

A
HANDBOOK
FOR
CULTURAL
ENGAGEMENT
WITH
OLDER MEN

the **Whitworth**



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## FOREWORD

The Baring Foundation for the last five years has focussed its arts programme on work with older people. It is one of the best decisions we have taken. It has given us the privilege of being involved with exciting work, which has changed people's lives and we have seen an accelerating recognition of the importance of this work.

I have learnt two lessons in that time: if everywhere was like Manchester we wouldn't have needed our programme and that everyone (even Manchester!) finds it harder to involve older men in arts activities. So the solution was clear - a guide to involving older men in the arts from Manchester.

Why is involving more men in the arts important? Well, everyone has a right to participate in the arts and we should be trying to remove any barriers, perceived or real, to that participation. Secondly, I vividly remember seeing some documentary footage filmed in the Fifties. In it two groups of five year olds, one of girls and the other of boys, were filmed playing with toys. The girls, barely looking at the toys, immediately asked each others' names and began socialising.

The boys, without really even looking at each other, straight away started constructing rules for a competitive game. Those boys are now in their sixties. Research has recently proved the devastating effects on health and well-being of social isolation and that is worst among older men. The arts have a great ability to tackle loneliness, as well as give meaning and pleasure.

I commend this important guide to you.

**DAVID CUTLER – THE BARING FOUNDATION**

## INTRODUCTION

The presence of older men within activities at the Whitworth, or lack of, has been apparent for some time. Despite being in Manchester, a city known nationally and internationally for its Age Friendly credentials, older men still fall into a minority within such activities at the gallery. Through conversations with fellow programmers from other cultural organisations, big and small, it became clear this was not just a problem in Manchester.

The closure of the Whitworth for a major fifteen million pound redevelopment gave a unique opportunity to explore this in further detail, in anticipation of engaging this audience in all of what the new Whitworth has to offer. I knew that to understand why older men were not getting involved in such activities I had to first understand what made those activities, that did appeal, so successful. I also wanted to ensure that older men's voices were at the heart of this research, speaking with those that participate and those that do not. To get their views on why they get involved and possibly more importantly, why they choose not to.

The findings of this report have all been gathered through conversations, with groups, artists, organisations and most importantly with older men. Whilst the Whitworth has been closed I've taken to the road, travelling the breadth of the United Kingdom from Glasgow to Bethnal Green, from Rhyll to Belfast and meeting some real characters along the way. These conversations have highlighted the diversity of this group that is often too readily described as simply "older men". These groups are made up of men of all shapes and sizes from a variety of cultural and social backgrounds. It's clear that an over fifties group can often work "intergenerationally" without the need to involve any primary school. These discussions opened up an array of wider debates, from funding and the role of the NHS to opening the can of worms that is gender stereotypes. It was these notions of "being a man" that made the diversity of the selected case studies so important.

Alongside these selected case studies and conversations with their groups, poet Tony Curry has been chatting with older men that do not get involved with cultural activities. He's been discussing their views and preconceptions on such institutions and activities and producing a poem that reflects their thoughts on the matter. What better provocation to get us started...

**ED WATTS – ENGAGEMENT MANAGER,  
THE WHITWORTH**

# LIFE, LOVE, DEATH AND ART MACHISMO

TONY CURRY

'I like playing poker, drinking with my mates,  
football and my garden'  
'I like the bookies, sports on TV'  
'I used to like to climb, to hike,  
Marquetry and playing the bagpipes'  
'Don't go in'  
'Never go in'  
'May go in'  
'I have been in'

'Please gents tell me what you think about art?'  
'Art's not my thing'  
'Often look at Art and think a 3 year old could do that'  
'Bit stuffy'  
'Never understood Lowry, never understood the  
fascination, to me he's like a kid who couldn't draw.  
I wouldn't pay 5p for it!'

