

Represent

Case Study

In October 2020 fifteen young people spent four days exploring neglected industrial heritage narratives of people of colour in Yorkshire.



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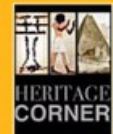


REPRESENT

A PAID OPPORTUNITY FOR 16-24 YEAR OLDS



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ignite
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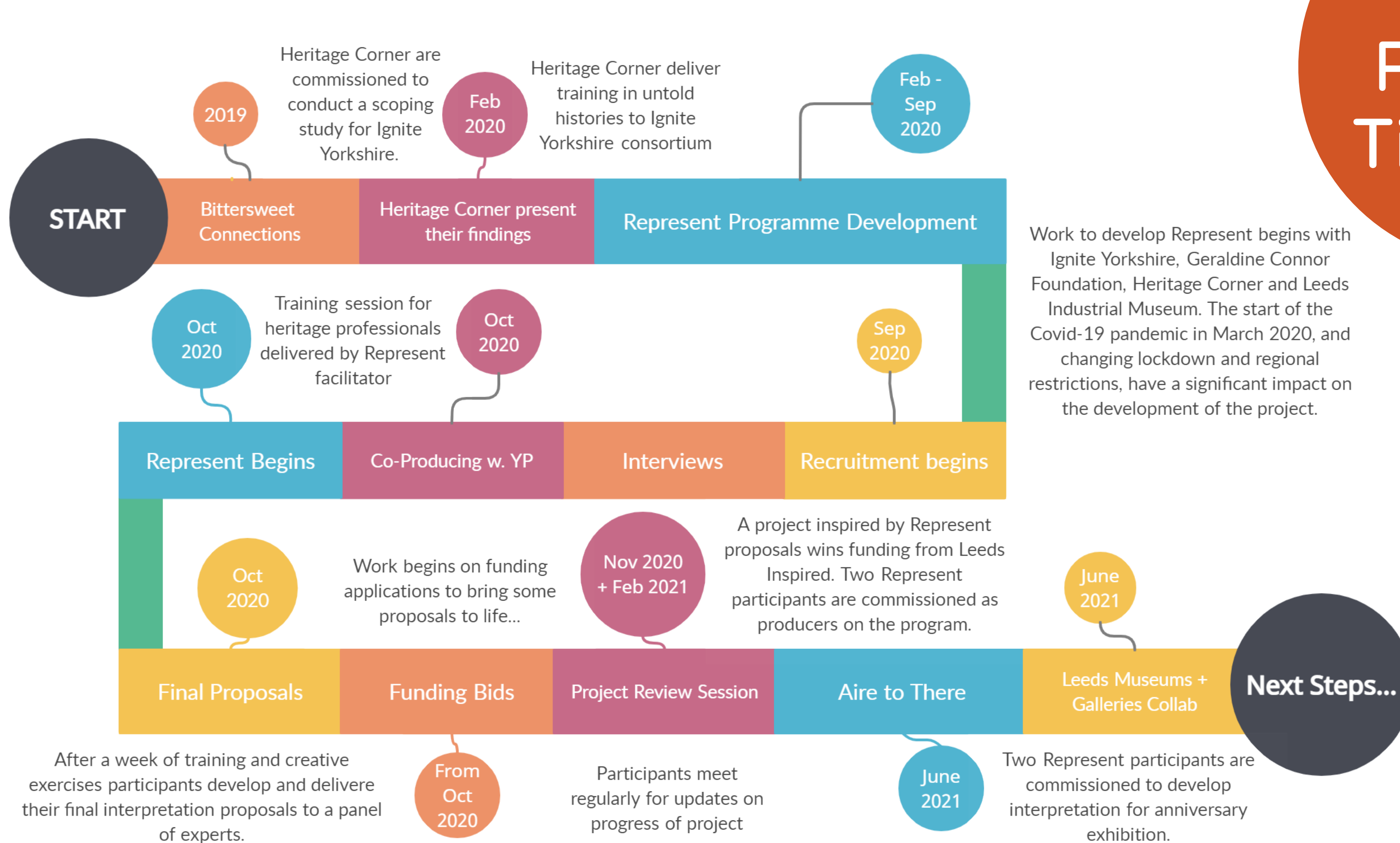
What is Represent?

