Third Age Learning

An introductory guide for museums working with older people drawn from the experience of four pilot projects in Cumbria

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Contents

Participants in the four Cumbria Pilot projects came from Whitehaven, Ambleside and Keswick.

Background

This guide has developed from the experience and evaluation of the "Third Age Learning Initiative", a pilot project involving four museums in Cumbria. It offers an introduction for museums who are interested in developing their work with older people.

Changing demographics

The pilot projects in Cumbria were launched by MLA North West as part of the Third Age Learning Initiative, as it was felt that older people were a significant and growing audience for museums.

A significant proportion of the population nationally is made up of older people, and this proportion is set to rise.

In Cumbria this means over one third of the population, an enormously varied group in terms of interests, abilities and lifestyles, are over fifty years old.

In Cumbria:

- 20% of Cumbrian residents are over state retirement age
- 10% are over 70 years old
- 40% of visitors to Cumbria are over 50 years old

The structure of our society is also changing, and the role of older people in our social networks is changing within this. Many communities are fractured, and many older people increasingly rely on outside agencies for support and friendship that previously came from their families and communities.

For the purposes of this guide, we have defined older people as anyone over the age of fifty.

Museums and Older People

What do museums offer older people?

Inspiring collections

Museum collections are a valuable resource for older people. Museum collections give older people an opportunity to re-experience things which they may have owned, used or had contact with in their past. These may be things that they easily identify with and relate to.

Events and exhibitions to celebrate

In organising appropriate events and exhibitions, museums can be places which represent older people's views and celebrate their contribution to society.

In capturing the reminiscences of older people, museums may help them to feel valued, giving a sense of identity and worth.

A place to be

Museums can be a place where older people can meet new people, socialise, and share experiences and ideas with family and friends.

A place to enjoy

Museums can provide inspiration for older people and encourage creativity. They can offer an alternative and stimulating environment.

Opportunity to gain new skills

Museums provide the opportunity to gain new skills, or revitalise and relearn old skills.

Outreach

Some museums do not have facilities to work with groups of older people on site. Providing outreach work is an ideal way of overcoming accommodation problems, and also enables museums to reach isolated or potentially excluded groups, particularly in rural areas.

A training session in reminiscence recording for a youth group at The Beacon Museum, Whitehaven.

What do older people have to offer museums?

Keepers of local history

Older people hold a wealth of information and knowledge about the past and the present.

Museums can preserve individual histories of the older people and the histories of their communities for other generations.

Life experience and perspective

Older people can contribute a wealth of life experience and perspective to help museums develop the services they offer.

Volunteers and staff

Many older people work as staff and volunteers bringing in a range of skills and experiences to museums.

Third Age Learning Initiative celebration event at The Beacon Museum, Whitehaven.
Photo © Cumbrian Newspapers 2004.

Cumbria Third Age Learning Initiative Projects

This guide is the result of four pilot projects which were part of the "The Third Age Learning Initiative" supported by MLA North West and the Northern Rock Foundation. The project started in October 2002 and completed in February 2004.

The initiative aimed to improve services for older people in Cumbria's museums. In order to achieve this the pilot projects explored ways of working in collaboration with older people's groups, and their representatives.

Four Cumbrian museums were involved in the Third Age Learning Initiative project, working with two freelance consultants. Three Age Concern day care centres provided venues for work with their members. The projects involved reminiscence work, and the sessions were taped for use by the museums. The Third Age Learning Initiative projects have resulted in the production of exhibitions, CD ROMs and portfolios which celebrated the contribution the older people made to the project.

The museums involved in the pilots improved their understanding of the needs of older people and enhanced their collections through oral history.

