

Memory boxes at Museum of Cardiff – delivering positive social impact.

Organisation: Museum of Cardiff

Name of Project, Exhibition or Campaign: Memory Boxes

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Project Description:

‘Memory Boxes’ shows how small museums can deliver positive social impact by prioritising sustainable cross-sector partnerships.

Our evaluation showed that health and mobility issues often prevent people over 60 from visiting the museum. At the same time our Reminiscence Monthly sessions were oversubscribed. Memory Boxes was created as a direct response, removing barriers by taking the museum out into the community. Four portable Boxes were developed and volunteers trained to facilitate sessions at community venues.

Our Memory Boxes are used by a variety of groups, from volunteer-lead Parkinson’s support groups, to UK-wide mental health charities. We are constantly seeking to develop the programme responding to need, and will be creating new, community specific, Boxes, training volunteers to deliver sessions in community languages.

Most recently, we have expanded Memory Boxes, from dementia friendly focus, to one also combatting isolation and loneliness. Working with Housing Associations and including arts and crafts activity within sessions, these new sessions increased residents’ feelings of wellbeing by 25% (UCL museum wellbeing measures toolkit).

Through working collaboratively we have been able to share resources and knowledge to achieve, sustainable social impact both for the museum and for our participants.

Project Outcomes:

This project has changed us and our participants. Participants’ feelings of happiness have improved by 45% (UCL museum wellbeing measures toolkit). It has enabled us to create a responsive service and has helped us demonstrably deliver against local and national initiatives that campaign for an age- and Dementia-friendly Wales.

We have partnered with 12 different organisations - mental health charities, housing and social care services – all new partners for the museum.

10 volunteers, from the communities in which we run the sessions, give over 150 hours, facilitating sessions reaching 540+ people. The ownership they have over the programme has prompted others to advocate for the museum’s wellbeing work, resulting in Dementia Friend training being compulsory for all staff and volunteers.

The museum now sits on the steering groups for Ageing Well in Wales, (a national programme from the Older People's Commissioner) and Cardiff Council's Dementia-Friendly City. This has enabled us to advocate for the health and wellbeing benefits and social impacts of museums' work to other organisations and services. It has resulted in us training 63 people (from community groups, libraries, community-support teams, housing and age-friendly schemes) to be Dementia Friends, empowering them to establish reminiscence activity within their organisations.

Project Budget:

'Memory Boxes' is an example of a small investment making a huge impact. The project was created using a grant of £2,500 from the Federation of Museums and Art Galleries of Wales. We allocated £700 to source training and support from experts at the Alzheimer's Society. This was key to building confidence among staff and volunteers. The remaining £1,800 was used for Memory Boxes content and marketing materials.

This was not a 'one-off' project; this is an ongoing service which we deliver all year round. Currently, there is no dedicated budget for the programme although the museum pays volunteer expenses using core funds. Interest in the Memory Boxes offer continues to grow and we are currently consulting with new partner organisations to deliver Memory Boxes in a variety of languages and representing the heritage of minority ethnic elders.

Link to Website: <https://cardiffmuseum.com/memory-boxes/>