

# Case Study

## Wolverhampton Arts and Heritage ArtsinMind



Age-Friendly

ArtsinMind is a programme of activities for older people and those living with dementia who find it difficult to continue accessing arts due to their age or disability. The project was developed by Wolverhampton Arts and Heritage with support from Creative Health CiC and funded through MLA Renaissance, Transforming Adult Social Care and Arts Council England.

The project promotes the use of arts and heritage activities to improve the quality of life of older people who are living with dementia or cognitive difficulties. The aim is to enhance the mental and emotional wellbeing of older people and to improve their engagement with the arts.

ArtsinMind is part of the Arts and Social Care programme and sits within the Education and Outreach team within Wolverhampton Arts and Heritage Service. The project came into being from the learning of previous pilots across the West Midlands creating regional partnerships. As a service Arts & Heritage is committed to developing its engagement with older people and providing quality experiences.

In 2010, Wolverhampton Arts & Heritage in partnership with praxis, set out to demonstrate how arts and museum services can be commissioned to deliver Health and Wellbeing and related services, particularly with regard to dementia support. As a result the ArtsinMind website was developed, which documents and promote previous work activity and current programmes.

### Meet Me @ WAG

Meet Me @WAG is a 'conversation club' for over 55's based at Wolverhampton Art Gallery. Sessions of between one hour and ninety minutes in length are held where participants discuss a set topic with the aid of objects, photographs and documents either provided by the service or brought in by the participants.



The projected outcome is to generate wellbeing and encourage social interaction. This is particularly effective for those who might otherwise be socially isolated and provides an event to look forward to as well as an opportunity to practise social skills such as turn-taking and active listening. It is hoped that all members of the group, by the end of a session, will have shared memories, stories and reminiscences as well as listened to and enjoyed the reminiscences of others. They leave in good spirits and feeling content, cheerful or even uplifted; one participant at Meet Me @WAG reported that she had felt better for the rest of the day.



This connects to the Arts and Social Care agenda as an example of early intervention; by engaging with people who do not have specific social care needs or diagnoses the service helps to provide a preventative role. If people become ill it is helpful if they are already engaged with the cultural sector and feel 'at home' in the public venues. If they become more vulnerable and/or infirm in later years it is hoped

that they will still feel they are welcome visitors and are part of the Arts & Heritage 'family'.

Some of the sessions have been documented by Stephen King, a photographer commissioned by Wolverhampton Arts & Heritage with support from Creative Health CiC. The groups were photographed and also audio-recorded.



An unexpected bonus gained from Meet Me @WAG is that the staff running the sessions also feel their wellbeing has been enhanced. Representing the service at various events around the region staff have been able to explain the benefits of the sessions with real understanding and enthusiasm.

### **Memories in the Making**

This service is targeted at people who have early onset of dementia or those who would benefit from a more structured, formal way of reminiscing. There are four separate groups: two at Wolverhampton Art Gallery, one at Bilston Craft Gallery and one at Bantock House Museum. Objects are used to stimulate memories and discussions about the past. Later there will be the opportunity for the group to work on a creative response to those memories in the form of a piece of visual art or creative writing, collage, scrapbook, drama or whatever they wish.

The reminiscence sessions follow a format that is based on the Age Exchange Reminiscence Centre training. Memories are being collected and will be used to stimulate a creative response (and possibly a booklet) documenting the project.

These sessions have only been running for about one month and start up issues are still being addressed by staff as well as piloting evaluation tools.

## **Community Exhibition**

This exhibition will celebrate the joy of making. It will bring together handmade objects from the permanent collection alongside contemporary creations incorporating these traditional skills. These handmade objects hold a unique value which can be found in their making; the motivations; time spent creating; experimentation with new skills and materials; a sense of achievement; accomplishment and beauty. This value is represented through the collection including 19th and 20th century needlework samplers, an intriguing array of baskets from all over the world; Polish folk paper cut decorations, handmade decorative cards and toys. It will be a striking and colourful exhibition demonstrating the universal appeal and practice of arts and crafts.

An element of the exhibition draws from the work of the Arts and Social Care programme and builds on the relationship with community and health groups. For this exhibition, the Wolverhampton Arts & Heritage collection provides a basis for a collaborative project with the Older Adult Mental Health Unit at Penn Hospital Art and Woodworking groups in Wolverhampton. This project provides the opportunity for the groups to gain inspiration from the varied collections and apply this to an artistic and creative outcome.