Don't know what it is about men and art?  
It's like they won't even give it a start  
A go  
I'd like them to get a glow  
For them to know  
Some things that can make you think  
Entice  
Excite  
And just show

Well what do you know?  
It's not all doom and gloom  
We have the chap I talked to  
Who used to go in?  
He talked eloquently about art  
About doing it  
Being it  
Feeling it  
Breathing it  
No he's not gone  
For a while  
But I did believe in his style

## LIFE, LOVE, DEATH, AND ART MACHISMO

Then there was another  
Who embraces all of the anarchic  
spellbinding tendencies within his own life?  
And he can relate to the strife of the artist  
As he seeks to embody  
Employ that  
Sense of disquiet

So it's not all lost  
It's not all in vain  
We can't fall for the line  
That all men are a pain  
A Neanderthal breed  
Who only speak and communicate  
Through one creed  
Boozing  
Boozing  
Boozing

More boozing  
And TV  
And Sports

## LIFE, LOVE, DEATH, AND ART MACHISMO

So what is the deal chaps?  
What puts you of?  
When you can take a butchers at a Van Gogh  
A Rembrandt  
A Picasso  
Something about love  
Something about death  
Something about sadness  
Just something  
Something  
Something  
Something to articulate  
Try to convey  
All the stuff  
That we struggle to say  
But we think it  
Feel it  
Breathe it  
But we think it  
Feel it  
Breathe it  
But we think it  
Feel it breathe it

## LIFE, LOVE, DEATH, AND ART MACHISMO

And it's there within us  
And there not all poncey  
Fly by nights  
This isn't about class  
Our best painters  
And artists  
Are the ones  
That know what struggle is  
Or can convey beauty  
And life  
And surely  
Surely  
Surely  
We must all be interested in that?



## CORPORAL STEDIFORD'S MOBILE PIGEON LOFT

Eric William Ravilious (1942)  
*Pencil, watercolour, pen and ink.*

## LESSONS LEARNT

The methodology and findings of this report have been structured and analysed by researcher, Antonio Benitez. Antonio has spent more time than most thinking about this work. His PHD is on over 75's engagement with cultural organisations and was the research lead for the Age Friendly Museums Network. Antonio collated all the conversations, searching for links and themes to inform this handbook.

Through an initial steering group of academics, cultural programmers and older men, three key themes for the research were highlighted:

- **RECRUITMENT;** focusing on how cultural organisations can successfully remove barriers for engagement and recruit older men to join their programmes.
- **PROGRAMMING AND PARTICIPATION;** investigating what kind of activities and models of participation older men would like cultural organisations to offer.

- **IMPACT;** exploring the motivations and self-reported benefits for older men of engaging in cultural group activities.

Six case studies of best practice of engagement with older men were selected to collect data to inform this report. The selection of the case studies was made considering which cultural organisations are leading the work in the field of working with older men.

After the selection, the six organisations were contacted explaining the aims of the project and inviting them to take part in the research. Then each organisation was visited, delivering focus groups with participants and interviews with the individuals responsible for managing these projects.

A total of 6 project managers and 31 project participants took part in the focus groups and interviews for this research. Participation in this research project was entirely voluntary. Informed consent was obtained from all research participants and focus groups discussions and interviews with project leaders were recorded. The data collected from this research project has been analysed using a thematic analysis approach, reviewing the data and sorting it into categories to identify, analyse and report patterns within the data collected.

# CASE STUDIES



## A MIDNIGHT MODERN CONVERSATION

William Hogarth (1732–1733)

Ink, etching.



## CASE STUDIES

### 1 – BURRELL FOR BLOKES – GLASGOW

A pilot project by the Burrell Collection offering practical art workshops aimed at older men.

*glasgowlife.org.uk/museums/burrell-collection*

Burrell for Blokes and the Craft Collective are projects by the Burrell Collection, which provide practical sessions, aimed at men, based on traditional crafts to learn a new skill each time, build up skills over a prolonged period, and have a larger communal outcome.

The Craft Collective and Burrell for Blokes focus on the large amount of medieval furniture in the Burrell Collection. The group will learn the history of furniture making by examining the design, materials, techniques, and tools used by medieval carpenters. The skills learned will then be applied to cooperatively recreate reproduction wooden furniture decided upon by the group. Items created will then often be used in future educational activities.

