House of Memories

National Museums Liverpool

Connecting with Communities to Create Heritage Collections

A Guide for Cultural Organisations

Connecting with Yemeni Elders' Heritage

Connecting with Yemeni Elders' Heritage is an intergenerational project which looked to the younger Yemeni community in Liverpool to collect and record objects important to Yemeni heritage to share with their older relatives and neighbours digitally via the 'My House of Memories' app. It has also been supported by community organisations and partners.

The project is part of House of Memories, National Museums Liverpool's award-winning dementia awareness programme.

A toolkit

Through a toolkit we would like to share our experiences of working in the community and the lessons learnt through the collaboration, with the input of the young people involved. You can read the text and hear from some of our participants via film. Look out for links to videos from those involved in the project!

The toolkit will be of interest to museums, galleries and other cultural institutions that would like to build relationships and undertake collections work in their diverse local communities. While our project specifically focuses on our partnerships within the Yemeni community in Liverpool, many of the lessons learnt and considerations will apply to other communities and partnerships too.

1) Finding inspiration

The idea to collaborate came from Abdulwase Sufian – a young man from Liverpool's Yemeni community who is inspired by his desire to assist his grandmother, who is living with dementia. When he came across the 'My House of Memories' app, a digital resource full of museum objects and photographs, he realised that this could be a valuable tool for the Yemeni community – if it contained the right pictures and stories.

Learning points:

- Having an inspirational young person at the heart of this initiative has been one of its great strengths. Listening to young people can present new opportunities for both them and your organisation
- Their involvement as an advocate can inspire and motivate the wider community
- Young people reported that seeing a familiar face made the project relatable and gave a sense of community
- Abdulwase identified a genuine need which gave the project integrity.

Watch now: Abdulwase Sufian on bringing the project to life

2) Making a connection

When Abdulwase wanted to approach House of Memories about his idea, he was able to do so through a community mentor Saba Ahmed, who is also of Yemeni heritage. Abdulwase knew Saba both personally and from her role at the Kuumba Imani Millennium Centre, Liverpool, where Abdulwase and his friends met and supported community events.

Building trust is a key requirement of working with young people and indeed of any community project. It can be incredibly useful to include a third party or someone with an established relationship with your young advocate to build confidence and act as a broker. This helps to create bridges but also enables an appropriate level of distance, so as not to overwhelm your participants.

Learning points:

- A mentor can support and give young people the confidence to participate
- They can help to articulate a young person's thoughts and bring focus. This is useful if they want to offer critical advice or say no to a request. It can also be helpful if there are language considerations
- A third party can offer advice and context about your approach to participation
- Including a mentor known to the young people, such as a coach, teacher, youth worker or community leader can help establish trust with the organisation.

Watch now: Saba Ahmed on connecting with and supporting young people

3) Setting expectations for everyone involved

Working in a genuinely consultative and collaborative way takes time and effort. Not everything will go to plan, despite the best intentions. There may be adjustments and changes to make along the way, and not everything will be achievable. An open and transparent dialogue is essential to success.

One way that we did this for Connecting with Yemeni Elders' Heritage was to host a virtual workshop with an open invitation to members of the community. This included key role models and people that could offer support for the project, including those from Abdulwase's immediate circle such as mentors, youth club managers, family members, friends, and teachers.

Learning points:

- Don't make assumptions about the needs and views of the community without discussion
- Sharing plans can enable meaningful conversations and help you adjust your plans to meet the community's needs
- Having an open invitation can help to formulate new partnerships and connections
- Consultation with community leaders and community elders can bring support, endorsement, and genuine advocacy for your project.

Watch now: Taher Qassim on working together

4) Building your team

Finding the right project leader is an important consideration when setting out on a project involving young people and communities. As well as observing the correct safeguarding measures, it needs to be someone with an engaging personality that can mix well and convey a sense of ease. Unlike a school project, there is no requisite for anyone to take part in the project, so it needs to be appealing! Project management skills are, of course, also essential.