## **Steering Board**

The project has a steering board made up of local representatives; they support initiatives that benefit older people. Board members include; Wolverhampton AGE UK chief executive, New Cross Hospital Arts Coordinator, Voluntary Sector Senior Wellbeing Officer, Asian Elder's Support Worker, Adult Social Care Team, Over 50s forum; from Wolverhampton City Council Head of Outreach and Education (Chair) and Arts and Social Care Coordinator.

The board have met twice since the ArtsinMind programme was formally launched in April. They have been involved in assisting the project coordinator in developing an outcomes framework and evaluation tools to meet the agreed outcomes set out for the ArtsinMind project.

## **Impact of the project on Social Care Dementia outcomes**

The number of people suffering from dementia is expected to rise from 3,000 people currently to 4,315 by 2030 in Wolverhampton. The projections of the number of older people will increase a further 20% in the next 20 years. The Council launched

Wolverhampton's Dementia Strategy and Forward Plan in response to this statistic and the identified need to develop services more suited for dementia care, awareness and early intervention.

The aim of the Arts and Reminiscence programme is to provide an effective series of activities, projects that support the elderly and vulnerable adults and in particular people with dementia and their carers. The activities are aimed at ensuring that elderly and vulnerable adults can begin to make choices on how they spend their leisure time and can continue to engage in cultural and learning activity which is enjoyable and thought provoking, thus building confidence and improving their quality of life preventing social isolation and decline.

ArtsinMind responds to the commissioning outcome of 'Improve community personal care', part of the local Joint Dementia Strategy. This includes improved access to universal services and prevention services.

The evaluation of the aims and objectives of the ArtsinMind project will be aligned both nationally and locally to strategies for the improvement of quality of life for older people and people living with dementia. In turn the data collected and used to evaluate the project and its activities will clearly provide evidence of meeting strategic outcomes.

Agreed Outcomes with Steering Board and Adult Social Care Department:

- Improve the wellbeing and quality of life of older people, carers and those living with dementia.
- People living with dementia perceive galleries and museums as safe spaces where they can enjoy, learn and socialise.
- Agencies supporting people with social care needs have improved awareness of galleries and museums as places where older people living with dementia can learn, enjoy and feel supported to access such services through their care plans.
- Social care commissioners including arts and heritage when planning personal service plan based on universal options.

### **Lessons learnt and current progress**

The project has taken longer to start up than anticipated due to recruitment issues for the City Council and one of the partners. As part of the commission from Social Care Wolverhampton Arts & Heritage were able to employ a delivery assistant to the project who will take responsibility for establishing the Memories groups across the three venues. The process took much longer and therefore the Memories groups have only recently been launched. The issues of drawing in such a targeted audience without much capacity for doing outreach work and projects to establish relationships have proved to be a big challenge. The project assistant has now been

appointed into post meaning that the approach can be reviewed. The aim is to get people aware and interested in these sessions and pilot the evaluation tools.

What is emerging is that such a service will prove to be difficult for the target audience to access due to transport and care issues. They are currently being encouraged to come independently with carers but what is more 'comfortable' for them is to have it arranged via a care agency, care home or resource centre. Perhaps the next approach is to establish the relationships with these organisations.

Another issue is that as a service Arts & Heritage has agreed to host the Alzheimer's Society's dementia cafes. The idea is that they will have a captive audience who come for the specific support and information related to their illness and they will get familiar and comfortable being in the public spaces. Arts & Heritage will then work with the café coordinators to signpost them onto the ArtsinMind programme of activities where appropriate. However, these cafes, which are independent from Arts & Heritage, have been delayed in their set up and have only just launched this month (October). As the cafes are up and running now and with the project assistant in post, the Memories groups will hopefully grow and progress.

The next step for the Meet Me @ WAG 'conversation club' may be to expand the model to outreach sessions at community venues; as the benefits of conversation clubs become apparent we anticipate an increase in demand and, resources notwithstanding, would enjoy the opportunity to extend the service beyond the current once a month session. There has been a high interest in this model and a consistently good turn-out of between 8-10 regular attendees with 3-5 newcomers each month.

The ArtsinMind project and website will continue to be developed. Funding has been sought to enable the outreach strand of the ArtsinMind project for 2012-2013. From consultation and the learning from working on the project there is a high demand and market for making this service a mobile service. Wolverhampton Arts & Heritage looks to build on the work so far and to extend the project beyond the City Council arts venues.

**Author:**  
Thanh Sinden