



CULTURAL SPACES HOMELESSNESS TOOLKIT

A collaboration of Arts and Homelessness International, Museum of Homelessness, Manchester Museum and Tate Modern



Arts & Homelessness International

Arts & Homelessness International, the international arts and homelessness movement (AHI) is a British charity working to strengthen projects, influence policy and to help people thrive not just survive. Founded by Streetwise Opera in 2016, AHI is helping organisations and individuals to learn from each other through exchanges, events and arts projects. It commissions and disseminates research, designs and delivers training for arts and/or homelessness organisations and advocates for a place for the arts in homelessness support.

The Cultural Spaces' Responses to Homelessness Project

Homelessness is on the rise globally and many people who are homeless come to the centre of cities, the same areas where there is a density of libraries, museums, galleries and arts centres. Many of these cultural spaces are open to the public and many want to serve the whole community, no matter their background. They are incredible community resources – a place to meet, to feel safe, to be warm and dry; a place of acceptance no matter who you are. In an age where community centres are dying out, cultural spaces are important parts of the fabric of society. But **there is no shared practice about how cultural spaces can involve and include homeless people**. Consequently, staff particularly front-of-house and visitor services staff have no tools or training to engage with the growing number of homeless visitors.

So AHI commissioned Open House: **A Review of Cultural Space's Responses to Homelessness** which includes case studies of cultural spaces who are responding to homelessness to share good practice or lessons that can be shared more widely. The findings of this review have led to this 'Toolkit' which we have developed as a free resource in partnership with **Museum of Homelessness**. We have tested this work with two 'flagship' cultural spaces in the UK, **Tate Modern** and **Manchester Museum**. We have also created a paid-for training package which builds the capacity of staff in cultural spaces to deepen access and involvement for people who are or have been homeless.

About this toolkit

The toolkit offers guidance to people working in cultural spaces that can help equip staff and volunteers to make the space as welcoming as possible for people who are or have been homeless and increase their involvement in the life of the cultural space.

It begins with **7 practices and values which the cultural spaces in our Review all share**. We have expanded each of these areas with other sharable examples of practices that are proving effective. Most importantly, we include detailed information about training packages available in order to help anyone interested take the next steps in their learning.

Homelessness definitions

For the purposes of this toolkit, homelessness is defined as people who are living on the streets or in unsuitable or temporary accommodation including night shelters, hostels, living in internet cafes or night-buses and sofa-surfing. We also include in this definition, people who have known homelessness in the past. It may not be possible to recognise a homeless person from appearance alone.

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This Toolkit is made up of 7 practices and values that cultural spaces can use to deepen access and involvement with people who are or have been homeless.



1. EQUITY

People who are or have been homeless should have the same access to the cultural space on the same basis as anyone else.

Attitude and Behaviour

Most cultural spaces are for everyone – this is a value that the org should help all staff believe in rather than just making them do it. It is not about ‘allowing’ people into the space but treating people as equals and potential assets to the space.

The welcome

- The threshold and how people are welcomed is key – it should be **friendly** and **consistent** (see section 5.)¹
- **Signage** should be welcoming – this space is for you (see section 2.) and clear (people can be **anxious e.g. when they don’t know if they will be asked to pay**).
- **Greeting people** or allowing them to come in unchallenged both have merits.
- Sometimes non-homeless visitors may **complain** if they see people who are homeless – the staff member should point out that the space is open to everyone
- Is there **security**? How authoritarian is the uniform? Many people are put off by people in authority and if police-style uniforms can be avoided, that is better
- **Bag checks** can be made friendly if the same language and attitudes are adopted as the rest of staff. Remind people they are not being singled out but that bag checks are essential in some public spaces. A persons’ entire belongings may be in their bag
- **Going the extra mile.** Some spaces provide **free or pay-what-you-can tea/coffee/water, free Wifi, free lockers, phone charging points, a clothes rail of donated coats, extended opening times with a weekly free breakfast club, Culture Cards** which enable people to have an ID and the knowledge they will be welcome in the building. Some spaces are even opening a room or foyer as a **winter emergency shelter** in partnership with local homeless centres (this is fairly common practice with churches)
- Designate a space as a **Quiet Space**; this can be useful for visitors with a variety of needs

Case Study – ‘Radical Welcome’, Path With Art, Seattle

PWA have adopted the term “radical hospitality” which can be defined as a practice putting extraordinary emphasis on making people feel welcome. This concept is often referred to as “radical welcome,” and focuses on breaking down barriers that prevent people from participating in an effort, campaign, or community. Overcoming these barriers means accommodating things like environmental or behaviour actions that may result in participants with identities outside of the dominant culture feeling unwelcome

2. WRITTEN COMMITMENT & TOOLS

Somewhere in policies or plans an organisation's commitment to welcome and work with people who are or have been homeless should be written down.

Homelessness Policy

Having a written policy is a way of **sustaining commitment** and sharing consistency of approach and language (see section 5). It is useful to have a positioning statement that can sit within a cultural spaces' relevant in-house policy portfolio.

