection, Loans and Programming for Paintings in Hospitals, said: 'This year we were looking for strong examples of 'use-led' project, with clearly identifiable outcomes and high levels of community participation. We certainly found that in Multaka.'

Rana Ibrahim, Collections Project Officer at the History of Science Museum, who accepted the award on behalf of the Multaka team, commented: 'We're absolutely delighted with the award. It is such an endorsement of the work of the museum teams and the volunteers.'

Further information

Susannah Wintersgill, Head of Communications & Marketing, Oxford University Gardens, Libraries & Museums

susannah.wintersgill@glam.ox.ac.uk / 01865 613786

Notes to editors

- [Multaka-Oxford](#) is a project at the History of Science Museum and the Pitt Rivers Museum in Oxford, which runs until September 2020.
- The initial two-year project was funded by a grant from the Esmée Fairbairn Collections fund. The project will now continue for a further year thanks to the generous support of individual donors and The Barakat Trust.
- Multaka-Oxford won Volunteer Team of the Year at the Museums + Heritage Awards in May 2019 and received Highly Commended in the Partnership of the Year category.
- The History of Science Museum contains one of the most important collection of European medieval and early modern scientific instruments, and the finest collection of astronomical instruments from the Islamic world.
- The Pitt Rivers Museum holds one of the world's finest collections of anthropology and archaeology. Its 600,000 objects, photographs and manuscripts, which are from every continent, celebrate human creativity and cultural diversity.
- Collections Trust is a sector support organisation, funded by Arts Council England, which helps museums capture and share the information that gives their objects meaning. Its standards and advice are used around the world to make museum collections accessible.
- Multaka-Oxford was inspired by 'Multaka: Museum as Meeting Point', a project launched in December 2015 by Berlin State Museums and the Deutsches Historisches Museum to train Syrian and Iraqi migrants to lead tours in Arabic (<https://multaka.de/en/startsite-en>).

A range of **high-resolution images** can be [downloaded here](#).