



Artist's Brief – The Historic Lived Experience of Families at the Workhouse

Ripon Museums Trust (RMT) seeks to engage an artist or a group of artists to undertake a community art project which will explore the stories and experiences of families from the past and how they interacted with the social welfare system, specifically in Ripon Workhouse, from the mid 1800s to the 1920s.

The RMT mission is to use the unique trio of the Workhouse, Prison & Police and Courthouse Museums, collections and the stories they tell to help people explore big issues such as fairness, equality, justice and welfare. Through excellent engagement, programming and outreach, together we will inspire people to become compassionate and active citizens, shaping society for the better. We will work for greater participation in our heritage which will enrich lives and improve wellbeing. Volunteering is integral to our organisation; at our core we work as one team. We will make a positive impact on Ripon and the region's cultural and economic capital.

The Workhouse Museum is located within the former Ripon Union Workhouse (RUW), which is considered to be one of the most complete surviving workhouse sites in England. The site consists of several buildings, including the Vagrants' Block, the Main Block, the Woodshed, the Infirmary, and the Mortuary. Outside, there are inmate work yards, three gardens, which include the Victorian Kitchen Garden, Master's Garden, and connecting spaces. Constructed in 1854 at the location of a previous workhouse, the workhouse provided shelter and support to the poorest people in Victorian society. The Main Block provided long-term accommodation to people from within the Union, while the Vagrants' Block offered two nights of accommodation to people from outside the Union.

In the past, many different types of families had to live in the Workhouse for various reasons. Some of these reasons included being abandoned, unmarried women with children, orphans with no relatives who could support them, families who had fallen on hard times, homeless couples, the Master and Matrons family, and generations of families who sat on the board of guardians.

When poor families entered the Workhouse, they were separated. Men went to the right of the building, women went to the left, and children were sent to a separate children's wing. Life in the Workhouse was harsh, and it was considered a last resort with a stigma and shame attached to it. Inmates were classified and segregated, and they had to follow a strict programme of work. The living conditions were basic, and the food was plain and unappealing. However, RUW was more progressive than its counterparts. It had extended facilities such as a considerable infirmary and children's wing. The evidence suggests that the staff provided pastoral care and consideration, which was much advanced for the time. All of these factors highlight the unusual nature of the RUW.

Applications are particularly encouraged from artists with the lived experience of disability or have experience of family member who is disabled or have lived experience of the welfare system.

1 – Points to Consider

- How can we draw comparisons between the experiences of Workhouse families and those in the education and welfare systems today?
- How can we give voice to those families long gone and to the community participants in the project.
- How can participants and visitors imagine themselves in the shoes of families in the past?
- What does fairness mean today and what did it mean in the past? How can we compare the two?
- How can we consider positive and negative experiences of the people who lived and worked in the Workhouse?
- How you will work with disabled family groups to bring the creative output to life and how the final piece will be aimed at our family visitors.