Safeguarding

Safeguarding is the action taken to **promote the welfare of a particular part of society**, traditionally, children or vulnerable adults but this is equally important for all visitors and staff. A safeguarding policy might include: Identifying the designated safeguarding person, defining practices to be avoided, how to report incidents etc. Any safeguarding incident in a public space should have a clear process of actions including how to support members of the public and staff after an incident. This is covered in AHI's training programme including scenarios and techniques.

Boundaries

It is very important not to consider people who are or have been homeless as dangerous in any way (the instances of violence in homeless populations is small) – people who have been homeless are vulnerable and are often the victims of violence. Boundaries will exist in any cultural space and there should be no special 'rule' for people who are or have been homeless – **there should be equity of rules as well as equity of welcome**. Do treat people who are or have been homeless with respect, human warmth and dignity and also respect their boundaries. Trust your instincts and encourage staff to get help from a line manager.

Sign-posting tools

Cultural spaces often report that their Visitor Services staff don't know what to do when people who are homeless ask for help – or they see people regularly use the space and they want to help them more. A **simple information sheet** for staff can be very effective – this could have the contact details of the local homelessness services and directions.¹ Introduce yourself to the local homeless agency and this is a good way of beginning a partnership.

¹ Info on local services can be found in UK through Homeless Link, Street Support and Pavement, in USA through Invisible People – in other countries, the local street paper is a good starting point.

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Posters

Having posters in the toilets of cultural spaces can avoid the tricky questions associated with being homeless. Highlight where someone can gain help and assistance in the local area, a phone number someone can call or the Homeless Lead in the cultural space (see section 6).

Case study – Southbank Centre, London

The Southbank Centre produced a short document for staff with key information about homelessness: Some general information and demystification about the causes and consequences of homelessness; contact details of local homelessness services and day centres which serve free meals; and all the information in Romanian and Polish for visitors which, at the time, was the predominant language of visitors who were homeless.

3. TRAINING

Training brings theory to life equipping staff and volunteers with skills and confidence.

Arts & Homelessness International's Training Modules

Training is **as much about confidence building as skilling-up**. Training is particularly key since the main interactions that happen between a cultural space and the homeless community are in foyers and public spaces where there is sometimes a big turnover of staff. Sometimes, security staff are from a separate agency and it is important that everyone is trained in the same way and embodying the spaces' values. Many staff members admit to being nervous about approaching people who are or have been homeless and giving people tools and confidence can make a quick, positive impact.

Arts & Homelessness International has a training programme where the main elements are as follows:

- Homelessness information – myth-busting and demystifying homelessness
- How is it going at the venue in terms of working with people who are or have been homeless? What's going well, what could be improved
- Scenarios – stand-up scenarios such as welcoming people and the bag check
- Further ideas. What is working well around the world

This training is co-produced and designed and delivered by people who are or have been homeless.

Get in touch with AHI's Executive Producer Lora Krasteva if you want to know more information lora@with-one-voice.com

Case Study – Tate Modern, London

Tate Modern is a very large organisation. It is also a flagship in this Cultural Spaces' Responses to Homelessness Project. AHI came to train staff before a large event involving people who are or have been homeless in 2018. Because of the size of the staff, key staff in different departments were present including security, visitor services and programming. This training was then cascaded down into teams. There was a particular focus on making guests feel welcome around the security/bag check area since Tate Modern is the biggest visitor attraction in the UK.

4. PARTNERSHIPS

Homelessness is complex and cultural spaces should work in partnership with professional service providers. Staff in cultural spaces are not social workers and a good relationship with a local homelessness centre can provide not only practical advice but a confidence boost that there is someone to turn to.

Find the nearest homeless centre and make contact

If a cultural space is interested in engaging more with people who are or have been homeless, make contact with the nearest homeless centre. **You can start small** – to begin with, find out information for the signposting sheet (see section 2). A longer-term partnership can develop from here (see examples below)

People as partners – a journey from access to equity

Arts organisations working with communities are on a journey from **Access** (a “welcome to the space”) to **Participation** (“please take part in what we do here”) to **Integration** (“people are integrated into the workings of the org”) to **Equity** (Treating people as equals and insuring representation – for instance at staff or board levels). A cultural space will be on its own journey and below are examples are how cultural spaces are delivering on these ideas:

- **Access (visits)** – people can come individually or a group from a local homeless centre could be given a guided tour of the cultural space and reminded that they can come back on their own; they are welcome anytime
- **Participation (workshops, performances, exhibitions)** – opportunities for people to take part in creative workshops, perform or exhibit their work
- **Integration (of programming)** – there is increasingly a blur between ‘mainstream’ and ‘community’ programming where the work of the community is part of the main programme e.g. no ‘outsider art’; or performances regarded as lesser than the a “main” programme
- **Artist in Residence** – a small number of spaces have appointed an Artist in Residence for 6-12 months (Old Diorama Arts Centre in London [free use of a studio and exhibition space] and Manchester Museum [a weekly placement to explore the collection, engage with other local groups, mount an exhibition and advise the org]). Placements can be paid or voluntary and best if two-way, so the org is getting as much as the artist
- **Opportunities behind-the-scenes** – as volunteers, staff, on advisory panels, as trustees
- **Equity** – this comes from an org with a deep commitment to eradicating any ‘us’ and ‘them’. This is not possible for all orgs but it’s sometimes good for orgs to look at the make-up of their whole staff team and see if it mirrors the people who use the space