## CASE STUDIES

**“I’m giving a helping and guiding hand here but I am also taking part in building the crib. This is a fabulous place; this is the first time I have been in the Burrell Collection. This is a fantastic idea because it allows the public in to do a project within the museum space. I think anyone coming along to this project would get a lot of satisfaction because you are learning a skill but also meeting new people. You’re building up a network of friends.”**

– Participant, Glasgow

## CASE STUDIES

### 2 – MEN'S SHED – RHYL

A club where men get together, meet new people to enjoy individual, group and community projects.

*www.rhylmensshed.co.uk*

The Rhyl Men's Shed project was established by Supporting People Denbighshire and Older People's Strategy, part of the Denbighshire County Council. It is a club where men come together to take part in individual, group, and community projects and develop social networks. Men's Shed is multi-generational, open to all adults regardless of background or ability. Members are invited to share or learn skills and knowledge, and to contribute to the mutually agreed upon group projects. The atmosphere is welcoming and relaxed, encouraging conversation and sharing of life experiences. The idea of the Men's Shed has been becoming more popular across Ireland and southern parts of the UK, however the Rhyl Men's Shed is the first in the North of Wales, and has received great feedback from the community and the press.

## CASE STUDIES

### 3 – GREEN CANDLE DANCE COMPANY – LONDON

A community and education company providing dance experience to those with least access to it.

*greencandle.com*

Green Candle Dance Company delivers dance and movement workshops that are accessible to all levels of experience and physical ability. They are focused on improving the health and well being of older community members, and have worked with care homes, rehabilitation centres, and hospitals to promote active aging. Green Candle seeks to improve the general quality of life for its participants, and focuses especially on the boroughs of London where residents may be suffering health issues due to economic hardship. There are a wide range of classes offered, many that are tailored to address traditional limitations that older men may face when joining in on cultural events. For example, there are male-only sessions for participants in which gender mixing may be prohibitive for religious reasons. Green Candle has also partnered with East London NHS Foundation Trust, Alzheimer's Society and Sidney De Haan Research Centre for Arts and Health to conduct research on the benefits of dance and movement for patients with the early stages of dementia and their carers. For this case study we met with a Bengali dance group from Bethnal Green.

## CASE STUDIES

### 4 – OUT IN THE CITY – MANCHESTER

A social initiative for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people over 50.

[ageuk.org.uk/manchester/our-services/ageing-well/out-in-the-city](http://ageuk.org.uk/manchester/our-services/ageing-well/out-in-the-city)

Out in the City is a welcoming lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender group for people over 50 who meet twice a week for a range of day trips and local activities, from pub trips to art gallery visits. Designed to support members of the LGBT community by building an enjoyable, gratifying social network. The group is diverse and interesting, coming from a variety of backgrounds which means that their meet ups are always lively. Some members say that the group has been a lifesaver as it has given them an opportunity to meet new people and share their stories in a safe and relaxing space. The group has also been involved in many projects with creative venues such as Manchester Art Gallery, the Whitworth and Start Manchester as well as taking part in the PRIDE parade for the last ten years.

## CASE STUDIES

**“I know of one person who believes that being a member of Out in the City saved his life after the break up of his marriage. It helped him to cope knowing that there were people there who would listen and understand. It’s a safe non-judgmental space where people can share their experiences”**

– Project leader

## CASE STUDIES

### 5 – EQUAL ARTS, GRAND GESTURES – GATESHEAD

A company of mature dance artists.  
[equalarts.org.uk/projects/grand-gestures](http://equalarts.org.uk/projects/grand-gestures)

Grand Gestures is a dance troupe comprised of mature dance artists, and is part of a larger organisation Equal Arts, which promotes health, wellbeing and inclusion of older community members. Grand Gestures works with dancer Paula Turner and musician Meg Middleton to bring movement programmes to care homes in Gateshead and S. Tyneside, and work with care staff and residents. Paula Turner has done research in New York City, Washington, DC, and Queensland, Australia, supported by the Churchill Memorial Trust, that centres on movement and improvisation programmes to promote social inclusion.

