

Project Title: Live Well @ NI War Memorial

Background: The Northern Ireland War Memorial (NIWM) already had an informal learning and outreach programme in place delivered by colleagues Jenny Haslett and Alan Freeburn. Staff have also undertaken NIMC training in delivering reminiscence workshops and dementia awareness training with the Alzheimer's Society.

Aspirations: Having only recently joined the museum sector, the project provided Michael Fryer, NIWM Learning and Outreach Assistant, with an opportunity to take on a significant community engagement project for the first time. Live Well would also give the NIWM as a small museum the chance to expand its current outreach programme and reassess how to use its collection to inspire creativity and engagement in older people.

Project: Live Well is a National Museums NI community engagement project funded by the National Lottery Community Fund and designed to connect disadvantaged older people with museums. In 2018 National Museums decided to partner with six local museums, including the NIWM, in the delivery of the project. Live Well is delivered as a six week programme, with five outreach sessions and a museum visit. The project is designed to use collections and creativity as the basis for active engagement with older audiences.

The project initially involved Michael observing the delivery of a Live Well programme in Highfield Community Centre based on the collection of the Ulster Folk Museum. Live Well was then delivered by Michael on behalf of NIWM across six weekly sessions in the Grove Day Centre on a Wednesday afternoon with a group of 12 older people. Sessions were themed around the Home Front, the Belfast Blitz, the American presence and the experience of evacuees with objects from the NIWM's collection being used to accompany each theme. Creative activities were also developed for the programme including notebook decoupage based on a Luftwaffe map of Belfast; copper work American stars with facilitator Tineke Kroes; and painting papier mache evacuees' suitcases. In the penultimate week the group visited the NIWM for a tour of the museum followed by a wartime sing along event.

Partnerships: Partnership with National Museums NI and the Grove Day Centre. Cathy Hanna from Live Well observed two sessions of the programme and provided practical advice and support during the delivery of the project.

Impacts: As a Lottery funded project, Live Well is based on encouraging the five ways to wellbeing in older museum audiences: keep learning, take notice, connect, be active and give. The project involved evaluation from the project leader based on these five outcomes as well as participant feedback through a questionnaire. The group leader also completed evaluation relating to indicators of social deprivation and equality monitoring.

The group engaged well with each of the sessions and feedback was overwhelmingly positive: comments included “I enjoyed looking back on the war” and “I’m now more confident because of the programme”. A number of the group said they would be keen to be involved in similar projects and, having not been to a museum in the past year, the majority of the participants said they would be open to visiting other museums in the future. The project also allowed Michael to create a bank of resources for doing future outreach work as well as giving him greater confidence in developing creative activities.

Learning Legacy: The project again proved the value of doing reminiscence with older people, with most of the group being of an age to remember the Second World War and therefore connecting well with the different topics each week. They appreciated the opportunity to take part in the creative activities and felt a sense of achievement at the end of each session with what they had made. Michael found the experience of working with Live Well staff invaluable and has already used his involvement in the project as a template for undertaking subsequent community engagement work. The NIWM continues to develop its outreach programmes and has recently created a reminiscence loan box for groups to borrow based on life during the Second World War.

Costs: Budget of £650 covered cost of resources, travel and facilitator. Time commitment to Highfield Community Centre of six weeks between October and November 2018 and six weeks in the Grove Day Centre between January and March 2019.

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