Name of Cumbria Pilot:

KESWICK- Cumbria Museums' Third Age Learning Initiative 2002 - 2003

Main partners:

Keswick Museum and Art Gallery

Age Concern North Lakeland

Number of individuals or groups:

Seven main sessions with group numbers varying between 8 and 16 members

Five sessions with individual members of group

Activities:

*   Group reminiscence sessions
*   One to one reminiscence to create biography album
*   Celebration event and exhibition

Duration of project:

Dec 2002 - Sept 2003

What happened:

Keswick Museum is a fine example of a Victorian Museum, but it has an acute lack of modern facilities for elderly visitors and is currently under major redevelopment. Due to the physical restrictions of the building it was decided to base the project at a nearby Age Concern Day Care Centre.

The project participants were aged from 70 to 90 years old and included some people with severe disabilities.

A programme of activities was run by an independent consultant with close involvement from the museum curator. The reminiscence sessions focussed on the theme of 'Work and Play', using a range of objects. A sound archive and transcript of the sessions were produced incorporating a large amount of information about the local area.

The sessions helped raise the self-esteem of the participants. Besides developing interest in the museum, the sessions helped the participants and others around them to see older people as extraordinary and valuable people.

At the close of the project an album of photos and the biographies were donated to the Day Care Centre to act as a record of the project. An exhibition on the project was also produced and a celebration event held.

Name of Cumbria Pilot:

AMBLESIDE - Older Learners' Project

Main Partners:

Armitt Trust (Armitt Museum and Library)

Age Concern South Lakeland

Social Services South Lakeland

Morecambe Bay Health Trust

Number of individuals or groups:

9 sessions with group numbers varying between 9 and 12 members

Activities:

- Reminiscence sessions with whole group
- One to one reminiscence to create biography album
- Exhibition and celebration event
- Commemorative quilt

Duration of project:

Jan 2003 to Sept 2003

What happened:

A series of reminiscence sessions were held in a local Day Care Centre around the theme of 'Work and Family'. The theme was chosen as it was felt that it would offer an interesting and relevant discussion topic for the older people, and at the same time enhance the museum's archive which already contains some oral history recordings on local crafts and skills.

Constraints of the present layout and the restricted space within the small museum meant that outreach work was essential.

Meetings were held in Age Concern Centres with different groups of varying sizes on different days of the week in order to reach as many participants as possible.

Reminiscence sessions were held with a range of groups using museum objects and other items as a focus for discussion around the theme of work and play. The activities helped older members who were not from the local area learn about the area, as well as more about the other participants in their group.

The museum curator met with the Age Concern carers group to run a reminiscence session in order to share ideas and encourage them to carry out similar activities.

An exhibition on the project has been developed. The project was also recorded in words and images, with biographies and portraits bound into an album that was donated to the Day Care Centre for the older people's groups to use.

The project was extended through a grant of £2000 from the 2003 North West Diversity Festival to make a quilt commemorating the project.

Name of Cumbria Pilot:

WHITEHAVEN [A] - Cumbria Museums' Third Age Learning Initiative

Main Partners:

Haig Colliery Mining Museum

The Beacon Museum, Whitehaven

Age Concern, Whitehaven

Number of individuals or groups:

28 people attended 5 sessions:

i]   Lunch Club: 4 people attended up to 3 sessions

ii]   Art group: 24 people attended 1 or 2 sessions,

Joint Whitehaven 'Celebration Event', 55 people attended

Activities:

*   Reminiscence sessions

*   One to one reminiscence to create a biography album

*   Art Exhibition

*   Celebration event

Duration of project:

August 2003 to March 2004

What happened:

Sessions were held in partnership with Age Concern (Whitehaven) and Haig Colliery Mining Museum.

Using loan boxes from The Beacon Museum's handling collections, objects were used as prompts for reminiscence discussions.

The sessions were run by an independent consultant. A total of four sessions were originally planned for members of Age Concern's drop-in session at the Old Customs House. This proved difficult in practice, as attendance at the Lunch Club was voluntary, and some participants found the timing of the after lunch sessions inconvenient. Due to the small number of participants on weeks two and three, the programme was altered.