## CASE STUDIES

### 6 – LIVE AND LEARN PROJECT – BELFAST

A museum based project to increase learning opportunities and enhance well-being for older people.  
[www.nmni.com/um/Learning/Live-and-Learn](http://www.nmni.com/um/Learning/Live-and-Learn)

Live and Learn is a project through the National Museums Northern Ireland, which aims to develop and deliver programmes to engage older community members in cultural activities; especially those who would not normally be able to access museums and galleries. Their focus is on residents of communities that may be isolated or divested, or that simply don't have opportunities for cultural engagement for men and women over 50. In collaboration with Age NI, an organisation devoted to the health and wellbeing of old residents in Northern Ireland, Live and Learn uses the Museums' collection to create cultural activities across Northern Ireland, particularly appealing to older citizens. The programmes are diverse in the way they use different parts of the collections. Every Picture Tells a Story uses the galleries photography collections to encourage participants to tell the stories behind the images using drama and creative writing, while Museum Uncovered allows for hands-on exploration of the Natural History collections, to learn about everything from ancient Egypt to Victorian-era Belfast.

## RECRUITMENT

**“If you’re not interested in art, then what on earth are you doing at a gallery? But if there’s someone there to explain it to you... I mean, I wouldn’t sit and watch a football match without a commentator. I wouldn’t have a clue what was going on. Offside rule? No idea!”**

– Participant, Glasgow

Participants acknowledged that not many men engage with cultural activities at later age. Social isolation and lack of self-esteem and confidence were considered to be the main barriers preventing men from engaging in cultural activities.

Some of the participants referred to older men as a neglected group in society and found this neglect by other members of society to be the main cause of social isolation in later age. They identified some important intellectual barriers stopping older men getting involved in cultural activities.

## EDUCATION

These barriers included the perceived need for education to enjoy cultural activities and some gender stereotypes which participants felt were traditionally associated with more creative cultural activities.

In terms of education, having formal qualifications is considered by some older men as a requirement to enjoy cultural activities, especially the ability to understand and produce art, which many see as an activity for middle and upper classes.

Many of the participants shared the view that school had been the only time in their lives when they were allowed and encouraged to develop their creative skills. Older men feel that traditionally men have been expected to be more focused on their career development, having less time and opportunities to develop their creative skills after leaving school.

## RECRUITMENT

### BRANDING

Another important barrier for engagement in cultural activities by older men is how these activities are branded and presented. Some older men still hold very traditional and separated roles, which includes hobbies and the leisure activities normally associated with members of each gender.

Some gender stereotypes associated with more creative activities still persist. An important number of participants raised their concerns about these activities being seen as "not blokey enough". Some activities, especially art and creative activities are socially "gender-casted", associating specific activities with certain male and female roles.

Some older men additionally explained that they generally associated group activities with activities for women. Older men felt that men have traditionally been considered solitary creatures, with not as many social interaction-needs as women. Some older men do not want to be seen as having the need to take part in creative group activities because they are worried to be seen as "needy" which they don't associate with masculinity.

## RECRUITMENT

**"When you've worked all your life, and you've worked hard, long hours, then all of a sudden there's nothing, it leads to a blank mind and you've got to find something to do otherwise you'll go stir-crazy. You can't get up in the morning, watch television, then go to bed at night - that's more or less waiting for god isn't it? So you've got to start looking at projects."**

— Participant, Gateshead

**"I think there's something quite good about a group of men getting together; because we're more solitary creatures, and as you get older I think you become even more solitary! It's really weird, but it does happen and you start operating in your own wee world at a different level. I think people older than us, I see it in my father-in-law - it's his wife keeps him going to things, because he would withdraw into a shed. He's got a greenhouse, so he'd be up there 24/7 pottering about with things. I think they like that cut-off time. To be with other blokes, there aren't that many opportunities actually. Unless you've known people from school or something like that, or worked with. Or the pub. That's why they're not in the museum. Free beer!"**