Represent is the first collaborative project between Ignite Yorkshire, IVE, Geraldine Connor Foundation, and Heritage Corner, hosted by Leeds Industrial Museum.

Fifteen young people aged 16-24 were commissioned to spend four days developing interpretations of the industrial heritage of Leeds and its links to Britain's colonial connections and black history. Participants undertook a creative training programme to produce innovative ideas for uncovering the city's industrial past and links to colonialism, and ways to engage future audiences with this heritage.

Image caption: Instagram post graphic used during the recruitment campaign for Represent.

Project Timeline



Ignite Yorkshire, alongside Geraldine Connor Foundation and Heritage Corner, continue to apply for funding to further the project. Leeds Museums and Galleries continue to be a champion of the project. 'Co-Producing with Young People' training will run in September 2021.

'Bittersweet Connections'

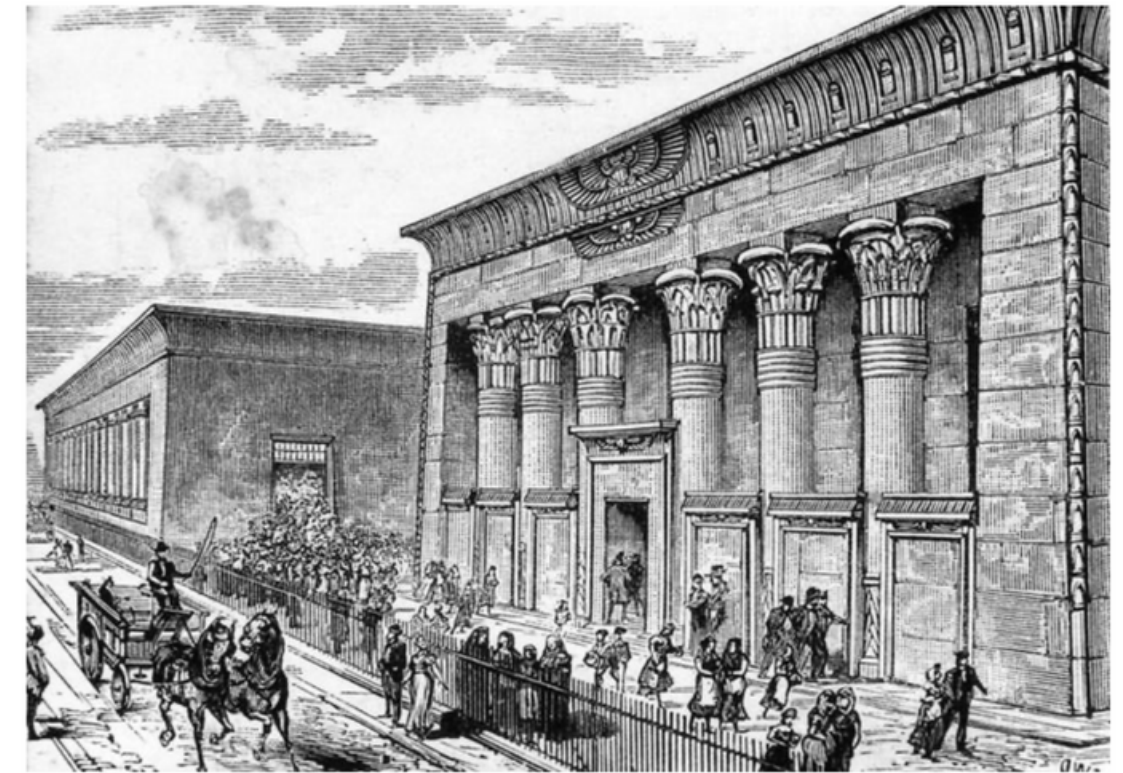
In 2019, IVE commissioned Heritage Corner to research on the connection between Yorkshire's industrial history and transatlantic trade, and explore whether this history had been interpreted in previous exhibitions, projects or work with young people.