Our consultations confirmed that appointing a person of Yemeni heritage and with bilingual skills to lead the project would be essential and of huge importance to the community. A project leader can also act as an advocate between the community and the organisation, by relaying crucial information regarding cultural awareness, community sensitivities, and religious considerations.

Learning points:

- The project should be led by someone appropriate for the community, with the right language skills. This will make the project easier to run operationally, as well as bringing a closer understanding of the needs of the community and any barriers
- Review your recruitment procedures to ensure they are as inclusive as possible, including bilingual advertisements in the local community centres
- Provide a phone number for people to talk about the role and provide support to apply if required. Not everyone is reliant on emails
- Bring in your project leader early in the process to help with establishing partnerships
- Try to ensure continuity in the team working on the project to ensure cohesion and understanding of the community and parameters for working.

5) Identifying and building partnerships

For a project to be truly successful, it needs to have the support, input and endorsement of the community. This often means working with established community organisations and leaders with the appropriate knowledge, influence and areas of expertise to help plan and implement the project. Before confirming which partner organisations you should work with, it is a good idea to do your research, ideally in advance of applying for funding. Bringing in partners at an early stage can be beneficial in giving a project integrity and guarantee commitment right from the start.

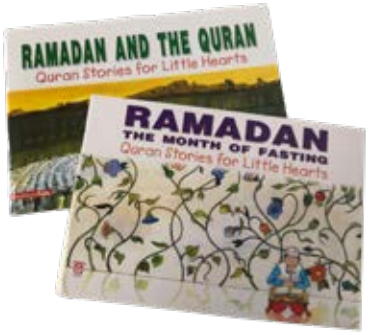
Learning points:

- Find out about local community organisations and other places where people gather such as faith-based centres (for example the local Mosque)
- Identify key influencers and stakeholders that can help support you and advocate for the project, as well as playing the role of the critical friend
- Regularly visit community leaders and elders in person to ask for advice and guidance on culture and religious considerations throughout the project – trust is key from the start
- Work with community outreach workers for information on local community gatherings or smaller independent groups
- Community stores are great information hubs and offer many resources beyond the general store purpose. They can be valuable information points and areas of high community footfall
- Reach out to service providers who have bilingual staff positioned in key areas, for example NHS and local authorities who already have trusted access into the community circles
- Consider forming an 'Advisory Group' of key stakeholders from different organisations, to ensure that people have an equal opportunity to participate, voice opinions and benefit from the programme.

Watch now: Miriam Alhanshali on working in the community

6) Effective communications

Working in the community can be very different than working in a corporate environment and you may need to adjust your practices to effectively communicate with participants and stakeholders. Bear in mind that many people will have multiple responsibilities to juggle. These could include running businesses, family and caring responsibilities, study, community roles, as well as faith and charity commitments.



Learning points:

- Email can be useful in some circumstances, but more direct communication can sometimes be more effective as community members may not be in a desk-based role
- Those that do connect by email may be too busy to get back to you quickly, especially if they are carrying out the activities outside of their core roles and responsibilities
- Making a telephone call or visiting the community to speak to people in person can be a more straightforward way to get in touch
- Having a dedicated internal team with key responsibilities can be helpful so that relationships can be built within the partnership – for example with finance or marketing representatives
- Smaller organisations and community centres may not necessarily have print assets such as logos or brand guidelines or be able to meet certain technical specifications
- Communicate any mandatory requirements (such as carrying out risk assessments) at the start of the project to ensure there are clear expectations. Layers of bureaucracy unexpectedly introduced during the project can frustrate partners and stifle progress
- You may be keen to document and photograph your project. However, appearing in photographs can be sensitive for the community, and in particular for Muslim females. It is paramount that permissions forms and consent is acquired before taking or publishing photographs. Failure to do this can have a dramatic effect on the project and you will lose trust within the community
- Consider having consent forms for photography or other permissions translated to make it as clear as possible what people are signing up for. Interpreters may also be required as not everyone can read English or necessarily read in their first language
- If you are creating print assets, make sure you have them in sufficient time to be distributed in the community properly. Posters and leaflets displayed in key community areas and centres show a continuous commitment and will enhance the reach of the project.