— Participant, Glasgow

## RECRUITMENT

### COMMUNICATIONS

When asked about the best way for cultural organisations to reach older men, the majority of participants agreed on word of mouth being the most effective way to recruit new participants for these activities. According to participants, recommendations from peers, existing project participants and family members, especially through female relatives, have traditionally been a very successful method to recruit. Referrals or recommendations from community based organisations working with older people are also successful channels to recruit participants for these groups. These trusted organisations include day centres, lunch clubs, libraries, faith centres, pubs, shops and housing providers. The value of word of mouth from people you trust was something that was unanimous across all groups visited.

## RECRUITMENT

Participants highlighted the importance of cultural organisations being more involved in community based activities and investing time and resources in developing strong community networks for the successful development and advocacy of these activities.

Community leaders, especially those working with people in their own communities, who are already known and trusted by older people, are ideally placed to establish the first contact to recruit older men for group activities. It was felt that as long as the community gatekeeper thought it was a good opportunity to take part, the rest of the community would be at least willing to consider it. Another useful approach to recruit older men is through already established networks, especially through ethnicity groups.

## RECRUITMENT

### ISOLATED OLDER MEN

One of the main challenges, and something unavoidable during all group discussions was, how to reach isolated older men who are not already part of any existing networks or community groups. This is something that definitely threw up more questions than answers during this project, suggesting that this needs much deeper thought than can be covered here. Though we have some interesting findings gleaned from these conversations to consider. Many participants felt the most effective way to reach isolated older men is to work in partnership with social services from local authorities, housing providers and other organisations providing services for older people. Noting that traditional ways of advertising used by these organisations tend not to be particularly effective, especially when trying to reach these more isolated older audiences. Although the levels of digital engagement amongst older audiences is growing, internet based recruitment was not considered to be the best option for older men as most participants considered it lacked the personal touch.

## **PROGRAMMING AND PARTICIPATION**

**"I can hardly draw a breath,  
never mind put pen to paper!"**

— Participant, Belfast

### **SKILLS**

Is it what we're offering as cultural organisations that isn't exciting older men enough to get involved, or simply the way we speak about what we do? The type of language used and how it's shared can make or break the popularity of a project.

Participants recommended giving special attention to the promotion of social interaction when developing cultural activities. The main priorities for programming suggested by group participants included having the opportunity to spend time with other like-minded men, sharing stories and experiences and sharing a feeling of "camaraderie" amongst the participants in the group with other like-minded people.

**"Well if you don't try you never find out these things! And it's very good as it gets me out of the house, cause you don't wanna get up in the morning so it gets you out, keeps you active as the age goes on you have to keep moving about. And I'm meeting people and they're all really friendly and it's very nice, it's great to get out I think."**

— Participant, Belfast

## PROGRAMMING AND PARTICIPATION

In terms of the content of the activities, some of the groups recommended focusing on the functionality and practical aspects of the activity more than aesthetic elements. On one hand, many participants recommended topics such as stone and wood carving, electrics, football, fishing and other traditionally male orientated skills that are not being used anymore, which replicate the work ethos from their lives before retirement. On the other hand, a vocal minority encouraged group organisers to develop more art related activities such as drama, dance and music, which promote creativity. Independently of the content of the activity, it was agreed that in order for the programme to be a success, the activity needed to have a clear goal, to provide a sense of purpose and achievement at the end of the session. The participants were not keen on an overly formal structure, however.

In terms of the content, participants also recommended the need for these activities to be familiar in order to increase the number of people joining without feeling they would not be able to perform certain activities. Once the group has started and the dynamics of the group have been established, there is always an opportunity to push the boundaries and to encourage participants to do something new or more creative.