The purpose of the report was to provide a solid foundation of knowledge to enable Ignite partners to pilot work with young people on this subject area with greater confidence and awareness. Very little previous work was found in this area, confirming our assumption that this is a hidden history. On release of the report, Heritage Corner shared their findings in a training session for IVE staff, Ignite Yorkshire partners and practitioners in engaging with this aspect of industrial heritage in Yorkshire.

Represent was developed as a direct result of the research and recommendations presented by Heritage Corner. The depth and thoroughness of their research supported the design of a program that would create space for young people to explore this untold heritage. IVE went on to form a partnership of organisations to develop Represent.

"Heritage Corner strives to share narratives of African humanity in relation to British history...Ignite approached Heritage Corner to exchange ideas around British industry, transatlantic connections and youth engagement."

BITTERSWEET CONNECTIONS



Yorkshire Industry and Transatlantic Trade A Report by Heritage Corner, Leeds for Ignite Yorkshire

February 2020



Image caption: Front cover of the 'Bittersweet Connections' research document produced by Heritage Corner.

The Partnership



Heritage Corner:

Heritage Corner are experts in black history, and use creative approaches to expose hidden histories and engage people in understanding racism. They are the creators of the award-winning Leeds Black History Walk.

Geraldine Connor Foundation:



The Geraldine Connor Foundation was established in 2012 to continue the work and vision of Geraldine Connor by bringing people together through arts and culture. They provide global perspectives across many artforms and mentor young people with artistic ambitions.

Leeds Museums and Galleries:



Leeds Museums and Galleries is a family of heritage sites, museums, country houses and a flagship art gallery. They are part of Leeds City Council. Represent was hosted by Leeds Industrial Museum.

National Lottery Heritage Fund:



Kick the Dust is a group of 12 projects throughout the UK working to increase representation and engagement of young people in heritage. Kick the Dust is funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund.



IVE and Ignite Yorkshire:

Ignite Yorkshire is a four-year Kick the Dust programme devised, led and co-ordinated by IVE. IVE is a progressive training company with programmes designed to develop the creative leadership potential of young people.

The Programme



RECRUITMENT:

Represent was advertised as a paid opportunity. This was to make sure that financial obstacles for participating were removed, widening the number and diversity of young people able to take part. 68 young people applied for the programme.

COVID-19:

Local Covid-19 restrictions in Leeds meant that the majority of guest speakers, as well as three participants from outside the city, joined the project virtually. Twelve young people and facilitators were able to attend the project in person at Leeds Industrial Museum, with Covid safety measures in place such as face masks and social distancing.

TRAINING PROGRAMME:

Participants undertook a training programme that included sessions on Unconscious Bias, the Role of the Curator and how to use archives for research. Training also included a tour of the museum exhibitions. Young people were joined throughout the week by expert guest speakers including Khadijah Ibrahiim (Geraldine Connor Foundation), Jordan Keighley (Heritage Corner), and Pauline Mayers, artist.



"The project has motivated me to want to work with museums further and be a part of the curating process as my voice is important and representation matters."

Participant

CO-PRODUCING WITH YOUNG PEOPLE

Represent facilitator Laura Rakotonirina led a training session on 'Co-Producing with Young People' for adult facilitators involved in Represent. This was opened up to the museum and heritage sector and proved incredibly popular.

FINAL PRESENTATIONS:

Following the training programme, participants worked together in small groups to develop proposals for public artwork and artistic interventions that would engage audiences in the history they had learned about throughout Represent.

The final presentations were presented to industry professionals, including curators from across Leeds Museums and Galleries.

Final pitch ideas included spoken word performance pieces, community engagement and outreach in schools, as well as an art piece using projections on the Hudson's Company wagons on display at the museum, which were used in exploitative mining practices in Angola.

