catalyst
SCIENCE DISCOVERY CENTRE AND MUSEUM

Annual Newsletter reflecting on 2020

Happy New Year everyone!

2020 is certainly a year we will all remember! Society has been challenged in a way not seen before in modern times. Our own small part of this challenge was, of course, having to close our doors on 20th March 2020 as we all entered lockdown. Fast forward to the summer, we managed to open our Café as a take-away in August and later as a sit in offer and at weekends during September. We have had four dates for re-opening all of which have had to be changed as we take stock of the local and regional picture and the safety of our staff and visitors. We did manage to open for two days in October half-term via our new on-line booking service. Although not too busy, visitors were happy to be temperature checked on entry, to hand sanitise, to wear face coverings and follow our one-way system and maintain social distancing. The preparation for this opening was huge and our motto of 'We've sanitised the equipment and the building but not the Experience' seemed to be a true comment when we listened to the public feedback. With the new2021 lockdown in place it will not be possible for us to open on 4th February as planned. Disappointing, but the right decision for our team and the business, it seems very odd to have only been open to visitors for 34 days in 2020.

Last year started, of course, with a closure to allow for the refurbishment of the Reception, Café, Gift Shop, new Exhibition area plus the first 10 new interactive exhibits installed as part of the Inspiring Science Fund grant. We opened up on Saturday 15th February to a very busy expectant public, queueing out of the door! During that week some days had over 450 visitors coming through. The feedback was excellent on what we had done which was lovely to hear. Little did we know that 5 weeks later we would be shut again with an uncertain future ahead of us. As well as the majority of staff going on 'furlough' the building was locked down too and we worked hard to minimise our fixed costs as we worked out our forward strategy. In June we started the rest of the ISF refurbishment work while we had no visitors. I'm pleased to say that we are nearly there now with just two more exhibits to arrive in February, the ground floor interactive gallery looks fabulous and bright. The new exhibits are great fun for all the family and for all ages. Huge thank you to all those involved in delivering the ISF grant. We have also been working with Mind Halton in running Mental Health workshops with a Science element built in, a very new and innovative approach, but one that has received some great feedback. Wellcome Trust have said they are delighted with our progress in delivering this major project.

Although it was an uncertain 2020 with the effects of managing the pandemic, I believe we were on the front foot all the way through the year and with support from many it has set us up for a strong few years ahead, starting when we re-open in Spring 2021. We have some new offers being developed to entice more visitors such as Science Birthday parties, Heritage Afternoon Teas in the Observatory and a new Digital offer to add to the Education Outreach we started last year.

We of course, are continually looking for new sponsors to support our work and this will be a key theme during this year. We now have a 'Donation button' on our website too! Our thanks to our current sponsors and to Halton Borough Council for their continued support. I would also like to thank the Friends of Catalyst for their long term and unconditional support and, of course, our dedicated Trustees led by Dr Diana Leitch. However, I'll leave my last words to thank my team, who despite being displaced from their normal working lives and routines have responded brilliantly to every request, have shown great flexibility and are itching to get going again.

Best wishes to you and your families for a happy and healthy new year. I'm pretty sure 2021 will look and feel very different and we at Catalyst can't wait to get going again.

Martin

Martin B Pearson, CEO Catalyst Science Discovery Centre & Museum Trust Ltd

Trustee news

This year we sadly said goodbye to two people from our trustee board. Kerry Bibby and Vicki Richardson both retired, we thank them for all the contributions they made and wish them well for the future.

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CatalystScienceDiscoveryCentre

Grants and Sponsorship

Inspiring Science Fund

Our refurbishment project continued at a rapid pace last year following the grant of £754,600 from the ISF, funded by UKRI and the Wellcome Trust who granted an additional £55,000 in November for us to complete the project.

We closed in early 2020 for a few weeks in order to complete the refurbishment of the café, shop, reception and gallery area and the first phase of the redevelopment of our ground floor gallery. We re-opened in time for February half term and received lots of very positive comments from our visitors.