## PROGRAMMING AND PARTICIPATION

**If somebody told me 18 months ago I'd be talking about dancing and improvised dance, and I'd be part of it, I'd say, "Don't be stupid. There's no way I'd do that."**

— Participant, Gateshead

## GROUP DYNAMICS

The membership of the group was also discussed, the two main options explored were the participation of women in mixed groups and multigenerational all men groups. In principle, none of the groups were opposed to the idea of women joining the group; however some of the participants from more practical based activities raised their concerns about the impact this would have on the dynamics of the group. These participants made clear they did not want to exclude women from taking part but they felt the behaviour of the participants in the group would need to change if women were included.

## PROGRAMMING AND PARTICIPATION

**"Women try to join us for this sort of thing but they cannot because they are not allowed for our culture"**

— Participant, Bethnal Green

Some participants also considered that in mixed groups, there are expectations for men to lead the activity and deliver very high quality outcomes. Most of the group leaders and participants favoured activities which were more appealing to men, but without excluding women from taking part. In the case of some faith groups, mixing participants from different genders can be prohibited by religious beliefs. On the other hand, some participants from craft or making groups, raised the importance of women taking part on their activities, encouraging their involvement and stating that the group would not work out without their participation.

## PROGRAMMING AND PARTICIPATION

In terms of mixed ages within an all male group, the discussions suggested most participants would welcome members from younger ages, as they felt they could share life experiences with participants from other ages. Participants felt the subject and the content of the activity was more relevant than the age of the participants. Sharing a similar social background was considered more important than age in terms of membership of the group. Participants indicated they would feel more comfortable with other participants with similar interests and life experiences, so they could relate to each other.

### REGULARITY

The ideal frequency of activities was also discussed during the conversations with groups of older men, with most of them indicating their preference for one weekly half day activity. Participants also highlighted the importance of thinking about the sustainability of the activity from the early stages in the project and the need for organisations to consider the impact that cancellation of these activities could have on the participant's wellbeing. In order to avoid this situation, participants suggested the need to have a robust funding plan to guarantee the sustainability and resilience of the project. For older people these projects are extremely important and need to provide follow up opportunities for engagement and signposting of other activities happening locally.

## PROGRAMMING AND PARTICIPATION

### GETTING THE BASICS RIGHT

The provision of transport and refreshments during the activities were also important for participants. Creating the right atmosphere for the activity is one of the key roles for the group facilitator. Participants value a relaxed, casual, friendly and non-competitive environment. They feel the need to develop trust with the project leader and other participants in order to fully integrate in the dynamics of the group.

These group activities are a very good opportunity for venues, especially museums and galleries, to work with under-represented audiences who may not feel comfortable visiting these organisations on their own.

## PROGRAMMING AND PARTICIPATION

Museum staff delivering these group activities for older men recommended working on three particular areas:

- Using the group activity to promote creativity
- Developing technical skills
- Using the gallery as the inspiration or starting point for the group activity highlighting the link between the collections and the public.

The role and personality of the group facilitator is one of the main elements that impacts on the dynamics of the group. The gender of the facilitator did not seem to be important for participants, as long as they felt the facilitator had the skills and personality required to lead the group. These included being knowledgeable, not being too perfectionist, having a relaxed and calm attitude, being able to keep the group under control. Developing a long term relationship with the facilitator, based on trust and respect was also very important for group participants.

## IMPACT

**“What’s kept me alive up until this time, it’s not imagination or anything- it’s joining these groups”**

– Participant, Gateshead

At times these conversations have been side splittingly funny and spine tinglingly emotional in equal measure. It was moving to hear these men talk passionately about the impact these activities have had on the quality of their lives. Whether through improved health and wellbeing or simply making friends and developing new social networks, each story emphasised the importance of this work and the need to spread the word to the more isolated older men within our communities.

**“I couldn’t have hoped to have met better people in the group. I just enjoy it.”**

– Participant, Gateshead

The main motivation for participants to take part in these group activities was to improve their health and well-being. This improvement was self-reported and it was linked to the opportunities for socialisation. These group activities gave participants the opportunity to meet people, spend time with them and do things together. Socialising with peers who they share experiences with and can relate to was extremely important for all participants. They recognised the importance of these activities to help them keep an active social life and not feel lonely or isolated.

