To visit the Postal Museums online provision, follow this link:
https://www.postalmuseum.org/visit-us/accessibility/information-for-autistic-people/

The Postal Museum – Co-Creating Resources with Neurodivergent Visitors

The Postal Museum in Farringdon, London, opened in 2017 as part of the Postal Heritage Trust, an independent charity preserving British postal history. With a diverse collection, including vehicles, uniforms, and the 100-year-old postal railway, the museum has made significant strides toward accessibility. Through a collaboration with *Ambitious About Autism*, they co-created events and resources to support neurodivergent visitors, ensuring that their needs were at the forefront of the design process.

Engaging Neurodivergent Voices: Pre-Visit Films with Ambitious About Autism

During an initial access audit, The Postal Museum recognised key barriers for neurodivergent visitors. They were determined to respond to these challenges by working with people with lived experience, and to not make assumptions about how neurodivergent people experience museums.

This led to their collaboration with Youth patrons from Ambitious About Autism, whose input shaped a range of co-created resources, including a set of pre-visit films led by and starring the young people.

Pre-Visit Films:

These pre-visit films, led by and starring the young people, provide visual and sensory information to help neurodivergent visitors prepare for their experience at The Postal Museum. They supplement a set of Visual Stories, also developed with the Youth Patrons, giving additional insight into what a visit to The Postal Museum might be like.

The Postal Museum exhibition:

The Youth Patrons introduce the museum and a range of ways to get there and things to do. They signpost helpful information, such as how to identify tactile displays, key objects to look out for and highlighting interactives that make unexpected sounds.

With the films being led directly by the young people, they are also a crucial piece of representation that reminds visitors (families and individuals alike) that this is a space that welcomes, their visits. They demonstrate that this is a museum where neurodivergent visitors are encouraged and supported to be themselves and to engage with collections.

Mail Rail:

The second of the two pre-visit films explores the Mail Rail ride, an interactive experience for visitors where they can ride ____.

From the sounds of interactives to the smells of the underground tunnel in the Mail Rail exhibition, every detail was thoughtfully included based on feedback from neurodivergent young people. For example, visitors can learn in advance that there is a simulated power cut on the Mail Rail ride, giving them the option to plan accordingly.

The Postal Museum recognises that neurodivergent people are the true experts when it comes to their needs. By working closely with the Youth Patrons, the museum recognised their lived experience as a form of expertise, ensuring that the resources were not based on assumptions but real, practical insights.

How did The Postal Museum develop their resources?

I spoke with Hannah Clipson, Access and Community Engagement Manager at the museum, about how this partnership with Ambitious About Autism has shaped their provision for neurodivergent communities.

How did your partnership with Ambitious About Autism begin?

"We reached out to Ambitious About Autism and said, ‘These are our barriers; we’d like to come up with ways to break them down with you. We have some ideas, but we’re completely open to doing it differently, depending on what the young people tell us.’

Over a year, we planned how to respond to those challenges together. As a group, we decided to create a visual story, the films, and relaxed events."

How were the young people supported in this co-creation process?

“The first year was a pilot year, testing ways of working with young people and piloting the outputs. The young people were compensated for their time, expertise, and travel. They travelled from across the UK, and we covered their hotels and trains.

Though Ambitious About Autism handled the practicalities of payment, as we understood that they were best placed to understand the individual needs of their Youth Patrons, all of this came from our budget, through funding we had secured. This compensation for time and expertise has been a priority from day one.

"The pilot year was so successful that the museum’s entire team, from the executive level down, became invested in the program. Now, it’s part of our core budget, ensuring we continue delivering at a high standard."

The Neurodiverse Museum aims to achieve greater equity within the sector across not just provision for audiences, but also through widening opportunities for neurodivergent people to engage with and feel represented by museum collections. How does the Postal Museum aim to keep building on this successful work?

As a museum, we have ambitions to work in a more participatory way. Our next temporary exhibition, is being co-curated, for example. We want to develop our approach with a view to embedding what we learn across the delivery of core functions at the museum. We are currently piloting ways to work with audiences to resurface

objects in the collection and look at material in new ways. We're very junior in our practice at the minute, but with intentions to do better.

What advice would you give to other museums looking to co-create with neurodivergent communities?

Show intent, show you are learning the approach, and work with a range of audiences to represent diverse voices and experiences. Keep learning as one approach won't work for everyone and be flexible and open. Factor in plenty of time to adapt to the needs of different groups and interests.