7) Financial considerations

Managing the finances of a programme is an important task for any organisation, to ensure the programme is viable and meets funders' and community partners' expectations. Transparency is essential and confirming when and how you will communicate with stakeholders about finances in advance can be valuable and keep relationships buoyant.

Learning points:

- Sharing the financial forecast and budget commitments for the project from the beginning is a good idea to ensure people feel fully informed and included. It can also help avoid problems or confusion later
- Where possible, consider remunerations for partners organisations that reflect their contributions, rather than relying on goodwill
- Try and ensure that the financial opportunity for community partners is fairly or equally weighted, to encourage collaboration rather than competition
- Financial processes in corporate organisations can be convoluted and frustrating for small providers such as freelancers and community members
- Consider reviewing and adapting your financial processes – in advance of the project activity if possible – to ensure people don't feel short-changed or inconvenienced.

8) Working with youth groups

The Connecting with Yemeni Elders' Heritage project had young people at its heart. They were involved in creative sessions, gathering content, and more. Having a group of young people that are willing and able to contribute to your programme is key.

Learning points:

- Youth clubs are a great starting point for interaction within the local community
- Identify your local key organisations and attend in person to introduce yourself to the centre manager and youth workers rather than sending out an email. This will help to build a solid relationship from the start
- You will need to find a suitable window of opportunity to connect with the young people. Many groups will already have set timeframes for their activity programmes in place, so you will need to work with them to find the best approach
- Young people told us that they appreciated a familiar setting and a relaxed, comfortable environment. They also enjoyed being with friends and having a leader that knew them and knew their culture
- Some young people may not be willing to participate in a project – they may want to concentrate on their sports and usual activities instead
- When you start your activity, you may find that the number of participants may fluctuate as there is no obligation to attend the youth club, so bear this in mind when you structure your sessions
- If you want to ensure equal opportunity to participate, it is worth contacting multiple youth groups. You can also consider sharing information on social media to attract young people that do not attend or are out of reach of the general community
- Depending on the nature of your project, it can also be worth connecting with formal education establishments such as schools and colleges. They may be able to factor your project into their curriculum or extra-curricular activities, and this can help with the numbers in attendance
- Engagement with youth centres will probably only be possible from 5pm onwards on weekdays or at the weekend, so be prepared to work outside of core business hours
- You will need to ensure your sessions are appealing to keep the attention of young people. Some expressed an interest in building in outdoor sessions and more interactivity to our programme. As one person said, "Less theory and more action".

9) Engaging with young people

There are many reasons that young people may or may not want to contribute to a project, but it can be useful to give these practical considerations some thought.

Learning points:

- Many young people and volunteers have daily commitments - to attend school, college, university, or employment and this can be challenging when trying to arrange a meeting or activity. Consider what times will work best and consult with them on this
- Incentives can be helpful where attendance is vital to the project. You may need to offer these at various times throughout the project. This could be money, a voucher, or a social gathering with food and treats
- Rewarding participation with a certificate or other acknowledgment can be beneficial for young people and they can be used to help build their professional profile and references
- Encouraging young ambassadors or spokespeople to raise awareness of the project within the community will encourage others to participate as there will be trust and familiarity
- Identify opportunities for young people to stay involved with your organisation after the project has finished – for example, if you have a youth engagement group or volunteering opportunities
- Bear in mind that in some communities, young people may need permission from their parents to take part in an activity, regardless of age. Others may not be able to attend gatherings or venues outside the city without a chaperone or a member of their family
- English may not be the first language for some young people, and they may have different levels of literacy skills, so keep the language plain and clear if reading or writing is involved. Offer support and alternatives where necessary – for example, a youth worker or team member with bilingual capacity
- Consider recruiting more than the necessary amount of young people needed to attend, as some may drop out if other obligations arise.