Sadly on 20th March 2020 we were forced to close our doors due to the pandemic and we will remain closed until Spring 2021. However, we turned this to our advantage and have pressed on with the redevelopment project and have achieved a huge amount in the last few months with Martin our CEO coordinating the work. The ground floor gallery is complete, we have a new logo, we have a new open plan staff office on the 3rd floor, a side entrance has been installed in the café along with a new staff entrance door and a new back door. We have a new till system, wifi throughout the whole building, a new ceiling in the Gossage room, we are in the planning stages of new external signage and the area adjacent to the glass lift is being converted to a lovely courtyard area where visitors can sit and enjoy a drink and snack!

We are extremely grateful to Halton Borough Council and to all our contractors for helping this happen in extremely difficult circumstances.

Catalyst would like to thank the following for their support this year;

Agility
Americhem
Ames Goldsmith
Arts Council England
ASDC
Ashton Chemicals
BYK
Ceimig Limited
Chemical Industries Association
Dr Diana Leitch
Dr Jenny Clucas
Emerald Kalama
Foyle Foundation
Friends of Catalyst
Garfield Weston Foundation
Halton Borough Council
INEOS Community Fund
Inovyn
Institute of Physics
Less Common Metals
Meade-King Robinson
Mersey Gateway Crossings Board
MIND Halton
Mr Andrew Ritchie
Mr David Yaxley
Mr Howard Hopwood
Mr John Blewett
Mr Roy Coldwell
Professor Alan Dronsfield
Royal Society of Chemistry
RSC CICAG
The Brunner Family
Victrex plc
Viridor
Wellcome Trust
West Lancashire Freemasons

Culture Recovery Fund

Last October we were thrilled to be awarded £162,000 as part of the Government's £1.57 billion Culture Recovery Fund (CRF) to help face the challenges of the coronavirus pandemic and to ensure we have a sustainable future.

Catalyst was one of 1,385 cultural and creative organisations across the country to receive urgently needed support. £257 million of investment was announced as part of the very first round of the Culture Recovery Fund grants programme being administered by Arts Council England.

INEOS Community Fund

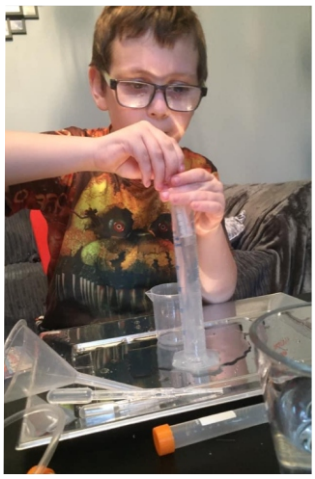
As a charity, Catalyst was invited to apply for funding from the INEOS Community Fund which was set up to support ongoing work in the community surrounding INEOS sites. Catalyst was awarded £10,000 to run a programme of workshops in conjunction with MIND Halton and Youth Federation which supported adults and young people facing mental health issues during the pandemic. The programme included group therapy sessions, hands-on workshops, yoga and live demonstrations streamed from the lab.

Covid -19 Funding

Last year was particularly difficult for Catalyst due to the pandemic but we are pleased to say that we were successful with two applications for funding to help address the impact of Covid-19. Firstly, in June, we were awarded £7,500 from the Halton Borough Council Local Discretionary Grant Fund and in August we received £8,600 National Lottery funding from the Heritage Emergency Fund.

Education

Science Capital Project



In June we were delighted to announce that Catalyst had been chosen as one of just 15 science centres and museums nationally who would be delivering initiatives as part of the UK Association for Science and Discovery Centres (ASDC) and the Science Museum Group's 'Science Capital in Practice' programme.

The programme is part of the Science Museum Group Academy, which focuses on embedding good practice informed by the latest science capital research, to enable children and adults from a more diverse range of backgrounds to participate in science-related experiences and feel that science 'is for me'.

As one of the selected centres, Catalyst created a range of science boxes that families used at home to support science learning. Each science box was aimed at families with children under the age of 8 and contained equipment and instructions to carry out a number of different activities. Boxes were delivered to families within a 3 mile radius of Catalyst and they shared photos of their children enjoying their experiments.