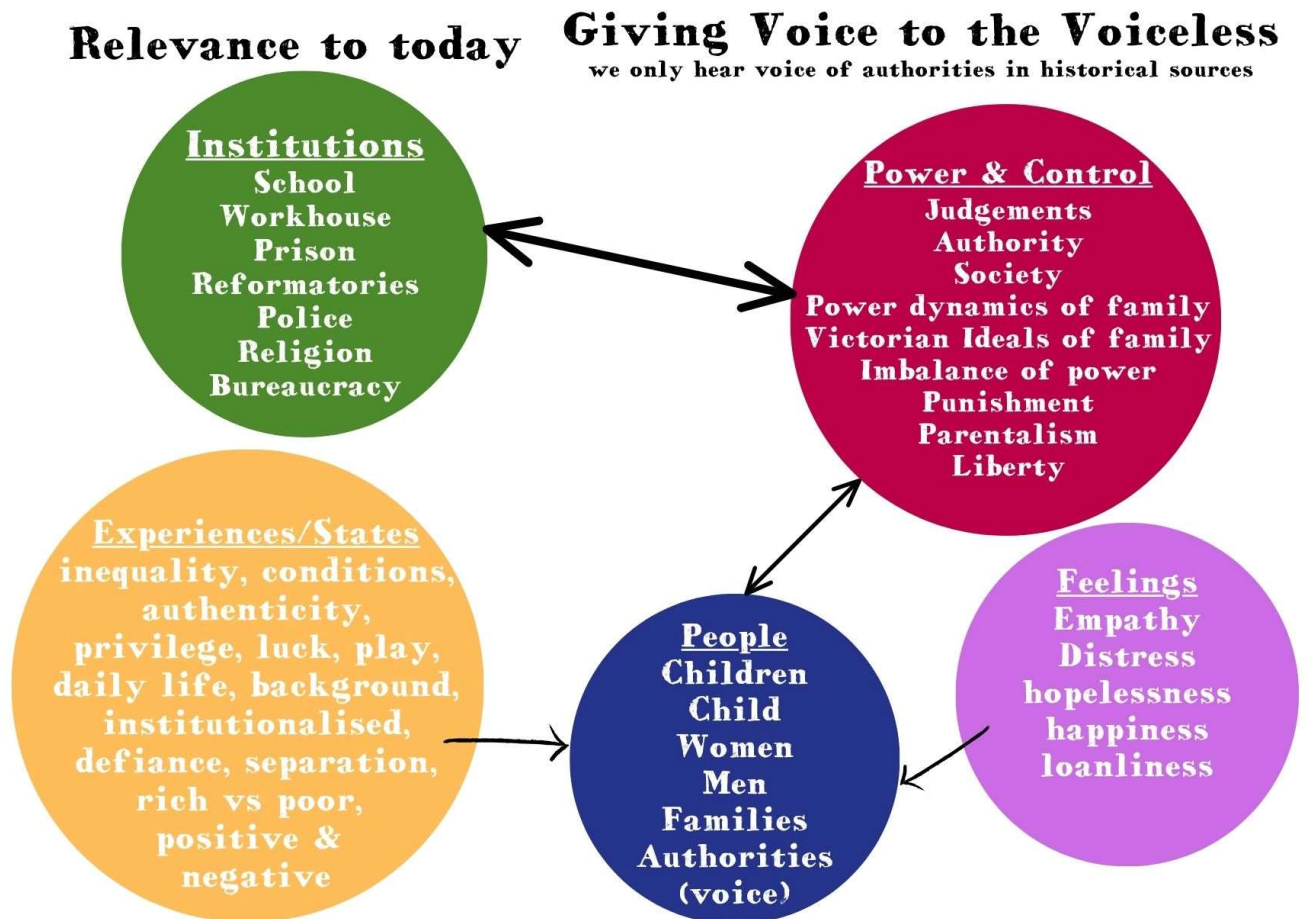
2 – Questions to consider

The project will also use as inspiration the topics and themes that emerged during an ideation session with staff, volunteers and trustees about the stories of families across all three RMT sites. These raised questions such as;

- Who were these people and how did they come to be in Ripon Workhouse?
- What became of the family after their Workhouse experience?
- What was happening at the time in wider society?
- What status did those in authority have?
- What were conditions in workhouses, reformatories and prisons like?
- Why did the Workhouse educate children?
- How were children able to experience play and happiness?
- How did the Workhouse affect a child's chances in later life?
- What was work like for children?

The project will also draw upon and utilise research material provided by the Community Curator and research volunteers (see the example of the Wintersgill Family).

3 - Topics and Themes



4 - Practicalities

- The fee available is £7500.00 and this is to cover materials, transport, any accommodation which might be required and all and any other associated costs.
- A minimum of 5 full days of workshops will be undertaken (divided over weeks if required) which engage a minimum of 8 to 10 people overall.
- The artist(s) will create an activity which can be used to engage family visitors as part of the final creative output. They will also train volunteers to facilitate the activity in their absence.
- The artist(s) will attend and facilitate two 'Meet the Artist' sessions with volunteers in order to explain the project and discuss the final creative output.
- The creative output must be on display in the Workhouse Museum by the 31st July 2024.
- The artist(s) will work collaboratively and inclusively with participants such that they are able to gain a sense of agency about and ownership of the project.
- The artist(s) will be required to take part in the evaluation of the project.
- The final creative outputs will include an exhibition or activity or event at one Ripon Museums Trust site and an exhibition, activity or event at one community location or online (livestream, website or YouTube).

How to Submit

Applications must be submitted to Creative Engagement Officer Andy Bates at andy.bates@riponmuseums.co.uk by 12pm the 30th April 2024. Interviews will be held the w/c 6th of May and to start the project mid-May.

Please include;

- Information about who you are.
- How you will approach the project.
- And indication as to what the final creative output will be.
- How you will engage with community participants.
- A CV and a portfolio of your work.

You can submit this information in PDF or Word format, or as an audio or video file. Please use Wetransfer for the latter two.

If your submission is selected at this first stage you will be invited to an interview at Ripon Workhouse Museum which will take place the w/c 6th May.

If you would like to visit the Workhouse Museum beforehand, or need any further information, please email Andy as above or call on 01765 690799.

If you are successful with your application and the project is run satisfactorily there will be the possibility of facilitating another smaller Creative Conversation project later in the year with an attached fee of £3500.00.