Case Study – Museum of Tomorrow, Rio

The museum has been interested in working with the main homeless people in the district since it was built. Key members of staff engaged with the local homelessness group and now the Uma So Voz choir meets there every week for rehearsals. The Museum has expanded this programme with the choir to offer a free lunch, other programmes such as poetry and has more recently brought in a health team and a dental team once a month to give check-ups to the choir members.

5. CONSISTENCY

The organisation is consistent in the way it communicates and behaves internally and with its audiences.

Language

Consistent language is key. It is important to use **respectful language** when talking about homelessness and people affected by it as many homeless people face stigma on a daily basis. It's always best to ask people themselves how they like to be described. This can differ from country to country. In the UK, we have moved away from using the term 'the homeless' since it misses the 'person' – some of the commonly used phrases include 'People who are or have been homeless' or 'People who have a personal insight into homelessness'. Having consistent language in policies helps all staff and volunteers speak in the most respectful way about people from all walks of life.

Treatment

It is important to have **consistency in treatment for all visitors** and not to have one rule for some people and not for others e.g. waking up some people who have fallen asleep and not others. Similarly, if some people are stopped at the entrance and others aren't, this creates discrimination.

Case study - learning from libraries

Libraries are often welcoming, open to all and free of charge and with no expectations on visitors other than just to 'be'. The treatment of visitors tends to be consistent regardless of who is running the library and therefore people who are homeless can use them as safe spaces. Some of the qualities that make libraries particularly welcoming are:

- You do not have to pay to be there – it is widely understood that you won't be charged
- Information hubs – there is generally community information, giving the feeling of community space for all and therefore a safe space for all
- Non-threatening – libraries are particularly accessible since visitors do not need any prior knowledge of a particular subject
- Space to sit and be – there are usually open communal spaces with plenty of chairs and free newspapers, giving the message that you don't need to rush your visit
- Open doors – there are very seldom security guards or staff members on the threshold. People can walk in anonymously
- Exceptional staff – staff of libraries take pride in getting to know people and being particularly pro-active in social issues. There are now over 40 USA libraries with social workers specifically helping people who are homeless or disadvantaged
- Many libraries have free Wifi and computer terminals.

6. IT TAKES TIME

It takes time to build relationships and achieve change. Working in homelessness requires patience and determination. Cultural Spaces should take a long view and put in place structures in this Toolkit to enable the most effective, long term change.

Appoint a Homelessness Lead

Have a person who can be a homeless lead in your organisation. This doesn't need to be someone with specific skills, just the interest and commitment **to be the point of contact for homelessness issues**. Formalising this role shows commitment from the organisation. The role can be flexible – it could be that the member of staff updates the homelessness policy periodically, gets in touch with local homeless services (see Partnerships), organises training, workshops or visits with homeless groups etc.

Form a Homelessness Working Group

It can be useful to convene a working group to talk about access and inclusion for homeless people and to discuss how the cultural space will approach the commitment.

This could be chaired by the Homelessness Lead and include people from different 'departments' within an organisation **to ensure information is cascaded well**. It should also, ideally include people who are or have been homeless e.g. from the partner homeless centre.

Peer Learning

Cultural spaces who have a particular commitment to homelessness are beginning to meet in peer networks to share ideas and practice. **Peer networks can be useful sounding boards and provide support** when things are challenging. Speak to AHI if you're interested in this and to find other spaces which are responding to homelessness.

7. MEMORY

Any activity relating to the organisation's response to homelessness should be recorded, to prevent organisational memory being lost, when key people move on.

Responding to homelessness checklist

This Toolkit includes the main building blocks to achieve a good environment to deepen access and involvement for people who are or have been homeless. Here is a chronological checklist of what the ideal plan should be:

Action

Done

Action	Done
Appoint a Homeless Lead (someone on the staff who can take responsibility for this agenda)	
Create a Homelessness Working Group from staff who are interested in/committed to this agenda	
Take part in training	
Cascade the training to other members of staff	
Make contact with the nearest homelessness centre	
Write a homelessness policy and include consistent language, consistent behaviours, safeguarding protocols	
Implement some of the consistent language and behaviours into the welcome script of visitor services, security and bag check staff	
Create some signposting tools (with the local homeless centre)	
Try some other practical ideas such as posters in the toilets, a free tea and coffee station, designate a quiet space	
Try some other programme ideas such as inviting a group from the nearest homeless centre to visit the space and take part in a workshop, include some 'outsider art' in an exhibition	