



# Overview

Foundation Stones was a flagship national engagement programme, delivered by Big Ideas in partnership with the UK Holocaust Memorial Foundation (UKHMF). Inspired by the Jewish custom of placing stones on graves, the project invited everyone across the UK to paint a stone to be incorporated into the foundations of the new UK Holocaust Memorial and Learning Centre in London. Every stone painted is both a personal act of commemoration and a public promise to remember the past and build a future free from hate.

Since launching in 2019, Foundation Stones has grown into a nationally recognised programme connecting communities in every region and nation of the UK to the history of the Holocaust, Nazi persecution and subsequent genocides. What began as a grassroots engagement initiative evolved into a multi-strand programme encompassing live workshops, digital campaigns, media partnerships, and an award-winning interactive digital legacy: the Foundation Stones Map.

## Scale and Reach

The programme achieved significant scale:

**10,000+**

Foundation Stones painted by members of the public across the UK

**5,000**

young people joined a single live stone-painting workshop on Holocaust Memorial Day 2022 — across 58 schools, 150 classrooms, 31 cities and towns

**86+**

digital workshops delivered, involving over 600 participants and 57 organisations in the first year alone

**65+**

new community groups engaged in one year alone, against a target of 56 — including faith groups, museums, care homes and football clubs

**50+**

schools engaged in a single year (2020–21), with more than 36 taking part in Holocaust Memorial Day activities despite COVID-19 school closures

**10**

new Foundation Stones hubs established across the UK, from Southampton to Glasgow, Jersey to Cornwall

**1.44M**

impressions on a single Holocaust Survivor Day tweet, supported by the Prime Minister, the Chief Rabbi and Cabinet ministers

These figures demonstrate both mass participation and genuine depth of engagement. Each stone represents a personal investment of time and thought with an average of an hour of someone's life dedicated to commemoration.

## Responding to the Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic presented a significant operational challenge: a project designed around community gatherings and physical stone-painting workshops had to pivot entirely to digital delivery. Big Ideas responded quickly and effectively, developing Zoom-based workshops that maintained the intimacy and emotional depth of face-to-face engagement. Far from limiting the programme, this pivot expanded its reach, enabling participation from care homes, schools in Northern Ireland, football academies, faith groups, and government departments who might never have attended an in-person event.

The success of this approach was reflected in consistently high social media engagement rates, averaging 2.28% on UKHMF Twitter against a target of 0.02%, and in qualitative feedback from participants across the country.

## Breadth of engagement

One of the programme's most distinctive achievements is the diversity of communities it has brought into the project. Foundation Stones has been delivered with:



## Schools and Young People

More than 50 schools participated in a single year, from primary schools to sixth forms, in every nation of the UK. The Big Stone Paint live event in January 2022 was hosted by Natasha Kaplinsky and addressed directly by UKHMF Co-Chairs Lord Pickles and Ed Balls. Pupils from Hartlepool, Alderney and Clydebank spoke live to 5,000 peers about what the Memorial means to their communities.

*"Sometimes coming from a town in the North, you can be underrepresented. By painting a stone, I felt like I was part of something special."*

Ellie, English Martyrs Catholic School, Hartlepool



### Premier League Football

Nine Premier League clubs took part, including Arsenal, Brighton, Norwich City, Stoke City, Crystal Palace, Manchester United, Middlesbrough, Wolves and Bournemouth. Workshops centred on the story of Béla Guttmann, the superstar football coach and Holocaust survivor. Arsenal Academy's post about the workshop received 2,800 likes and was retweeted by the main Arsenal account to 17.6 million followers. Middlesbrough FC became a regional hub, with staff personally collecting stones from schools across the North East.