## IMPACT

**"That's the one thing that's kept me alive. I would not be here today. I've discovered all sorts of things. I mean my main objective is meeting people, that's what it's involved. I love all the groups- I'm part of it"**

— Participant, Gateshead

These activities provide an important opportunity for older men to meet people and develop friendships which are considered by participants to be vital for their sense of well-being and happiness. Participants acknowledged that these group activities have helped them in fighting depression and reducing their feeling of loneliness.

Participants also expressed the opinion that women normally have better capacity to develop and sustain social networks throughout their lives, conserving more of these important social acquaintances during later life.

## IMPACT

**"It's a lot harder to get through to men. I think men in general are hesitant about joining anything, and I think word of mouth is better from a member than someone who's running it."**

— Participant, Belfast

These group activities were also recognised as beneficial for keeping older men active, breaking down the routine that some find in older age and promoting a more enjoyable lifestyle. This is especially important after retirement, when they felt it was important to look for activities that fill the gap that work used to occupy. Some older men, who used to work with manual skills, now use these skills during the group activities for their own enjoyment.

## IMPACT

Apart from having the opportunity to use skills from the past, most older men also valued these activities as lifelong learning opportunities, raising the importance of keeping their brains working. Learning new things and developing new skills at later age was important for self esteem.

## MEASURE WHAT MATTERS

A more informal approach to evaluation was also favoured with several participants, recommending allocating time to sit down and obtain verbal feedback instead of filling out numerous forms. It was recommended that this feedback only needed to cover priority areas such as learning, enjoyment and other key issues from the activity and recommendations from the future.

Developing strong advocacy for these activities amongst policy and decision makers was highlighted as one of the priorities for group organisers. Buy-in and a better understanding about the functioning and impact of these activities by senior managers was considered key for the successful future development of these cultural programmes for older men. The power of personal testimony and stories are invaluable for such advocacy.

## IMPACT

Project organisers also highlighted the importance of developing new collaborative partnerships with other sectors, especially health and social care services, such as the NHS and local authorities. The development of a more holistic approach to funding by the health and social care sectors was acknowledged and welcomed. A challenge identified by project leaders was how to use a robust methodology to demonstrate the impact of these group activities and to advocate the importance of these activities, especially for smaller projects with limited resources.

These case study conversations showcase the quality of existing work across the UK. Highlighting the wealth of knowledge, creativity and ingenuity to be utilised, both within cultural organisations and most of all from older men themselves.



# TOP TIPS

**A GUIDE TO ENGAGING OLDER MEN  
IN CULTURAL ACTIVITIES AT A GLANCE.**

**MAX AS GODOT'S VLADIMIR**

Maggi Hambling (1981)  
*Oil paint*

## GIVE IT PURPOSE

Most older men prefer project based practical tasks with clear outputs rather than drop in activities. Investing time in getting to know the diverse needs and motivations of older men without making assumptions is key.

Project based tasks also allow participants to find a suitable role within the group. For example, if they're not interested in the practical task itself they can be project managers, photographers, researchers etc.

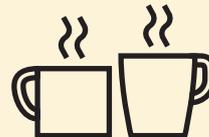


## HAVE A LAUGH!

Put socialisation at the heart of the activity when planning your programme.

Creating a safe and welcoming environment, where people feel comfortable to share experiences.

Think carefully about the physical and intellectual accessibility for your events.



TOP TIPS

## SPREAD THE WORD

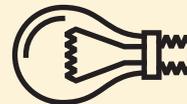
Work with community ambassadors to raise awareness of opportunities to engage in cultural activities and to recruit more isolated participants through word of mouth.



TOP TIPS

## THEY'RE FULL OF IDEAS

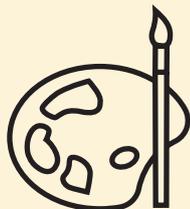
Use them! Sharing the ownership of the project with participants; empowering and encouraging them to make decisions about the development of the group.



