National Holocaust Centre and Museum launches



Steven Frank records his story in the studio

As the nation prepares to mark Holocaust Memorial Day, The National Holocaust Centre and Museum is embarking on a remarkable digital project that will preserve the voice of Holocaust survivors for generations to come.

Every week UK Holocaust survivors share their vital, and moving, testimonies with children in venues throughout the country. However, each year survivors with unique stories pass away. The value and impact of their personal conversations with children and adults is in critical danger of being lost.

The National Holocaust Centre and Museum's project will use advanced digital technologies that will enable children and adults of the future not only to hear and see a survivor giving their story, but to ask that survivor questions and hear them giving their answers. Recreating the experience schoolchildren currently have at the centre (listening to and interacting with a survivor in the centre's Memorial Hall), the project will protect an experience which makes a vital contribution to children's educational understanding of the events of the Holocaust and their connection to it.

Achieving this will respond to an urgent need to continue the opportunity to learn about the Holocaust from people who survived and settled in the UK. It will also provide a new and inspiring way to interact with primary testimony at the centre.

The project is being delivered with the centre by UK creative design consultancy Bright White Ltd, a company that has delivered a range of high quality digital heritage projects both in the UK and elsewhere. Professor Eunice Ma, Associate Dean (international) and Professor of Digital Media and Games at the University of Huddersfield, is also contributing research work to support the project's development.

The UK team are working in collaboration with the US-based specialists USC Shoah Foundation, the Institute of Creative Technologies (ICT), and design consultancy Conscience Display. The project will employ technologies developed at ICT to support interactions between 'real' people and people digitally captured on film. The collaboration with the Shoah Foundation and Conscience Display will ensure that the UK project contributes to global learning, and that it will connect with the US foundation's 'New Dimensions in Testimony' project, which is pushing forward interactive film in the US.

Filming for the UK project began this week (19th January 2015). The first survivor to be filmed, Steven Frank, is a survivor with a moving story about his experiences in Holland, Westerbork and Theresein, his liberation and eventual safe arrival in England. Steven's testimony is being filmed in High Definition 3D, and filming of other survivors will follow.

During the filming the survivors' answers to hundreds of frequently asked questions will be captured, in addition to their testimony. Demonstration versions of the final experience, where visitors will be able to 'meet' Steven and other survivors are likely to be available to certain audiences later in 2015.

The project has attracted attention and support from a variety of national institutions and Foundations, including a grant of £84,600 from the Heritage Lottery Fund, the R&D Digital Fund for the Arts, the Pears Foundation and the Association for Jewish Refugees. Further funding will be needed to complete the process for further survivors, and to deliver the large final installation required at the centre.

On a recent visit to the National Holocaust Centre, which included a briefing about the centre's testimony project, Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis commented: "I was fascinated to hear about the centre's plans to preserve and maintain the testimony of survivors in order to guarantee that future generations will have personal Holocaust testimony to reflect on and the opportunity to have their questions answered. I wholeheartedly recommend that absolutely everyone should visit the centre."

Mick Davis, Chair of the Prime Minister's Holocaust Commission said: "The many survivors who dedicate themselves to telling their stories in schools and institutions like the Holocaust Centre near Newark do incredibly important work. The Prime Minister's Holocaust Commission was established to ensure these stories live on when we no longer have these incredible individuals with us.

"I want to congratulate the National Holocaust Centre on embarking on this important project which will capture valuable survivor testimony for future generations."

The centre's Chairman, Henry Grunwald OBE QC, said: "The National Holocaust Centre and Museum has been fortunate for the last twenty years to have had a phenomenal group of survivors who have given so much of themselves for so long to make the centre what it is today. We have a duty to them to ensure that their contribution continues when they are, as will inevitably happen, no longer with us. This exciting project is the best way to make that happen. Their stories, their experiences, will live on, and our visitors will not only be able to hear their histories from them but also to question them, as they have done since the centre opened its doors in 1995."

The centre’s Chief Executive Mr Phil Lyons MBE commented: "A key part, if not the most important part of a visit to the centre is to listen and talk to a survivor, with this project that will never change. We are looking forward to working collaboratively with other Holocaust education organisations in the UK to establish how this vital project can help to support their work in addition to our own."