As a result of the poor attendance, two extra sessions were then held with other Age Concern participants. These took place at the Old Customs House with members of the Age Concern Art Club and resulted in an art exhibition of seventeen paintings and drawings being mounted at The Beacon Museum's gallery.

To close both Whitehaven projects, a final, shared 'Celebration Event' was held at The Beacon in February 2004. A report, transcriptions and recordings are stored at The Beacon. The equipment purchased, including recording and video equipment, will be available for both museums to use for future projects.

Name of Cumbria Pilot:

WHITEHAVEN [B] - Cumbria Museums' Third Age Learning Initiative

Main Partners:

Haig Colliery Mining Museum

The Beacon Museum, Whitehaven

Age Concern, Whitehaven

Harbour Youth Scheme, Whitehaven

Number of individuals or groups:

A total of 49 people attended 9 sessions as follows:

i]   Haig Day Care Centre: 5 sessions with an average of 11 people per session

ii]   Training sessions for museum staff and Age Concern staff - 2 sessions with 8 people per session

iii]   Harbour Youth Group: 2 sessions with 8 young people per session

Joint Whitehaven 'Celebration Event', a total of 55 people attended

Activities:

*   Reminiscence sessions
*   One to one reminiscence to create a biography album
*   Training for museum staff and Age Concern staff
*   Training in recording techniques with disadvantaged young people
*   Celebration Event

Duration of project:

August 2003 to March 2004

What happened:

Reminiscence sessions were held in partnership with Age Concern, Whitehaven. Five sessions were held at the Haig Colliery Day Care Centre, loosely based around preselected topics connected to Whitehaven's coal mining and maritime history, using handling collections from The Beacon Museum.

The reminiscence sessions at Haig Day Care Centre were run by an independent consultant. Fifteen of the older people aged between 60 and 92 years, drawn from the groups were interviewed, and brief biographies completed with them. A 'Book of Reminiscences' was produced and presented to Age Concern as a legacy of the project. Museum staff, and staff from Age Concern, also attended training sessions on the project, and reminiscence work generally, run by the independent consultant.

The project also included an intergenerational activity. Two sessions, which looked at the reasons for making recordings, as well as practical recording techniques, were held with a small group of disadvantaged young people from the Harbour Youth Scheme. Two members from this group have now gone on to do further intergenerational work with The Beacon museum on a regular basis. To close both Whitehaven projects, a final, shared 'Celebration Event' was held at The Beacon.

Evaluation of the Cumbria Third Age Learning Initiative

The project was evaluated by an external evaluator in order to find out:

- the impact of the Third Age Learning Initiative objectives against the original project objectives
- the Generic Learning Outcomes (GLOs) which have been developed by the Research Centre for Museums and Galleries (see page 28)

Key findings of the evaluation:

- Many museum facilities may not be appropriate for older people. Outreach work enables older people to become engaged in museum resources and services.
- Working with an established group of older people is an effective way of delivering the project.
- There is widespread agreement from Day Care members, Day Care staff, Age Concern management and museum representatives that reminiscence outreach work is valuable and worthwhile.
- The reminiscence outreach work carried out in the Third Age Learning Initiatives has reduced the perception that museums are "not for us" in older people's groups.
- Reminiscence outreach work is informative, improves social skills and provokes stimulating discussion of attitudes and values amongst older people and museum representatives.
- Older people may be particularly vulnerable, and trust and rapport takes time to develop.
- Older people may have physical limitations or mental health problems, and care is needed to ensure that this does not cause them to be excluded from the sessions.
- The extent of the collaboration during the project was limited by a number of factors. However project partners agreed that working collaboratively was an important element of outreach work.

"Clearly, there is enormous potential to develop work with older people, not only for the museums who have already made a start by participating in this project, but for other museums in Cumbria. It appears to have been a valuable and worthwhile experience for the participants themselves, and also for the museums and their representatives."

Evaluation Report

As part of a Cumbria Pilot project, an Age Concern art class produced paintings based on their reminiscences of the town and surrounding countryside. The painting shows a local landmark, 'North Pier Lighthouse'.