Lockdown science

As the first lockdown was announced and families were home-schooling, our Education Team put together a series of fun science experiments that pupils could do with basic kitchen utensils and a series of challenges to use up all of those toilet roll tubes! These included making a marble run, a bird feeder, a kaleidoscope and even a spectroscope. We shared these on our social media platforms and we had some great photos from local families.

Outreach offer

We understand how difficult it is at the moment for schools to come and visit Catalyst so we have put together a programme of outreach activities that schools can book so that we can deliver workshops in their classrooms. A full list is on the Schools section of our website but choices include Light Fantastic, Tasty Toothpaste, Glorious Gases and more! We can even take out our new mobile planetarium too!

Planetarium on the road

In June after the first lock-down we took our mobile planetarium out into a school for the first time. We delivered socially distanced "We are Aliens" sessions to pupils from Marydale Lodge which was a great success.

The teachers said "Brilliant session that has allowed our students to experience an interactive 'museum' on their own site. Set up was expertly managed and efficient, making optimal use of the time available. Everything was extremely well managed, safety of all involved was obviously considered and steps taken to ensure appropriate social distancing and management of resources were safe and clean. Thank you."

Following this success, this is definitely something that we will look to do more of in 2021!

Outreach activities

In November, we were invited by Changing Young Lives to take part in a two day event at Cronton 6th Form College as part of their Vocational VESPA Week celebrations. Our Education Manager Lucinda took our Bubbles workshop and spent two watery days with students competing to make the biggest bubbles!

News in brief

- Plans are under way to put together a digital offering of our Education packages so schools can watch demos from their classroom. More details on our website soon.
- We were thrilled to be invited twice to appear on local radio station Lymm Radio on their Sunday evening family show.

Community Engagement

Space Sapling

In 2015, astronaut Tim Peake blasted into space on the Principia mission along with some apple pips from Isaac Newton's apple tree. On their return, these pips were then grown on into Space Saplings at Kew Gardens. In January, CEO of Catalyst Martin Pearson and Community Engagement Coordinator Jade French were thrilled and delighted to be awarded one of only 7 UK saplings at an event at Woolsthorpe Manor, the home of Newton's Apple Tree. Catalyst will provide a home for this sapling, in partnership with Halton Borough Council.

Mind Lab Project

We are proud to report that in October, Jade French, our Community Engagement Coordinator had a paper published in Museum & Society, a peer reviewed open access journal by Museum Studies at Leicester.

Since 2018, Catalyst has collaborated with mental health charity Mind Halton on The MindLab project; a science inspired, well-being programme for residents local to the museum, in an area where access to mental health support is low. As museums in the twenty-first century are being increasingly regarded as community resources capable of producing valuable social impact, this article considers the role of museums in harnessing this potential to enhance community health and well-being during the COVID-19 pandemic. It reflects on the challenges encountered during this unprecedented period of lockdown, as well as the emerging opportunities through the perspectives of those delivering The MindLab project.

Please take a look at the article here https://t.co/mVZvPfKtpL?amp=1

Permanent staff

Jade French, our Community Engagement Coordinator has been with Catalyst for a couple of years as part of the ISF project. In October we were thrilled to announce that Jade had been made a permanent member of staff. Jade also represents Catalyst as joint chair of the local LCEP Group (Local Cultural Education Partnership).

Youth Federation

Alongside the MindLab programme we ran with the INEOS Community Grant, we also worked with local charity Youth Federation to provide online support for young people experiencing mental health issues. Topics covered included resilience, self care, mindfulness and 'Live from the lab' science sessions.

Smell Map Project

As part of an Arts Council England project we have been working with artist @katemclean to 'map' the smells of Widnes over 200 years and produce a series of 'Smell-Maps' for an exhibition entitled 'Two Centuries of Stink'. Due to the impact of the pandemic, the plans for the project had to be amended slightly so in April we created a new and unusual challenge entitled '7 Smells in 7 Days'.

Thanks to help from our local community we had gathered historical data about what people remembered about the smells of Widnes in the past. Now we needed help to record current day smells with our '7 Smells in 7 Days' diary challenge. We asked the community to record 1 smell a day, from their window, in their garden, on their commute to work or on their daily exercise (observing Government guidelines on social distancing of course!). This data has been gathered together and will be incorporated into the 'Smell Map' exhibition later this year.

