

PAST COMMUNITY PLATFORM EXHIBITIONS

AT HOME

Curated by clients of Alana House, this project explored our personal and shared ideas of home. In a series of workshops, the project explored the MERL photographic, film, archive and object collections and used them as inspiration for creative responses to the concept of home, personal possessions and family life.

Alana House is a women's community project in Reading and West Berkshire run by PACT. Alana House supports women to empower them to take control of their lives, make informed decisions and improve their life chances.

WELLBEING IN THE COUNTRYSIDE

Curated by MERL volunteers and supported by the Ridgeline Trust, Farming Community Network, the MERL Countryside Forum and Rural Services Network

This platform grew out of a desire to investigate connections between the countryside and human wellbeing. Several themes emerged in exploring our collections and they all pointed to one conclusion: it's complicated.

We might have romantic notions about country life being beneficial for wellbeing and sometimes this is the case. However, life in the village and on the land can also be characterised by stress and heartache. This display explored different ways in which rural practices impact on physical and mental wellbeing as well as contemporary first-hand accounts of what it's like to live in rural Britain.

This exhibition was co-developed with the Farming Community Network and Ridgeline Trust, with assistance from the Rural Services Network. It was made possible with the generous support of the Wellcome Trust.

SEW ENGAGING

The Sew Engaging project was funded by the [Ashley Family Foundation](#) and was inspired by our Festival of Britain wall hangings, one of which is now on display in a [new, purpose-built gallery](#). We asked community groups and individuals to stitch their contribution based on what they like and dislike about the countryside. A group of volunteers led by Jan Butler sewed all the contributions together into a beautiful wall hanging.

The 'Move up Group' at the [Rising Sun Arts Centre](#) created an entire wall hanging themselves, spending a number of weeks thinking about what the countryside means to them and then creating a vibrant and very personal piece.

The Sew Engaging exhibition featured in the Community Exhibition Case in *The Nook*, a new social learning space created as part of the Our Country Lives project.

JOURNEYS, STORIES AND IDENTITIES

This display showcased the artistic work of a group of women from the [Elizabeth Fry House](#) charity in Reading, with whom we have been working since 2015. The charity provides accommodation and support to women, mostly on licence from prison.

A group from Elizabeth Fry House visited the Museum to view the University's Art Collections. The project used individual artworks to introduce and discuss the themes of journeys, stories and identities. Favourite artworks were selected in terms of subject matter and medium. Some women chose to recreate original work. Taking inspiration from the collection, personal stories were explored and identity thought about. Participants created artwork using a variety of media including pottery, drawing, painting and collage. The women also documented their interests using photography.

This exhibition builds on the Arts Council England (ACE) funded project, [Journeys and Stories](#), which was a collaboration between [Reading Museum](#), [Thames Valley Partnership](#), The MERL and the Elizabeth Fry Charity, which culminated in an exhibition at Reading Museum in 2016. That project saw artists Christine Wilkinson and Carla Conte work with residents to create artworks inspired by their own life journeys and museum visits.