A film of the project can be found on Youtube.



"It's not very often that I get a chance to attend programmes that educate me on the forgotten and hidden history of people of colour whilst simultaneously giving me the space to explore my creativity. So when I first found out about Represent, I was sure I wanted to participate."

Iliham, participant

"...being part of the Represent project means that okay, we're supporting you to go to this place and develop your ideas, and showcase those ideas which I think is important."

Gina, participant

"...they asked some really really good questions about the museum and about how the cultural sector works, and really started to make me and my colleagues here think about how we can better represent some of the stories and voices that were coming out of the project as it took place. I see young people as the future for the cultural sector, they're going to be the ones that decide the direction that museums take in the future..."

Chris Sharp, Keeper, Leeds Museums and Galleries



What did we learn?

Represent was a pilot project to test new ways of working with young people for all partners involved. For some Represent was a first trial of paying young people for their contributions. For others it was a first in engaging young people with heritage, or bringing youth voice into interpretation. Read on for some of our key learning from this project...

MENTAL HEALTH

"...we discovered so many forgotten narratives, asked relevant questions and shared the emotional burden of uncovering some painful yet nevertheless important truths."

Participant

The nature of the subject matter of Represent meant that participants were unavoidably exposed to potentially triggering and upsetting subjects. A key lesson from Represent is the need to create a balance for young people, who are keen to engage with the subjects, but who will also need space to digest and reflect on what they have learned. The need for self care in the process of researching traumatic subjects was part of the training by Pauline Meyers in using archives for research. The emotional impact of work around contested history was frequently identified by participants as a rewarding but challenging aspect of the project.

PAYING YOUNG PEOPLE FOR THEIR CONTRIBUTION

It is vital that we provide paid opportunities for young people wherever possible. Fair pay for contribution to a project makes opportunities much more accessible for a wider group of young people, some of whom may face financial barriers to engagement.

68 young people applied to be part of Represent. The volume of applications can be attributed, in substantial part, to the payment aspect of the commission. Young people could afford to participate in a way they may not have if the project were marketed as a volunteering opportunity.

Paid opportunities are also an important way of demonstrating to young people that their input is valued and respected. Represent demanded a time commitment, dedication, a high standard of work and emotional investment from participants. By paying them in the same way that adult practitioners would be paid, a message was sent that they were not only expected to contribute professionally, but that the museum in turn would respect their ideas and perspectives.

YOUNG PEOPLE AS ASSETS

"I think young people are an untapped talent, and too often we as adults get sucked up into providing and telling and leading, all with good intention..."

Vanessa Mudd, Heritage Corner

The Represent project was planned with an asset-based approach to young people. Based on research by the [Paul Hamlyn Foundation](#), Represent aimed to work with young people in a role that allowed them to bring their own skills and strengths to their work, and positioned them as equal partners in decision making.

An asset-based approach to work with young people is essential when co-producing projects. Young people have a wealth of valuable ideas and lived experiences that bring unique perspectives to their work.

During Represent this model was incorporated not only by providing payment for participation, but also by structuring a training programme that gave the young people the tools they would need to develop their own interpretation. Training was provided for museum staff in meaningful co-production techniques. The end of the week's programme was also planned with space to respond to the work produced by young people. This has allowed IVE to successfully pursue additional funding to develop the specific proposals of participants.



RECRUITMENT

Although the volume of applications for Represent was very high, some were lacking in the right amount of detail. Though they showed promise, they were ultimately not chosen.

Since Represent, Geraldine Connor Foundation have researched and written a collection of 'helpful hints' that will accompany all future application forms for projects with young people. The hints provide extra support to make sure that young people who have excellent potential can articulate their experiences and skills in future projects. This supported application process has also been incorporated into recent recruitment for two Ignite Yorkshire interns at IVE.

AN INVESTMENT IN BLENDED DELIVERY



During the course of developing Represent, the Covid-19 pandemic arrived in the UK, and caused mass disruption. The project partners decided that it was more worthwhile to pursue Represent than postpone, and to continue providing young people with opportunities for social and cultural engagement in difficult times.

