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Cambridgeshire County Council representatives met the Duchess of Cornwall on Tuesday (November 27) as part of a day of royal appointments in Cambridgeshire by the Duchess and the Prince of Wales.

Her Royal Highness The Duchess of Cornwall, Patron of the National Literacy Trust, visited the Wisbech & Fenland Museum to celebrate the wealth of local activity to improve the literacy skills of children and families including Cambridgeshire County Council's community literacy project *Talking Together in Cambridgeshire* which helps develop children's early communication and language skills.

Whilst there she met Gillian Beasley, Chief Executive of Cambridgeshire County Council and Councillor Simon Bywater, Chairman of the Children and Young People Committee, along with excited pupils from Elm Road Primary School, one of 24 Cambridgeshire schools to receive literacy toolkits, and families and young children enjoying fun activities.

The Duchess was also shown the original manuscript of Charles Dickens' *Great Expectations* which was bequeathed to the museum in 1868 and the school children enjoyed an activity led by author Marcia Williams based on her retelling of *A Christmas Carol* by Charles Dickens.

Since April, Talking Together has been working with communities in Wisbech, March, Chatteris, Huntingdon and north-east Cambridge to help children to develop strong communication, language and literacy skills in their early years and to inspire families to become more involved in this crucial stage of their child's development.

One element of the project has been to highlight the importance of sustained back-and-forth interactions between children and adults. The team refers to these interactions as 'Talking Tennis' and research indicates that this approach can make a difference to children's communication and language development over time.

The Fitzwilliam Museum is one of 12 organisations who successfully bid for a share of £61,000 of Talking Together in Cambridgeshire grant funding to set up activities to support children and their families' communication, language and literacy. The museum will deliver their Creative Families – *Talking Together* programme to families in north-east Cambridge and Wisbech. The programme also focuses on promoting responsive interactions to support children's communication and cultural development when visiting museums.

The Fitzwilliam is working with Wisbech Child and Family Centres to bring the project to Wisbech & Fenland Museum early next year. Families previously recruited by the Child and Family Centre staff had the opportunity to take part in

the taster session at the museum as part of the Royal visit.

Councillor Bywater said: “Research shows the importance of strong language skills, and the impact of language on attainment and enjoyment of school and future life chances. Talking Together aims to increase the number of children reaching or surpassing the expected standard at the end of their reception year at school by working with parents, childcare providers and community groups.

“It was wonderful to meet the Duchess of Cornwall and talk to her about *Talking Together in Cambridgeshire*. As Patron of the National Literacy Trust she is an avid reader and passionate about inspiring a love of reading and writing in young children and was very interested to hear more about our work to encourage this.”

The Literacy Toolkits, for children aged 2-11, were created by the National Literacy Trust and Walker Books and funded by KPMG. They contain 50 brand new books, fun activities and materials to help children develop a love of reading at school and at home.



The Duchess of Cornwall at Wisbech Museum

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