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Fitzwilliam Museum: Take a Walk in My Shoes

Author	Bradfield, Emily
Title	Fitzwilliam Museum: Take a Walk in My Shoes
Publication date	2024
Download date	2026-05-14 04:09:31
Link to Item	https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.14069/1058

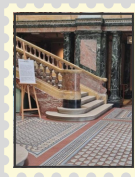
Take a Walk in My Shoes: reflections on space

This research project explored experiences of how it feels to 'be' in the Museum and how the experiences of people affected by non-visible disabilities can be used to inform and support health and wellbeing in the Museum.

We've created this postcard blog series as a way of sharing our experiences with you - in each series we reflect on different aspects of being in the museum, and share our thoughts as postcards to a friend.

Emily, Georgie, Jo, Alex, and Dale

The research project was facilitated by Dr Emily Bradfield (Practitioner Researcher).



This series includes our reflections on being in the museum space.



Take a Walk in My Shoes: reflections on space

During one walk, the participant used their wheelchair to conserve their energy. I was struck by how different I felt pushing someone – their autonomy and agency was reduced, and I could feel this. I felt uncomfortable. I could see how our experiences differed – by moving my feet I could easily turn to face a painting, but for them, the wheelchair was a barrier – turning head not feet. Looking up, rather than directly at. Our experience was different – it wasn't equal.

Emily

Image: looking at the floor in the lift, with wheelchair wheel.



Take a Walk in My Shoes included walking interviews with museum staff and community members.

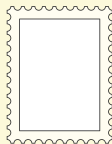


Take a Walk in My Shoes: reflections on space

My pregnant belly is very heavy now and the first time I noticed it was climbing those stairs, you know the ones at the old entrance to the Museum? I've learned to love the lift at the courtyard entrance. Coming into the back of gallery 14 always feels like I'm entering a corner of the Museum that holds lots of secrets. But I'm also ok to go slow: to take my time running my hand along the stone bannister, taking a break on the landing. You're not bothering anyone by going at your own pace, I tell myself. This place is for all of us. Belongs to all of us.

Alex

Image: Founders (main) entrance, inside.



Take a Walk in My Shoes explored experiences of how it feels to 'be' in the Museum.

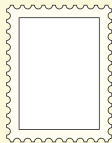


Take a Walk in My Shoes: reflections on space

I've been walking around Cambridge all morning, getting tired now so I've gone to relax at the Fitzwilliam Museum. Usually I love it here, but today the scale of it all feels imposing, the floors are creaking too loud, and I feel like everyone is creeping up behind me. I've gone to the Egypt galleries, the corridors are stone down here and it feels cooler and calmer. I want to lie down on the cold stone and stare at the ceiling for a while - the other visitors might think it's odd, but I think that floor would be a lovely sensory reset. I just wish it wasn't such a long walk from here to the cafe!

Image: gallery 23.

Georgie



Take a Walk in My Shoes involved adults affected by non-visible disabilities participating in focus groups.

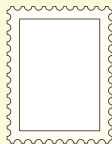


Take a Walk in My Shoes: reflections on space

Visiting in my wheelchair enabled me to use my energy to enjoy the exhibition. I couldn't do this alone though as, although I can self-propel my chair for short distances, I need someone to push me - or it doesn't serve its purpose of energy preservation. The alternative, as I have done before, means either spending time on benches, which are inherently static, or sitting on the floor at various places. So, using my chair provides benefits but still leads to a very different experience of navigating the exhibits, being directed by the person pushing, as well finding it hard to view things at eye level, meaning I often had to stand, to find the right height or get close enough to see the detail.

Jo

Image: looking at exhibit, sitting in a wheelchair.



Take a Walk in My Shoes was funded by the Fitzwilliam Museum Marlay Group and HEIF.