10) Sustaining community relationships

Establishing and sustaining relationships with people and organisations in the community takes time and effort. It is important to keep dialogues open at regular intervals and to be visible, as well as to identify wider opportunities to connect.

Learning points:

- Regular visits to partners and community leaders in person builds trust and ensures familiarity. Face to face contact or telephone calls are much more effective and will achieve greater results
- Sustaining regular meetings with key individuals will create support for the project as well as establishing a good working relationship for future projects
- Awareness of the rules regarding culture and faith in the community are particularly important and should be always respected. This can include norms around dress and modesty, mixing amongst the sexes, restrictions around certain religious sites and buildings, and the way people greet each other. If in doubt, ask about what is appropriate – and inappropriate
- Make sure that community partners and organisations are recognised in all of your externally facing communications such as leaflets, publicity and media opportunities – to recognise their contribution and to make participating worthwhile for them
- There needs to be equity of opportunity across the community organisations you work with. They may assume different roles and bring different areas of expertise or perspectives
- Relying on goodwill for organisations to support the project can be ineffective and they may run out of steam. Where possible, build in funding to reimburse organisations and to cover their costs and preparations. This can secure greater commitment and ensures that the value of their input is acknowledged
- Make sure that your partners are embedded into your organisation's relationship strategies – for example, added to invitation lists for future events or consultations that would interest them. This will help to make authentic and sustained connections with the community, instead of delivering isolated project work that comes to an abrupt ending.

11) Gathering digital content for a collections-based project

Our objective of the project was to build a content package on the 'My House of Memories' app full of objects, images and audio which would be relevant to the Yemeni community. There are lots of different ways that you might collect digitised material from the community with different advantages and disadvantages.

Learning points:

- If there are minimal technical parameters that you need set for your project, it's a good idea to share these from the outset, so you don't end up with poor quality material e.g. file sizes, minimum dpi of images, portrait or landscape formats and so on
- You may need to provide some training or guidance about how to check these parameters or how to make sure an image will meet them when your young contributor takes the photo
- Ensure that your group understand that it may not be possible to use every piece of material submitted and that a selection process will take place. This will prevent future disappointments
- Make sure you have a permissions form or process in place so you can track who the image belongs to and collect any relevant copyright information as you go. It will save time spent tracking down information later!
- Establish how you will credit people for their contributions to your project
- Using messaging platforms such as WhatsApp may be handy for gathering content together in one place and having a virtual community. However, you may also find that the programme or app compresses the image and makes it poorer quality
- It may be better to have a folder or web page where people can upload their files directly. You could also allow people to email in their submissions, proving the file sizes are small enough without losing quality
- Relying on mobile technology such as phones may mean that there are differing levels of quality due to different platforms and capabilities of people's devices. If you can provide a good quality camera or device for your project, consider whether it would be beneficial to do so
- Not all community members will have the same access to devices or the same level of familiarity with technology, although common with young people
- Working in a group environment such as a school with access to kit can be a good way to ensure you achieve the quality images you want
- Build in plenty of time to proofread and check your content, particularly if it will be presented in different languages or needs translating
- Where possible, involve young people in the different levels of production – for example, recording multi-media and audio files, to give them a broader experience and give authenticity to the project.

Watch now: Najib Alhakimi on creating collections with the community

12) Running an event with the community

One of the great successes of our project was the Yemeni Culture Day we arranged to bring people together to share Yemeni heritage and build awareness. It was a very special day, full of joy and lots of eating, music and dancing.

Organising an event can be complex and stressful, but this can be mitigated with careful planning. When working with the community on an event, it is important to ensure that you have done your research and accommodated their specific needs. The best way to do this is through collaboration.