## TOP TIPS

# MIX IT UP

Be flexible, adapting your programme to the needs, motivations and dynamics for each individual group.



## TOP TIPS

# GIVE IT A GO

Supporting the group to increase the confidence of participants to learn new things, improving their self-esteem and sense of achievement.



TOP TIPS

## BRANDING FOR BLOKES

Focusing the branding and marketing for more aesthetic activities on the impact and benefits instead of the content, to avoid any barriers in recruitment due to gender stereotypes.



TOP TIPS

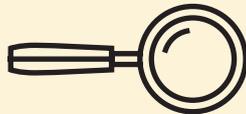
## KEEP IT REGULAR

Groups prefer weekly sessions to one off, short projects. Think carefully about the sustainability of these projects and consider a long term funding plan for these activities. Try to develop collaborative partnerships with key stakeholders to strengthen your project.



## PROVE IT!

Develop a creative but robust methodology to demonstrate the impact and increase advocacy for your project.



## WHAT'S NEXT?

Support participants to access other opportunities. Whether that's exhibitions, performances and events or volunteering and coproduction experiences. Make them feel welcome in everything you offer, beyond simply the group, project or workshop they joined.



## AFTERWORD

### THE BIGGER PICTURE: AGE FRIENDLY CULTURE IN THE AGE FRIENDLY CITY

The founding vision for the Whitworth, to act for the 'perpetual gratification of the people of Manchester' seems as relevant today as when it first opened its doors (to "people of all social classes") as the gallery in the park that counteracted the malaises of inner city life in 1889.

In 2009, Manchester became the UK's first Age Friendly city. The Age-friendly city approach (led by the World Health Organisation) is an internationally recognised concept that enables and facilitates good quality of life for all older people. The aspiration in Manchester is, put simply, to become one of the greatest places in the world to grow older. This presents a real challenge in a city where the profile of disadvantage includes significant BME populations, disproportionately high levels of pensioner poverty, ill-health and disability and perhaps most relevant to this guide, Manchester has the second lowest male life expectancy in England.

There are two key characteristics which shape our age friendly city. First, the role of older people in shaping and developing this work. Over the last decade, Manchester has developed a citizen-based approach to ageing. It has shifted the focus away from traditional medical and care models around provision to developing programmes that are led by older people as active citizens. One of the flagship Age Friendly programmes for the city is *Culture Champions*, a large-scale volunteer ambassador scheme for older people within Manchester's communities. Over 120 Culture Champions advocate, lead and programme cultural participation and activities for their peers and communities. The ethos is to work "with and for, not to" the people of Manchester. As one of the Champions so neatly summarized, *Yes, I've heard all about what Manchester's cultural offer can do for me. I'm just wondering when you're going to ask what I can do for it!*

Secondly, the city has adopted a strategic and collaborative approach, which sees key partners, organisations and services working together in their collective aim to improve the ageing experience. This includes strategic and operational groups, which bring together housing, transport, public health, social care, research and culture as well as older people, as an integral part of the process. In addition to this, cultural organisations across the city, including museums, orchestras, theatres and participatory arts organisations, come together to develop

## AFTERWORD

the age friendly cultural offer and explore new cross-sector partnerships, funding and ways of working, particularly how to reach vulnerable older people and those who participate least in cultural activity (including older men).

To rewrite the story of old age (from a narrative of loss or deficit to one of aspiration and growth) is a bold aspiration but Manchester is, and always has been a progressive and ambitious city. By bringing together thinking, programmes and partnerships, organisations like the Whitworth are contributing to a city-wide story where culture can and does make a difference.

**ESME WARD – HEAD OF LEARNING AND ENGAGEMENT, THE WHITWORTH**



**THE VIRGIN & CHILD WITH CAT  
AND JOSEPH AT THE WINDOW**

Rembrandt, Harmensz van Rijn (1654)  
*Etching.*

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