Reminiscence

The Cumbria Third Age Learning Initiative projects focussed on reminiscence work using museum objects and other items as a prompt for discussion and the recollection of memories.

What are the benefits of reminiscence work for older people?

Reminiscence work has proven to be extremely valuable to older people, as it can be a tool for encouraging social interaction and keeping people's minds active. It can be used to promote tolerance, understanding and celebrate an individual's experiences, as well as collective contributions. Reminiscence projects can give people a sense of their own contribution to their community, and their part in shaping the history of their locale. It can also help support people suffering from early dementia.

"But I think the important point is that you know there's much more to it than just reminiscence. You know you're having good conversations and good debate with people who you know, it might be the only social time they get together in the week"

Age Concern staff member

✎ Useful resources:

Faith **Gibson** [1998] *Reminiscence and Recall*, Age Concern Books, and Joanna **Bornat** [1994], *Reminiscence Reviewed*, Open University Press, London, and see also 'Bibliography', p. 30

Reminiscence as opposed to oral history

Reminiscence work with older learners is not the same as oral history, which tends to be much more formalised.

Reminiscence: stimulating memories for enjoyment, health and learning, usually in groups, not usually recorded or archived, often no consent forms used, memories often used for different end products - for example drama or craft work

Oral history: collecting spoken testimony as a historical research tool, usually one-to-one, usually recorded electronically, usually archived and accessible to the public, consent forms usually considered essential, end products often used in exhibitions, academic research, books, film, television, radio

Many projects overlap and there is continuing discussion about the boundaries between reminiscence and oral history.

Reminiscence and therapy

Reminiscence can be therapeutic and is used by therapists, but is not a therapy in itself. The uncovering of a person's memories can be a powerful experience for everyone. The focus on individual memory will stimulate emotions in the individual and in other group members, including group leaders. Leaders need to be aware of their own skills and objectives, enabling them to deal appropriately with expressions of emotion as they arise. Partnership with other agencies, for instance care staff, will reduce the risk of problems arising.

❖ Cumbria Pilot example:

"I stole the dolly's clothes". A member shared a memory of a childhood experience which had troubled her for over sixty years. She received tremendous support from the group and was enabled at last to put a troubling memory in perspective. Support from the group can make sometimes long-standing personal 'monsters' seem less worrying.

Reminiscence activities

The Cumbria Pilot projects used a range of objects and associated activities to carry out reminiscence activities.

Types of activity	Resources Used
• Discussion on memories of childhood	• Collection of old fashioned sweets and wooden toys
• Sundays - discussion about Sunday activities and constraints	• Sheet music, old hymnals, religious tracts, photos of local church, script of play
• Discussion on bygone household tips, the doctor and ailments, vets, dentists, local disasters and local characters	• Book of household remedies
• Wartime weddings, food, fortune telling, dances, seamstress, singing	• Wedding dress pattern, invitations, photos, poem, 1930s music, perfume
• The story of this hand - drawing activity and discussion on work, society and life experiences	• Sheets of blank paper, pencils and marking pens, prompt sheet
• Discussion about the port area, shipping, trade and engineering work	• Map of harbour area, museum loan box with marine and maritime objects
• People of the town remembered - discussion about various characters remembered from 1930s and 1940s	• Museum loan box: coal mining, household items: jelly bag, dressing table set, dress gloves, handkerchief bag, book of old photos of town
• Discussion about wartime in area, rationing, recreation and excursions, singing and listening to music	• Museum loan box: the district at war, and two CDs of 1940s popular music.

A 'horse boot' used as a resource during reminiscence sessions with participants from Ambleside and Keswick.

Using the material from reminiscence sessions

The Third Age Learning Initiative projects chose to record many of the reminiscence sessions so that information collected from individuals could then be shared with others to highlight the contribution the older people had made to the community.