Learning points:

- Ensure you have enough time to plan and publicise your event effectively
- Involve the community in consultation and planning for the event to gain trust with community members
- Make use of the community settings and organisations you are working with to host and facilitate the event – this is both efficient and an opportunity to distribute funding streams in a constructive way
- Consider capacity and the amount of space you have available. If you have an open event you could be oversubscribed, so plan your entry system
- Think about the community you are working with and adapt your plans to cater for their needs – for example, will turnout be affected by prayer times or other commitments?
- It may be useful to recruit bilingual volunteers or interpreters on the day to help overcome any language barriers
- Young volunteers told us that the event made them proud to be Yemeni and of their culture, which was experienced through traditional dress, refreshments, music, dancing and objects from Yemeni heritage
- Working with volunteers from the community brought a great sense of connection and teamwork, and a lot of community pride. Young people appreciated being able to choose which elements of the day they got involved with
- It is really important to ensure your guests are comfortable on the day and that you are not unwittingly breaking any local conventions or practices – for example, you may need ample space for men and women to sit separately if working with members of a Muslim community that do not wish to mix
- All refreshments and food needs to be culturally appropriate for the community you are working with – for example purchased from a Halal establishment
- The community will welcome using suppliers from within the community itself – for example local stores and independent traders that they use daily. This can also generate goodwill and advocacy for your project
- Choose a venue that people are familiar with and that they can access easily, especially if working with elders that may need support to travel further. This alone will generate a sense of trust and familiarity that may make people more willing to attend

- If you are inviting the community into your own venue for an event, consider putting on transport and escorting people. Going to an unfamiliar place may not be desirable but these small steps may remove barriers and help people visit your venue for the first time
- Make sure you know what the objective of your event is and what you want to achieve by the end of it. If you are looking to create general awareness, then think about how you will communicate the key messages in a culturally appropriate but engaging way.

13) Holding workshops or meetings in the community

As with events, it can be beneficial to arrange any workshops or meetings for your project in the community, where surroundings are familiar. You may find you get greater participation this way. Within the Connecting with Yemeni Elders' Heritage project, we needed to specifically consider the needs of Muslims in the community to enable participation.

Learning points:

- Meetings that are held within the community and local centres will automatically adhere to providing appropriate space and religious guidance
- Within Muslim communities, some people will not feel comfortable sitting close or near to the opposite sex. Therefore, it is advised to bear this in mind when selecting a venue or arranging a large meeting or gathering. Provide additional spaces or rooms if required
- For Muslims, daily prayer times occur five times a day, and so it is wise to ask participants or partners to select a time that is suitable for them to attend before making arrangements. Friday Prayers are especially important, so this time frame should be avoided
- It is important to consider cultural and religious calendars before planning your workshop or meeting. There are many festivals across the year for different communities, which can lead to holidays and shut-downs, when work will not be able to take place. There are also times when activity may be reduced, such as during Ramadan
- Setting meeting dates with a long lead can be helpful – for example, to attend monthly or quarterly meetings - due to people often having prior commitments
- Some participants or partners may not feel comfortable with travelling to attend a corporate meeting space
- Ensure any presentations or talks with groups are stripped back to plain conversational English, as not everyone will have the same language skills. If necessary, provide bilingual resources and an interpreter.

Watch now: Leyla Mashjari on community-based project management

My House of Memories app

Our project reached a high point in June 2022 when the package of Yemeni content was launched via the 'My House of Memories' app. Please download the app, where you will find images, music and descriptions gathered by the community.

- The 'My House of Memories' app can be downloaded via the iTunes store for iPads, iPhones and iOS devices, or Google play for Android devices
- Once the app has been downloaded to your device, you will be asked to select a country. To view the content associated with the Connecting with Yemeni Elders' Heritage project, select the UK
- You can then also choose your preferred language, whether that's English or Arabic, after which the content will begin to load
- Press the Museum Memories button to view all of our collections
- The My House of Memories app also has a 'My Memories' feature, which enables users to create a personal profile to save favourite objects and add images.

