

## **Olivia Fales – Final Draft**

*Museums as tools for building empathy: supporting positive interactions between Santa Monica police officers and homeless individuals*

As part of Santa Monica's efforts to double down on homelessness, the city's police department is giving officers more nuanced tools for engaging with the homeless population. I am interested in the role that empathy can play in supporting SMPD's new approach - especially in its capacity to foster successful interactions between police officers and homeless individuals.

As spaces that foster connection, dialogue, and close observation, museums are a powerful tool for building empathy. Museums are leveraging this opportunity in myriad and diverse ways: some quite literally invite visitors to step in another's shoes (at the Empathy Museum, an exhibition brings together audio stories which a visitor can listen to while wearing the storyteller's shoes); LACMA has a virtual reality exhibition that simulates the harrowing journey of an immigrant or refugee on the run; a traveling exhibition, *Dialogue in Silence*, gives hearing-able visitors an opportunity to learn non-verbal communication tools from hearing impaired trainers while wearing noise-canceling headsets.

Even without an explicit agenda to inspire empathy, museums provide opportunities for visitors to experience different points of view: What are the similarities and differences between these two works of art? How are the artists addressing the same topic in different ways? How do your cultural biases influence the way you perceive a work of art?

As part of the officer training curriculum, trainees will visit a museum for a 1.5 hour experience guided by a museum educator, who has him/herself undergone empathy training and also shared their lesson plan with an empathy expert at UCLA. At the end of the tour, officers will be given the opportunity to reflect on skills learned and potential applications in the field. Empathy can indeed be learned, as evidenced in a 2012 study in which resident physicians received empathy training and made noticeable improvements as rated by patients (1). By the end of the experience, officers will have exercised their skills in communication, perspective-taking, and productive dialogue - tools that can support successful interactions with homeless individuals, whose historic marginalization can result in perceived barriers to connection.

\*\*\*\*

## **FEEDBACK ON FIRST DRAFT FROM COHORT MEMBER**

Questions for you regarding the project (and FYI I think this is an excellent idea):

-Is it just a single visit, or a series/program of visits for this training? Is the training connected to a particular show?

-How can you work in your own personal expertise as a museum educator into this pitch? In what way can you illustrate that you are the perfect person, given your background/history/training/passions to take the lead on this project?

## REFERENCES

1- <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/22549298>

[http://arts.berkeley.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/Csikszentmihalyi-Hermanson-1995\\_Intrinsic-Motivation-in-Museums.pdf](http://arts.berkeley.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/Csikszentmihalyi-Hermanson-1995_Intrinsic-Motivation-in-Museums.pdf) > Museums are intrinsic spaces of learning. “...learning involves an open process of interaction with the environment. This experiential process develops and expands the self, allowing one to discover aspects of oneself that were previously unknown. Thus the learning experience involves the whole person, not only the intellectual but the sensory and emotional faculties as well.”

<http://www.dialogue-in-silence.com/>

<http://www.empathymuseum.com/index.html#amileinmyshoes>

<https://artmuseumteaching.com/2016/07/11/the-urgency-of-empathy-social-impact-in-museums/>  
(Empathy in museum practice)

[https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/five\\_ways\\_museums\\_can\\_increase\\_empathy\\_in\\_the\\_world](https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/five_ways_museums_can_increase_empathy_in_the_world)

<https://artmuseumteaching.com/2016/07/11/the-urgency-of-empathy-social-impact-in-museums/>

<http://www.anthro.ucla.edu/content/anthropology-empathy-experiencing-lives-others-pacific-societies>

<https://www.uclaextension.edu/search/publicCourseSearchDetails.do?method=load&courseId=152372> (empathy training at UCLA)

<https://medium.com/@kcollingwood/why-civil-servants-should-become-experts-in-empathy-59c30507b3f6>