

Case studies: How can the arts and creativity support people who are shielding or vulnerable during Covid-19?

Project: Portals to the World

Organisation: University of Cambridge Museums

Region: East of England

Introduction

Portals to the World is a museum programme designed for people to learn, share and create together. It emphasises ability over disability and provides opportunities for people to enjoy 'respite together'; to be seen by ourselves and others anew. The session ingredients have a regular structure with the aim of supporting familiarity, confidence and trust in the Museums as welcome and enjoyable places. Each session comprises of a talk, gallery exploration and a creative or object handling activity. The programme is embedded with regular training and session facilitation being undertaken by conservators, curators, designers, front of house as well as the learning team.

With the Museums closed these ingredients and this practice has moved on-line using zoom video conferencing, the post and recorded pieces. 65% of the programme cohort have chosen



to participate in this. Dementia Compass facilitate preparation sessions to help people become confident with technology. Speakers create session handouts that are sent to people by post, beforehand. Dementia Compass also work closely with the speakers to plan for how best to prepare and share content virtually. To foster connectively, the sessions artwork activity (during this remote period) is the making and exchanging of art on postcards.

Image credit: A view of the ox eye daisy meadow at the Magog Downs. Portals to the World May 2020, Inspired by Gary Wragg

Funders

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Who is it for?

People with a cognitive impairment (including dementia) and the care giver –many of whom live with complex health conditions and disabilities.

What outcomes were/are you aiming for?

Foster connectivity, relationships and belonging, combatting loneliness and isolation.
Inspire curiosity, engagement and creativity, combatting diminishing sense of identity
Help build resilience and agency, combatting loss of societal, familial / environmental disablement.

Where is it happening?

Cambridgeshire

Are you working in partnership?

Yes – with Dementia Compass, small local charity that focuses on supporting people with dementia and their care partners at home.

How many people took/are taking part?

28 people have participated in the sessions as participants
8 people are attending as volunteers

For how long has it been happening?

The ‘live’ version of the programme – Portals to the World, began in in 2010 and consists of a monthly events programme and thematic courses at different museums.

The remote monthly events programme began in May 2020 and will take place monthly until we are able to return you the Museums.

Currently we are planning a remote thematic course for the autumn of 2020 and spring of 2021.

What were/are the main outputs?

Monthly workshops: 1.5 hours, attended by 20+ participants. Content, live talk from a subject specialist, Q&A and discussion. Follow on art activity, materials send by post, guidance created and available via video.

Autumn 2020: x6 week course from the Zoology Museum – tbc live and live streamed or video conference delivery and film (as with the monthly sessions described above)

Spring 2021: x8 week course from the Fitzwilliam Museum – as above.

Blog posts: to capture the programme story and share with peers

Blog post: to celebrate participants artworks and create a gallery for wider sharing and celebration

Evaluation:

At this very early stage we are collecting feedback rather than evaluation, to help shape the programme delivery.

What have been the challenges and successes for you?

Challenges

- Familiarity and confidence with technology
- Creating a sense of community online.
- Remote engagement for people with cognitive impairment

- Connecting virtually with collections
- Technical capacity for speakers and facilitators

Success

- Speakers introducing subjects from informal places and spaces, in doing so often being able to find the universal aspects and broader relevance more easily e.g. the Zoology Museum team live in a house share and gave their presentation using their garden as part of the session reference.
- Using a more informal, interview structure for speaker presentations (to break up concentration time) has supported with engagement and screen use.
- Preparation sessions for participants and speakers with Dementia Compass has helped in alleviating technology related anxiety.
- Art activity, postcard creation, has created an additional route to share, connect and exchange – this was not a part of the ‘live’ sessions.

Further information

The University of Cambridge Museums is a consortium of the eight University Museums and the Botanic Garden. The Fitzwilliam Museum is the lead partner in the consortium.

Our collections span four and a half billion years of natural objects, artefacts and art. They are centres of discovery for everyone, and essential research collections for students and academics.

We activate the power of the University through our collections, sharing with our communities and networks to deepen understanding of our world, inspire new thinking, and address local and global challenges.