Collected memories can be used to enrich, update and fill the gaps in information already held by museums and archives. However capturing or recording memories is not essential for reminiscence work (see p.11 for the difference between 'reminiscence' and 'oral history').

Your reasons for capturing the memory

It is important to clarify at the outset who you are capturing the memory for, and how it will be used. Is the memory for the individual themselves, the museum, the local community, for broadcast or for educational use? The reasoning behind why you need to capture the memory will affect your project. It is important to consider this in the planning stages of your project.

The Third Age Learning Initiative projects in Cumbria recorded many of their reminiscence sessions:

- to add to the museums' archives

- as a record for individuals and groups involved

- to provide raw material for interpretation - craftwork, exhibitions, further development of project

- to reflect on and evaluate sessions

❖ Cumbria Pilot example:

One group secured funding to make a quilted wall hanging to celebrate the project and all those who took part (see p. 28). The recordings were used as a source of inspiration for the figures and landscape shown. The completed quilt serves as a permanent reminder of group members who have contributed to the project, and is a talking point for anyone joining the group,

✎ Useful resources:

Oral History Society http://www.oralhistory.org.uk/
Also Paul **Thompson** [2000], *The Voice of the Past*, Oxford University Press, Oxford. See 'Bibliography' on p. 30, and 'Websites' on p. 31

❖ *Cumbria Pilot Example* - a photo (right) from The Beacon Museum collections at Whitehaven illustrates a biography for Sally McCoy.

"Barney, the Goose was my Dad's..." Sally explains. She says that the famous pet used to run around with the chickens outside the house. However the goose preferred to be inside the house where it was treated as a pet. Barney also used to go to the pub a couple of doors away and would never walk over the dock gates on the way home, preferring to be carried. Drinkers would often put their pints of beer on the floor, but when the door opened and Barney came in, a shout would go up, "Pick your pints up!"

Rights of the individual

- Never forget that the original story belongs to someone else. Respect the individual and control your material

- Use a Release Form in order to ensure that individuals understand and agree to their contributions being used. The Release Form or Copyright Form needs to be as unambiguous as possible with a large space in which to sign. Use simple language, large type and large spaces for the signature. The form is probably best filled in on a one-to-one basis so that no pressure is applied, and any questions or concerns about the project can be answered, giving another chance to answer questions and explain the background to the project

- Always give copies of photographs and the transcribed recordings to the individual interviewed

- People should always have the right to edit, or add to material they have discussed during the session. Make it easy for people to opt out altogether and edit painful reminiscences out of the record as required

❖ Cumbria Pilot example:

An elderly man recounted a story from childhood. During the session he wanted to tell his tale and was happy that it was recorded, however later he did not want this family background added to a written biography.

Controlling the end product

Think about factual use of material as opposed to the creative interpretation or re-interpretation which may fictionalise contributions. You need to be sensitive, and be in control of how far the end product has travelled from the original reminiscence.

For all the Cumbria Pilot projects, a useful partnership was formed between Age Concern and the participating museums.

Recording and archiving reminiscences

❖ **Tips from the Cumbria Pilot projects**

- Test and thoroughly get to know the recording equipment before the session

- Make sure your group knows they are being recorded and are happy about this

- Always have a first session where participants can familiarise themselves with recording equipment and listen to their own voices

- Record the date, title of the session and members present, including staff at the start of the tape

- Plan any discussion sessions carefully, so the session 'flows'

- Plan a fall-back strategy, as your equipment may fail – discreet note taking, back-up or duplicate equipment are recommended

- Check leads are safely out of the way and that they will not cause a trip hazard

- Make sure others are aware that a recording is taking place so that other activities do not get in the way of the recording. The clatter of crockery while making tea can make the transcription of recordings difficult

- Sound recordings need to be transcribed. This is a lengthy process. Transcribe as much as possible, as soon as possible, after the session

- Video recording is more intimidating for participants than sound recording. Only use video if your group is agreeable - get to know them first

✎ Useful resources:

An example of a Copyright Release form and more detailed information can be found at:
http://www.oralhistory.org.uk/advice

(see also Websites p.31)

Locally made clogs were used as a resource and a prompt for reminiscences.

