

Case Study

Leeds Museums and Galleries

Peer Support Cultural Partnership



Age-Friendly

Over the last six years Leeds Museums and Galleries have run two self-contained projects a year for people in the early stages of dementia, each project exploring different themes and covering drama, object handling, reminiscence, visual arts, song-writing, poetry, puppetry and story-telling. Sessions rotate across the three main venues of the West Yorkshire Playhouse, the Discovery Centre and the Central Library so that people feel a sense of familiarity and safety, although we have also had field trips out to other museums and theatres. Each project runs for between eight and ten weeks.

Topics covered have include:

- 'Musical Memories' developed new talents through group song-writing
- 'On Yer Bike' linked to the Tour De France's Grand Depart from Leeds in 2014
- 'Wild Worlds,' explored the tactile natural world linking the Natural Science collection at the Discovery Centre store to West Yorkshire Playhouse's production of 'The Jungle Book' and a pet handling session at the library.

Referrals to the project come through the peer support staff and they remain involved throughout the length of each project. The sessions are open to carers and we have a very intensive person-centred approach, adapting the content of sessions to best support each individual within the group.

Participants are introduced to cultural institutions they may not have visited before or have lost confidence in visiting.

How did it aim to reach or have relevance to older audiences?
What impact did you want it to have on the size or profile of your visitor base?

We wanted to provide small bespoke group activities for people in the early stages of dementia with their carers allowing some couples to spend quality time together enjoying new experiences that didn't revolve round medical and social care appointments. The initial pilot was funded by Adult Social Care and was inspired by the MOMA model but funding is now 'in-kind' support and some budget from Leeds Museum and galleries Arts Council

England funding. The emphasis is very much on new learning and creativity, exploring what people can do rather than what they can no longer achieve.

We wanted our venues to be dementia friendly and for people to feel safe and welcomed.

What tools did you use to measure this impact? What key indicator did you use to measure this impact?

The partnership has lasted six years and we document sessions through feedback, photographs, video clips and informal quotes.

What worked well, what challenges did you face?

The project is very staff intensive and involves high levels of planning, commitment, consistency and constant review and evaluation.



What have been the most important things you have learned?

- Focusing on an 'end' product creates some difficulties; people feel rushed and under pressure and we shouldn't try to do too much over the time period. The process is much more important than the outcome
- We have sessions over 8 to 10 weeks so that people can really develop confidence and familiarity with staff and venues
- Each session is sufficiently self-contained so people can dip in and out of the project according to their health and other commitments but people attending the whole project can see how it all links together

- Environments are also crucial, people needed to feel safe and comfortable and some of the venues have worked better than others and they need to be accessible by public transport as people travel independently wherever possible
- Refreshments are key to the sessions for people to relax and socialise
- Participants need a lot of support, sometimes on an almost 1:1 basis especially if their partners or carers do not attend.
- The pace of the session is also important and the length of time people can focus –1-1.5 hours is enough and afternoons are better
- Activities need to be appropriate and engaging but not too challenging (we have sometimes put on activities that are age inappropriate or had speakers who did not sufficiently adapt to the audience)
- The emphasis should always be on what people can still do or learn not what they can't with a balance of new learning, reminiscence and creative opportunities
- Wherever possible all staff involved at all stages of the project should have done Dementia Friends training and venues should be working to become Dementia Friendly



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