### Underrepresented communities

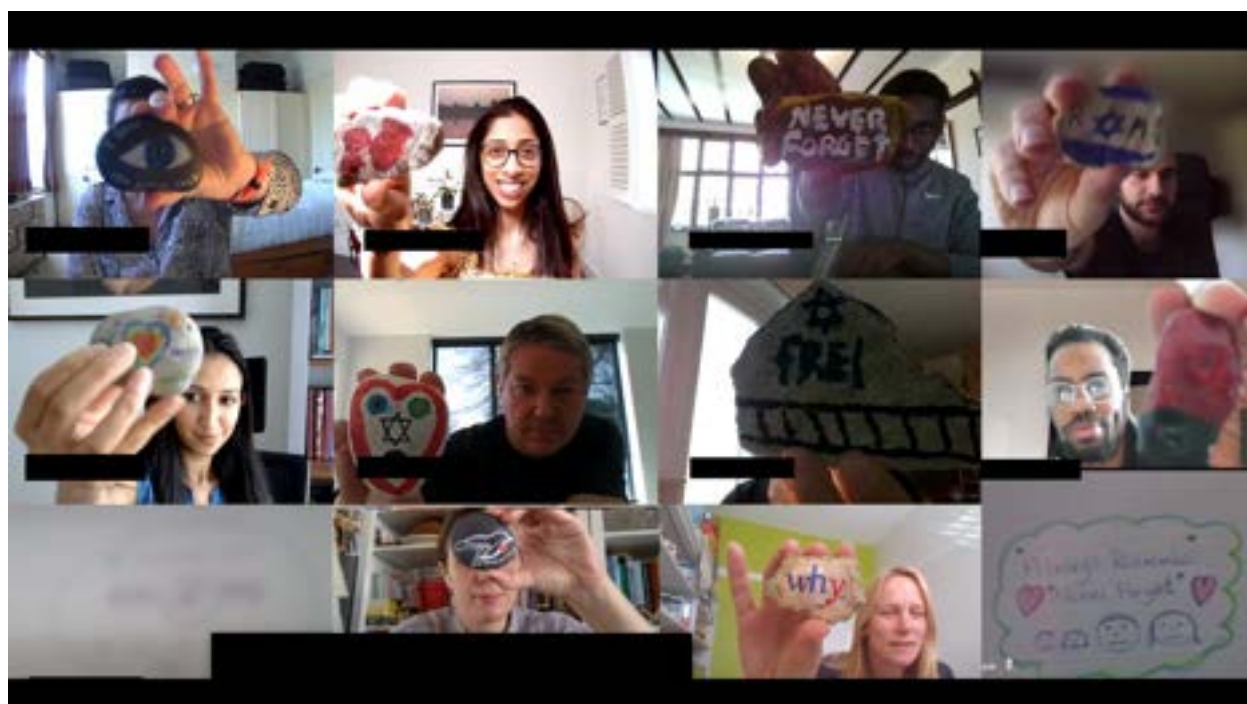


Foundation Stones has been a vehicle for inclusion. Workshops have been held specifically for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities in partnership with Kushti Bok and the Romani Cultural and Arts Company; for LGBT+ groups including Micro Rainbow (supporting LGBT+ asylum seekers), Metro LGBT+, and The Rainbow Project in Northern Ireland; for

residents of care homes, many of whom remembered the Second World War first-hand; and for Deaf Jewish communities, delivered by BSL-qualified facilitators. The programme has also reached deprived coastal communities in Thanet and Hartlepool, and island communities on the Channel Islands, Alderney and Sark.

## Subsequent genocides

In line with UKHMF's educational remit, Foundation Stones has broadened participation to communities with connections to the 1994 Genocide Against the Tutsi in Rwanda, the Genocide at Srebrenica, and the Cambodian Genocide. Survivors spoke at events, and communities heard these testimonies alongside the primary story of the Holocaust.



## Workplaces and institutions

Accenture, AXA XL, Deloitte, Google and Business in the Community all participated, often championed by internal Jewish staff networks. Government departments including the Cabinet Office, the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, the Greater London Authority and Brent Council also took part.

## The Foundation Stones Map

In 2022, with match funding secured from Google.org, Big Ideas launched the Foundation Stones Map – an immersive, interactive digital experience at [foundationstones.uk](http://foundationstones.uk). The map allowed users to explore stones in 3D as if holding them in the palm of their hand,

read the personal stories behind them, and hear them narrated by award-winning actor Juliet Stevenson.



The first trail, 'The British Story', launched on 28 April 2022 and features 28 stones drawn from over 10,000 created for the Memorial. A second trail, 'A Future Free From Hate', launched on Holocaust Memorial Day 2023, supported by The Gerald and Gail Ronson Family Foundation. It features 24 stones winding from County Londonderry to Stamford Bridge in London – the home

of Chelsea Football Club, where Foundation Stones had been integrated into Holocaust commemoration work, and gives voice to connections with subsequent genocides and communities persecuted by the Nazis.

The map is a lasting digital legacy: an archive of public engagement in the Memorial that will outlast any individual workshop or event.

## Commemorating Hidden Stories

A consistent thread through Foundation Stones has been the commitment to surface lesser-known stories of Nazi persecution and subsequent genocides. Big Ideas has been intentional in creating space for communities whose experiences have been historically marginalised:



In February 2022, in partnership with the London Gay Men's Chorus, Big Ideas held a Foundation Stones event to commemorate the 10,000 gay men murdered by the Nazis. Over 100 choir members took part, each given an individual name to commemorate. When research was conducted ahead of the event, only ten names could be found, a stark illustration of why this story remains untold. Choir member Sacha Kester, a Holocaust survivor and the oldest singing member of the chorus, shared his personal testimony.



A workshop for the Bethlem Museum of the Mind drew attention to the Nazi T4 programme's persecution of psychiatric patients, surfacing the stories of three Jewish clinicians forced to flee to Britain.

Workshops with the Jewish Deaf Association, delivered by BSL-qualified facilitators, acknowledged the intersecting identities of Jewish and Deaf participants.

Events marking the Channel Islands occupation connected communities in one of the less widely known chapters of Holocaust history on British soil, with nearly 800 stones painted by Channel Islanders alone.

## Conclusion

Foundation Stones succeeded in doing something genuinely difficult: it made a proposed national memorial feel relevant and personally meaningful to people across the entire United Kingdom. Over the course of the programme, more than 10,000 people chose to give their time, paint a stone and actively mark and commemorate, often for the first time, the Holocaust and subsequent genocides.

The programme consistently exceeded its targets and brought in communities that national projects rarely reach. It leaves behind a substantial body of work: thousands of stones, a digital archive, and a network of communities who engaged seriously and personally with this history.