The decision to pursue a blended delivery approach allowed for the majority of young people to attend the programme in person, with external speakers invited to lead sessions via Zoom.

This blended approach of in-person and online delivery prioritised the experience of the young people. Participants were able to fully engage with the museum and collections they had been asked to interpret. It also allowed three young people to participate who were unable to attend in person.

Represent was delivered by three facilitators and a technical assistant in order to effectively run the full programme. Museum staff conducted multiple site tours in smaller groups to allow for social distancing. The full programme required a significant amount of staff time, particularly to manage both facilitation and safeguarding on Zoom, and the more practical technical aspects of the online delivery.

This was ultimately felt to be a worthwhile investment, however it was unexpected. Since Represent, Ignite Yorkshire has included budget and staff time when planning new projects that keeps work with young people flexible, with the additional resources work in the pandemic requires.





SPACE FOR REFLECTION

"...I was slightly nervous about whether some of the subject matter might put some young people off - e.g. companies that were active 100 plus years ago."

Participant

In November 2020 Ignite Yorkshire, Geraldine Connor Foundation and Heritage Corner invited Represent participants to join a review session online.

The session was planned to collect feedback from the young people involved, after they had had time and space from their experience to reflect on what they had learned and achieved. Participants were asked to write a letter to themselves about how they had felt before and after the programme. Their letters were fed back anonymously to the partnership.

Their feedback revealed their concerns about potential alienation from heritage, their apprehensions around meeting new people, and the difficulty of some of the subject matter.

Since this session, participants have remained in touch with IVE and partnership organisations. Through maintaining contact with regular check ins, four young people have been recruited to new projects that developed from their initial proposals.

What's Next?

Since the main Represent project concluded in October 2020, the partnership of organisations has continued to work together on other projects, and the young people involved have continued to participate in opportunities related to their interpretation proposals.

In March 2021 Ignite Yorkshire was awarded funding from Leeds Inspired to explore untold narratives through sound and spoken word. 'Aire to There' has commissioned eleven young people in paid placements to develop an audio walk for the public to use on the waterways in Leeds. Two former Represent participants have been commissioned as producers on the project.

Leeds Museums and Galleries have commissioned two Represent participants to create interpretation for the Leeds Museums 200th Birthday Exhibition. Hannah and Lihem will work with artist Carmen Okome to create an artistic response to museum collections for the exhibition's 'Global Leeds' theme.

Following the training from Heritage Corner, IVE launched its 'Creative Approaches to Hidden Narratives' Continued Professional Development programme for teachers, with Heritage Corner as subject expert.

Geraldine Connor Foundation have gone on to develop similar work with Harewood House which has successfully bid to become part of the British Museum's 'Where We Are' programme.

Reflections on Represent are still ongoing. As part of the programme's evaluation, Represent practitioners and facilitators will carry out on a reflective exercise to unpack these experiences of working on black history and decolonizing museums with young people including the sensitivities of this work. The reflections will form part of the final Ignite Yorkshire Toolkit of learning, to be launched in early 2022.

Ignite Yorkshire and Geraldine Connor Foundation are working with Leeds Museums and Galleries to provide paid opportunities for two young people of colour to join an advisory panel on curatorial decision-making.

Links to resources

- [Blog post by Represent participants reflecting on their experiences](#)
- [Our film, shot and edited by Ashley Karrell](#)
- [Blog post by Represent participant Gina on youth voice in museums](#)
- [Film featuring interviews with Represent participants, Heritage Corner's Vanessa Mudd and Leeds Museums and Galleries' Chris Sharp for Amplify magazine](#)

This project is supported by the funding from Department for Media, Culture and Sport's [Youth Accelerator Fund](#) via the [National Lottery Heritage Fund](#).



Department for
Digital, Culture
Media & Sport



Photo credit: Ashley Karrell 2020

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