



## Fitzwilliam Museum

Shortlisted for Family Learning in the Early Years in partnership with Cache Alumni

Founded in 1816, the Fitzwilliam Museum, part of the University of Cambridge Museums, has a renowned collection of over half a million art and historical artefacts from antiquity to the present day. Providing a unique learning environment with real objects, staff encourage independent and creative learning, and share expertise in learning and collections. They collaborate with audiences to plan programs, offer a wide range of learning activities and resources for all ages, and target specially invited groups in collaboration with community partners.

### Empowering families through music

Last year the Fitzwilliam Museum invited expectant or new parents to engage in musical activities with their babies, inspired by the Museum as part of the 'Musical Bumps & Babies' programme. The activities supported family wellbeing by encouraging creativity and observation skills. Stimulated by movement activities, music, and sensory experiences such as the varying light levels, acoustics, and smells of the galleries the babies showed curiosity in their surroundings.

The museum aimed to reach families who faced participation barriers and contacted community organizations that support families with babies. They included previous collaborators who had shared resources during COVID lockdowns, Child & Family Centres, Mother & Baby Units, Family Support Groups, a Women's Refuge, maternity service providers and GPs. These contacts helped to promote the project, and support workers were confident in suggesting the museum activities to families.

### Exploring sound and creating songs

The project collaboration with a Masters student from the Royal College of Music focused on exploring sound and connections instead of singing. Parents and babies roamed the galleries, choosing an object that piqued their interest, and then creating a sound or action to represent it. One child was fascinated by the harp and enjoyed stroking and plucking the strings! The harpist improvised gentle music to blend the micro songs together, and the final recordings were played back to the group.

The parents were surprised by their babies' deep involvement in the activities, and a flexible approach was used to respond to the group's needs. The project opened up conversations about parenting and the emotions associated with it, and it was designed to create a calm and friendly environment.



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### Bring parents together through shared experience

Following each session, participants shared refreshments and discussed what they enjoyed and found useful. They planned which galleries to visit and how to extend activities during sessions and in a WhatsApp group. One participant gifted all families and facilitators a handmade notebook to document their thoughts about the sessions.

The course empowered families to use music and sound play to soothe their babies in stressful moments and viewed the museum as an interesting place for parent and child exploration.

Valuable reflections from parents were shared, and the museum is now building time for informal chats in workshops to support wellbeing and encourage feedback for program development. Breathing exercises for relaxation are now included in all baby sessions, and opportunities for listening and musical play are created.