Chris Walker, Managing Director Bright White Ltd: “This is a critically important project, requiring a novel and technical approach. The challenges are great, but we are solving them one by one by studying and making significant contributions to the state of the art. We are delighted to be playing a critical role, documenting and enabling interactions that will become important heritage material to future generations.”

Vanessa Harbar, Head of HLF East Midlands said: "Hearing about the experiences of a holocaust survivor first-hand is an unforgettable experience. Unfortunately as people pass away, much of this powerful testimony is lost and our ability to grasp and understand what happened is weakened. HLF believes that it is vital to preserve people's personal memories and stories and we are very proud to support this project that will ensure many generations to come are able to learn from those who survived."

Association of Jewish Refugees, Chairman, Andrew Kaufman: “The AJR is proud to be a leading benefactor of the National Holocaust Centre and to support this ground-breaking initiative to capture the memories of Holocaust refugees and survivors. These enhanced testimonies will provide future generations with a first-class resource to study one of the most important episodes in recent history.”

Emma Quinn, the Digital R&D for the Arts manager: “We’re delighted to be backing The National Holocaust Centre and Museum’s project as it will enable future generations hear the powerful stories of Holocaust survivors. To tell these stories they are experimenting with technologies rarely used in the heritage sector. This idea is central to the Digital R&D Fund for the Arts and, we hope, their experience will provide valuable information for the whole sector.”

Notes to editors

The National Holocaust Centre and Museum
The National Holocaust Centre and Museum is the UK’s first Centre dedicated to the remembrance of victims of the Holocaust and to Holocaust education. As well as being a place of memorial, the Centre serves as an educational resource with the aim of teaching future generations about the causes and consequences of genocide. www.holocaustcentre.net @HolocaustCentUK

Bright White Ltd
Bright White Ltd is an independent design consultancy based in York, UK. Founded in 2004, the company designs, develops and delivers innovative major learning-led projects within Europe.

University of Huddersfield, Professor Minhua Eunice Ma
Professor Ma is Associate Dean (International), Professor of Digital Media and Games at the University of Huddersfield. Professor Ma’s work on supporting the project through research and evaluation is funded by the Digital R&D Fund for the Arts (see below).

USC Shoah Foundation
The University of Southern California’s Shoah Foundation is dedicated to making audiovisual interviews with survivors and witnesses of the Holocaust and other genocides a compelling voice for education and action. It is working in conjunction with the USC Institute of Technologies and US consultancy Conscience Display to develop the New

Dimensions in Testimony Project. Further information can be found at the USC Shoah Foundation website.

Conscience Display
Conscience Display is an exhibition company that specializes in Holocaust exhibits.

Pears Foundation
The Pears Foundation is a British Family Foundation rooted in Jewish values. Its work champions positive identity and citizenship, based on research and inspired by the urge to ask questions. At the heart of everything the Foundation does are the Jewish values of social justice, individual responsibility and the imperative to make a positive difference. More ainformation about the Pears Foundation is available on the Pears Foundation website.

Digital R&D Fund for the Arts
Supported by the Digital R&D Fund for the Arts - Nesta, Arts & Humanities Research Council and public funding by the National Lottery through Arts Council England. The Digital R&D fund for the Arts is a £7million fund to support collaboration between organisations with arts projects, technology providers, and researchers. It is a partnership between Arts Council England, Arts and Humanities Research Council and Nesta.

They want to see projects that use digital technology to enhance audience reach and/or develop new business models for the arts sector. With a dedicated researcher or research team as part of the three-way collaboration, learning from the project can be captured and disseminated to the wider arts sector.

Every project needs to identify a particular question or problem that can be tested. Importantly this question needs to generate knowledge for other arts organisations that they can apply to their own digital strategies.

Association of Jewish Refugees:
The Association of Jewish Refugees (AJR) is the national charity supporting Holocaust refugees and survivors and their families. Alongside the delivery of extensive social and welfare services, the AJR supports initiatives to develop Holocaust education and research resources. Association of Jewish Refugees website.

Further information

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