An Age Concern member who took part in one of the Cumbria Pilot projects at The Old Customs' House, Whitehaven.

The Benefits of Working in Partnership

The Cumbria Third Age Learning Initiative projects worked with older people who all received Day Care at Age Concern. Some lived in their own homes, some in sheltered housing. Working through Age Concern in this way meant the museums were able to reach a large number of people efficiently, and were able to share in the skills and facilities of Age Concern.

Bringing in skills

Project partners may be in a position to offer staff with specialist skills in understanding the needs of older people.

"Developing links with Age Concern has proved extremely successful and there is good scope to develop this in the future."

Museum Curator

Bringing in resources

By working in partnership, it is possible that the work-load, equipment and costs may be shared and make a project feasible. Organisations may be able to provide venues for outreach work, where museums do not have suitable facilities on site, or transport.

Exchanging expertise

Through partnerships museum staff may learn new skills which will allow them to go on to develop services for older people. Partner organisations and groups may gain a greater understanding of what the museums have to offer the local community. Exchanging expertise should lead to sustainable growth of museum services for older learners.

Linking in with existing groups of older people

Working with organisations and groups allows museums to identify and link in with existing groups of older people. This may save time and resources spent trying to involve individual older people in projects. In addition, people may feel more comfortable and confident in developing a relationship with the museum through an established group.

"I suppose it's easier because they are already working with older people. They've got the kind of organisational back-up really, and the groups set up. They have, I think, more than forty groups throughout Cumbria. So they've already got the structure there, if you like… But that's not to say there are not other groups within the community who might be interested in doing this kind of work."

Museum Curator

Range of partners

There are a wide range of potential partners for museums, who are skilled in working with older people.

For example:

- Social Services
- Health Care Trusts
- Care staff
- Sheltered housing
- Age Concern
- Volunteer Bureau
- University of the Third Age

Many Local Authorities provide a directory of services. In Cumbria this is called "Directory of Services in Cumbria" and is available from the County Council's Social Services Department. The Adult and Community, or Lifelong Learning Department, of the Local Authority should know about existing groups and learning opportunities for older people.

Identifying potential partners

At the start of your project it is advisable to research and contact groups in your area to build a list of organisations who work with older people. The types of partners you investigate will be dependant on the types of older people you choose to target.

❖ Cumbria Pilot example:

Before the Third Age Learning Initiative projects got under way, project staff spent time compiling a directory of potential partners for the project. This was then followed up by personal contacts with managers of Age Concern day centres and sheltered housing.

External Partners in Cumbria Pilots

- Age Concern (Whitehaven, South Lakeland, North Lakeland)
- Social Services (South Lakeland)
- Morecambe Bay Health Trust
- Whitehaven Harbour Youth Project

Getting to know your partner

Partnerships that work best are based on good relationships:

- Find out what your partner organisation and the older people with whom they work want from the project: an opportunity to socialise, discuss stimulating topics, etc
- Find out what previous experience the partner organisation has had. Have they been involved in similar projects involving reminiscence or outside agencies? Check what worked and what did not
- You may need to build in a long lead in time in order to establish a good relationship and understanding

Maintaining the partnership

It is important to maintain a good relationship with your partners. Keeping good communication going with your partners throughout the project is essential to maintaining a good relationship.

Planning and Delivering Programmes

Getting the Focus Right

Spending time on research and consultation will help your project have a clear focus and clarify the thinking behind your project.

Identify the need for your project

What value will it have to the individual, the museum, the community?

