

Let's go to...

## The Scottish maritime museum

Children can play in the historic harbourside setting of this industrial museum. By **Claire Munro**, learning and access manager



We have also planted flowers in our small outdoor pots, and children were especially curious about how the small seeds grow. The children regularly check on the growth of the flowers, which is a nice return pick-up point for discussion for the session activity leader and the children. For many, this was the first time seeing this process and has prompted discussion and influenced the subject of future sessions.

**T**he Scottish Maritime Museum is an industrial museum with two homes, one on the Irvine harbour, south of

Glasgow, in a former engine shop, and one to the north in Dumbarton that focuses on naval architecture.

Little Sea Monsters runs weekly at both sites and focuses on engaging families of children aged six months to five years. We wanted to combat the stereotypes of museums being viewed as places where you must 'act like an adult', and instead reframe the museum as a place where families with young children can play. We also wanted to make Little Sea Monsters accessible to all.

Both of our museum sites are in areas that are high on the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation, and face barriers that include social and financial deprivation and issues engaging with the education system. We therefore offer the sessions for free, keeping the environment relaxed, and ensuring fruit snacks and water are available to attendees on demand to help focus attention.

With a growth in popularity, more STEM-focused activities were introduced. We found many of the adults felt they did not have the 'right knowledge' to engage in STEM activities with children at home.

While some sessions are more structured than others, every session offers a story, craft activity and an opportunity for play with a variety of

toys and games, so children can choose how much they want to engage in the activities and the other children in the group. Recent themes have included 'things that fly' and a 'day at the beach'.

### ACTIVITIES Sensory play

Children are encouraged to take an exploratory play style through sensory activities. For example, our 'Day at the Beach' session included boxes of sand, with various shells, buckets and spades where children could dig and explore.

A water tank was also introduced, where children explored floating and sinking through testing different objects such as marbles, plastic animals, coins and small plastic boats. We challenged the children to think more deeply about how each object would either float or sink, developing their thinking and problem-solving skills. These sessions are particularly popular with families of SEND children.

### Going outside

The museum is situated in an old shipyard, Irvine Harbourside, which lends itself to outdoor activities. During our 'Things that Fly' session, children were able to observe the birds that visit the Bogside flats, which is a Site of Scientific Interest, and spot some of the other local wildlife. The children then enjoyed flying kites on what was a particularly windy day!

**The MV Kyles boat (left) and a piece of artwork made with shapes (right)**

### Number, patterns and shapes

Sessions featuring numbers, shapes and patterns are usually embraced through a creative style of play. Families engage in a short tour of our main museum, which includes MV Kyles – a cargo boat and the oldest iron Clyde-built vessel still afloat in the UK. Children are introduced to the many shapes they see in the boats and tools and other maritime objects. Children then paint, make and craft their own artwork using shapes.

The sessions follow guidance by Play Scotland and we ensure our activities support the Curriculum for Excellence learning framework for our older children who attend. ■



SCOTTISH MARITIME MUSEUM

**Number of visitors:** 90,000

**Collection:** Ships and marine engines, a testing tank and recreated 1920s workers' tenement flat

**Early years offer:** 'Little Sea Monsters' at Irvine site and 'Little Guppies' at Dumbarton site – 45-minute sessions, delivered every Thursday morning all year round. For children aged six months to five years.