



## **Background Julie Benson – Founder of The Great Exhibition 2012**

Julie Benson was 11 and living in South Wales when the Queen celebrated her Silver Jubilee in 1977. For the first time, the school community came together from the youngest to the sixth formers in order to create a new flag. At home, the entire neighbourhood united to take part in a giant street party. People went in and out of each other's houses all day and it brought together those who had never met previously, despite sometimes living on the same street for years. There was a sense of common purpose and a reason to unite and celebrate which Julie had never experienced before.

Moving to Hertfordshire was difficult because her new school was stricter, smarter and harder to fit in. Overcoming these obstacles eventually, Julie became involved in debating and theatre, which led to a degree in English and Drama.

Having an entrepreneurial spirit, Julie then set up her own contract publishing company called 'Show Time' and re-invented the way exhibition catalogues were produced. This formula proved to be so successful that the company went on to manage over 70 titles a year with her format for exhibition catalogues becoming the industry standard.

Julie wanted to get involved in the Millennium Dome and its content but this turned to frustration when she was unable to directly influence the Litmus Group behind the project and resulted in her vow to stage an event that is worthy of the British Public.

When it was announced that the Olympic Games was coming to London in 2012, it seemed to be the moment she'd been waiting for, when the very best characteristics of the Jubilee could be recreated, and so the idea of staging The Great Exhibition was born.

As with the original Great Exhibition of 1851, it will celebrate all the very best things about being British. It aims to put Britain back on the map for the British public. As a nation, we have been responsible for some truly amazing achievements and that trend is continuing. Julie's vision is for us to recognise this together and applaud the innovations being created now.

"I want people to come away from the Great Exhibition 2012 feeling inspired and motivated to go out and explore all the possibilities which are offered in Britain today. I

want people to realise they need not be trapped by circumstance and geography. There are endless possibilities in life and we need to be inspired to take advantage of them.”

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