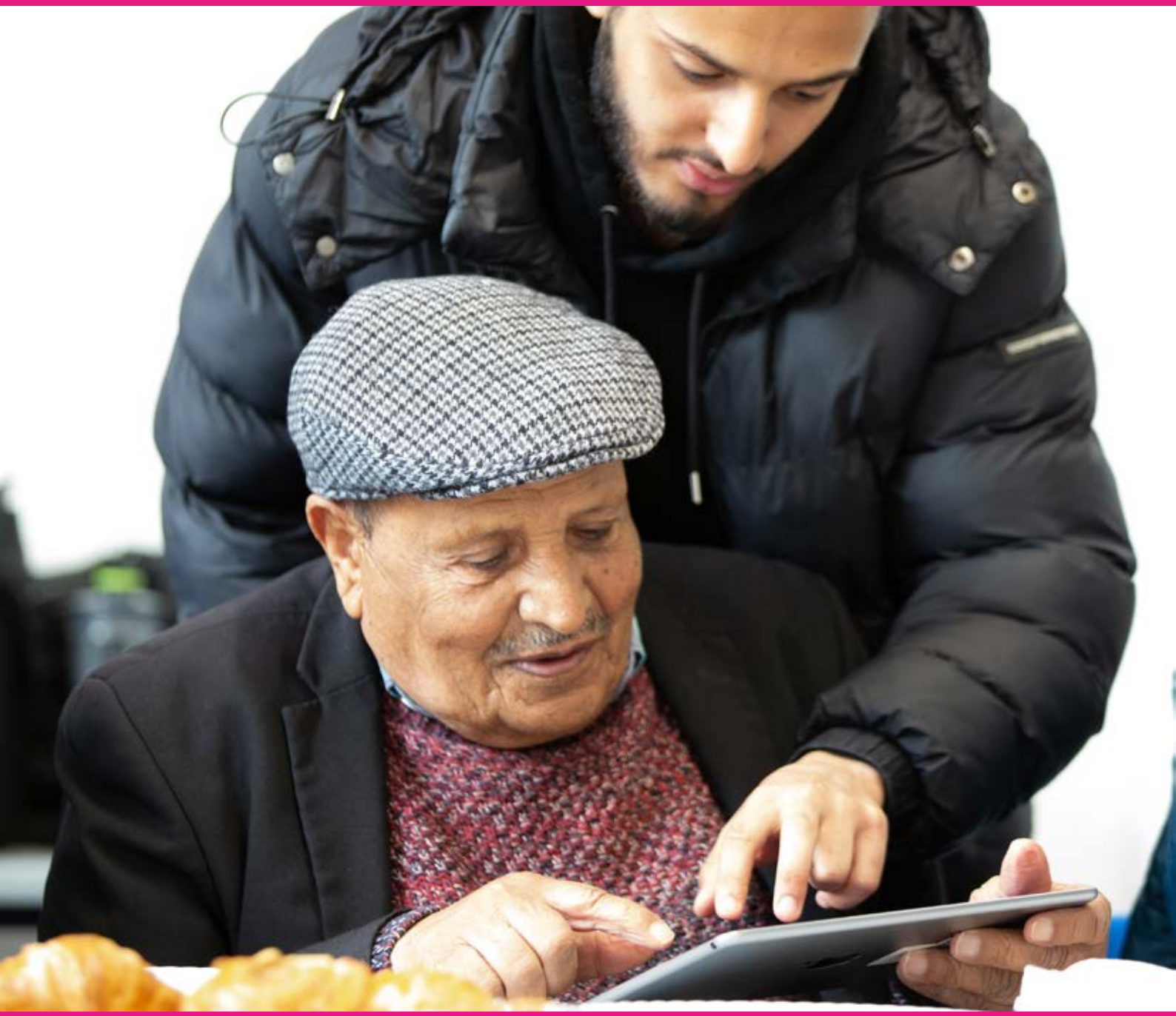
More information about the My House of Memories app is available via www.houseofmemories.co.uk

Thank you

We hope that this toolkit has given you some useful guidance as you start to plan your own projects.

We would like to thank everybody involved in the Connecting with

Yemeni Elders' Heritage project – young people, elders and partner organisations – for their help, expertise and generosity. Additionally, we'd like to thank everyone for their guidance and contribution to this toolkit, including students and staff at The Studio School Liverpool, who took part in a dedicated toolkit session.



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