Telling it like it was

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Interest in family trees and local history has never been higher, but the voices and stories of people with Learning Difficulties are rarely heard. This is set to change with a new project funded with a £94,300 grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF).

Wicked Fish, a theatre company in Liverpool for people with Learning Difficulties, will work with local and regional partners to create People Like Us, a community archive of first hand experiences told by the participants themselves. The two-year project will culminate in an exhibition at the Museum of Liverpool, after which a tour is planned.

The project aims to break down some of the social and cultural barriers facing people with Learning Difficulties. By taking ownership of their heritage, people with Learning Difficulties can further their dignity and self-esteem, and the respect of the wider community.

The participants will comprise a small group of 13 members of Wicked Fish and Moving on with Life and Learning (MOWLL), a charity working with people with Learning Difficulties, brain injuries and mental health conditions. They will be given training in oral history and recording methods, and how to select appropriate archive and exhibition content. There will also be emotional support on hand if difficult memories are uncovered in the making of the archive.

There will be three sets of workshops on the theme of remembering, run with MOWLL and local arts organisations and media companies.

Participants will focus on their first day at school to begin with. And because they may find dates and names difficult, archive content will be created largely from visual and voice recordings rather than written material. So they may collect photographs of significant places, or create memory boxes to support their spoken experiences.

They will learn how to develop a website, a blog, and video diaries, and investigate live streaming of radio broadcast and other possible ways to disseminate the stories. Performance pieces devised from some of the stories will be an integral part of the exhibition, with the participants as actors.

There are three strands to the archive. Physical artefacts will become part of the Museum of Liverpool’s permanent collection. The voice recordings will be donated to the North West Sound Archive, and print material will be kept at Liverpool Records Office.

Participants will also be given a hardback bound book of the project with blank pages so they can carry it on after the project has ended.

"It’s really exciting to receive the grant from HLF, as we would not be able to go ahead without it," says Di Christian, People Like Us project director. "We want to create an oral and visual community archive that is not just for dusty prosperity but is an accessible social treasure too. Our project has the potential to enhance the status of people with Learning Difficulties in our community, and start something really powerful and unique that as far as we know hasn't

been attempted before."

Sara Hilton, Head of Heritage Lottery Fund North West, said: "Collecting people's memories and experiences is one of the best ways of exploring our past; however stories are often lost without ever being told. Working with their partners, Wicked Fish will ensure that the voices of people with Learning Difficulties in Liverpool are heard for many years to come. HLF are delighted to be supporting this project that will give participants the opportunity to meet new people, forge friendships and learn new skills."

Further information

Laura Bates, HLF press office, 020 7591 6027, email: lbates@hlf.org.uk.