



## Manchester Museum

Shortlisted for Family Learning to Support Health and Wellbeing

Manchester Museum is one of the UK's leading university museums, welcoming over half a million visitors annually to interact with its natural history and humanities collections. Of these visitors, many are from programmes for local schools and communities which tackle inequality and promote inclusivity – for example, engagement with pupils with the lowest levels of progression into university, as well as older adults and people with dementia.

### Building bonds through music

Families represent the largest single audience who visit the museum and have access to an extensive family learning programme of events and activities. And in recent years, Muso Baby has been of great importance in response to addressing a local need from parents.

Postnatal depression affects at least one in every 10 women within a year of giving birth, and many do not recognise symptoms or seek support – which is why Manchester Museum launched its Muso Baby programme in 2019.

Facilitated by a qualified music therapist and utilising the museum's musical collections, sessions support parents experiencing or at risk of postnatal depression and/or anxiety, and their babies. They achieve this by sharing techniques and takeaways with parents for bonding with their babies through music, actions and song.

These sessions also help to provide a safe space for parents to share their own experiences with a small group, as well as presenting an opportunity to meet new people and develop supportive peer relationships – all whilst increasing confidence and reducing feelings of isolation.

### Going virtual

After initial success following its launch in 2019, parents benefitting from Muso Baby were quickly dealt a further challenge with the arrival of the global pandemic in early 2020.

Symptoms of postnatal depression include low mood and a persistent feeling of sadness and isolation, and – unsurprisingly – the number of parents experiencing this was dramatically exacerbated by the pandemic.



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The programme was therefore keen to maintain its support for parents and babies during this time, and was able to adapt into a six-week virtual programme by the end of 2020 – ensuring continued support to the health and wellbeing of families and the building of friendship and support networks.

### Benefits for both mum and baby

Since October 2021, the Manchester Museum programme has supported 17 mums and 18 babies and received highly positive feedback from those who participated, stating a greater connection with their baby and knowledge of additional sources of support as two key benefits.

One mum's feedback explained how she now feels much more confident in her role as a mother to trust that she knows what's best for her baby, stating how "the group helped me to normalise some of the difficult aspects of parenthood, and to feel less alone."

The programme is promoted through being shared with health practitioners such as midwives, GPs, link workers and charities, and is currently being delivered in a hybrid format in response to continued high demand.