Out and about

The pandemic hampered some of our community engagement activities in 2020 but we did manage to get out and about a couple of times before the first lockdown.

Catalyst took part in the very first Halton MakeFest, on 22 Feburary, where visitors made DNA bracelets

and to celebrate National Science Week in March we took a slime making activity to Halton Library.

General Catalyst news

New identity

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You may have noticed that as part of our ISF project, Catalyst has re-designed the corporate branding with new company colours to complement the refurbishment and a new company logo which better represents the main themes of Catalyst; interaction, community, galleries, science and education. To complete the transformation, new uniforms are on order and will be in place by the time we re-open.

Staff changes

Sadly in 2020 we said goodbye to Diane Winstanley, our finance officer who had been with Catalyst for 14 years. Pascale, one of our weekend presenters also left Catalyst to continue her university studies. We wish them both well and thank them for all they have done for Catalyst in the past.

We also welcomed some new faces too; Ann Mohamed joined our office staff and will be in charge of all school and group bookings, and Becci Hassey joined our Visitor Services team and will be welcoming visitors at weekends. We welcome them to Catalyst and look forward to working with them in the future.

Ann Mohamed (Left)

Becci Hassey (Right)

Friends of Catalyst news

After being a member of the Friends of Catalyst for 27 years and Chair for 15, Chris Lewis retired as Chair in 2020. We thank him for his support and dedication to Catalyst over the years and wish him a happy retirement. David Hornby has taken over as Chair and we look forward to working with him this year.

Heritage News

We are thrilled to announce that following our successful application for funding from the Culture Recovery Fund, we will be able to make much of our digital archive accessible to the public via an online portal. Work on this will commence early in 2021.

Volunteer thanks

As ever, we would like to thank our valuable volunteers for their help and support in 2020, even though we were closed for a major part of the year. Special thanks first of all goes to Judith who has been working away throughout this pandemic, answering all our archive questions and continuing to scan hundreds of documents! Thanks also must go to Kathy and Billy, Peter, Phil, Tim, Rob, Peter and Mary, Jane, Rosemary, Catherine, Jonathan, Stuart, Evelyn, Zach, Colin and Tom who all volunteered last year, in the archives, in the café when we opened for takeaway in August, during lockdown helping to clear areas for refurbishment and in our education department. We really have appreciated your help over the past 12 months, thank you! To all our other volunteers, we really miss you and hope to welcome you back to Catalyst very soon.

and finally . . . a word from the Chair of Trustees at Catalyst

The sections in this Newsletter between the opening words of our CEO, Martin Pearson, and my closing words here depict a most remarkable achievement that has occurred at Catalyst during 2020 despite all the challenges that have been thrown at us. It has been achieved by team effort from the staff, the Trustees, the Friends, our Patrons and many other supporters. As I started my second year as Chair of Trustees (the first woman to hold that post) and Martin embarked on his first full year as CEO, life looked rosy for Catalyst as we began to see the transformational outcomes of the Wellcome/UKRI monies and other funding grants. Little did we know what was to come. Having to put most of our staff on furlough was a regrettable business necessity but a vital lifeline, and I and my fellow Trustees have enormous admiration for all these people who want to resume work at Catalyst but are unable to. Their fortitude, stoic acceptance of the inevitable and roller coaster hopes of returning, often dashed at short notice as time went on, have been amazing. The indefatigable leadership, commitment and management skills of our CEO have helped to pull us through. The dogged commitment of the Trustees attending well over 30 Zoom meetings (at least) to fulfill their governance duties and doing much more has been unbelievable as some still have full-time, demanding jobs or other volunteer roles and have made great sacrifices. Why? Because we all believe in the great work that Catalyst has done for the last 33 years and are not giving up now as we would not be honouring what our predecessors set in place back in 1987 and have fought for since then.

Thank you to everyone for your support, long may it continue. 2021 will be different but Catalyst will still be here with its invaluable and unique offering.

Dr Diana M Leitch MBE, BSc, PhD (Edin), FRSC Chair of Trustees