Your project is more likely to be successful and have a lasting impact if it:

- responds to the needs of the older people with whom you are working
- responds to the needs of your community
- fits with the museum's priorities
- fills a gap

Carry out research and consultation in the early stages of your project

- Find out what activities are already going on with older people in your area: how will your project complement or add value to these?
- Consult with the local groups and organisers that might get involved with your project
- Review any previous activity
- Consult with local authority officers involved in supporting older people

Clarify the main aim of your project

- Involve partners in clarifying the aim of your project

Set clear objectives

- The objectives should describe the outcomes you and partners want to achieve as a result of the project

Planning a Successful Programme of Activities

When planning a programme of activities it is important to take into consideration a number of factors which may influence the success of your programme, such as interests of the group, type of activity, location of activities, staff involvement, and group size.

Using a session plan

* Write a session plan for each activity. Keep it flexible enough to allow for diversions, but keep original objectives in sight during the session

* Set clear aims, objectives and outcomes for all the activities you plan

* Keep these in mind and use them as a prompt during the sessions

✎ Useful resources:

The session objectives can be plotted out in timetable format to plan running order and duration of each part of the session, and to ensure that all the objectives are met.

DISCUSSION TOPIC	TIMING	LEADER ACTIVITY	PARTICIPANT ACTIVITY	RESOURCES	OBJECTIVE	EVALUATION

Include a variety of activities in your planning - music and costume can make reminiscence sessions enjoyable, lively and memorable.

Choosing Suitable topics for activities

The topics you cover will be influenced by:

- the interests of the group of people you are working with
- the suitability of the materials available to you from the museum collections
- the type of activities you have planned
- the preferred learning styles and abilities of the group you are working with
- the desired outcomes of the project and the individual activities

❖ Cumbria Pilot example:

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i]    Outline of sessions at Haig Day Centre, Haig Pit/Marchon
Session 1   What we did - in the pit and at home          Fri 1 Aug
Session 2   People remembered                             Mon 11 Aug
Session 4   A Whitehaven childhood                        Mon 1 Sept
Session 3   Celebrations, disasters, special events       Tue 9 Sept
Session 5   Whitehaven at war - memories of the town      Fri 19 Sept
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"In providing outreach sessions which are enjoyable and pertinent to the third age participants, the Third Age Learning Initiative has significantly reduced or removed the perception that 'museums are not for us'". External evaluator

Allow for different learning styles

Activities (e.g. examining museum objects) do not have to be used as purely VISUAL prompts. Allow for AUDITORY (sound) and KINESTHETIC (movement) learning styles by choosing objects that can be used in a number of different ways. Using a bell (a chime) or child's toy (yo-yo) can stimulate discussion, adds variety and interest, and allows enjoyment of activity by participants who have sight or hearing difficulties.

What is the best location for your activities?

- Consider whether the museum has a suitable space for the activities you have planned
- Special consideration needs to be given to the mobility of the group you are working with
- Plan for the provision of wheelchairs, toilets, comfortable seating
- Build in allowance for the extra time it may take to get people into the room
- Visit groups in their own setting before planning any museum visit
- Outreach programmes can be very successful - you may wish to consider taking the museum to the group
- Try to envisage possible pitfalls and plan strategies to avoiding them happening (risk analysis)

❖ Cumbria Pilot example:

The majority of the activities with Age Concern groups were held in the Age Concern Centres, as the museums involved did not have adequate facilities for the groups. Holding sessions in the centres also meant that the older people felt more comfortable in their own environment.

"We don't have an education room. We're very limited in what we can physically do in the building. So there's much greater scope to try and go out there, outreach." Museum staff

Volunteers and Staff

You need to consider what skills are needed for your project.

- Identify which staff and volunteers will be working on the project
- Consider whether staff and volunteers have the right skills for working with older people
- Ask whether there are museum volunteers who might be interested in helping deliver a reminiscence project to older people
- Take into account the training that might be needed for staff and volunteers
- Consider whether project partners can provide staff or training
- You may need to consider advertising for new volunteers who are especially interested in this type of work

Consider the best size for the group

- Plan different activities for different group sizes
- For a recorded reminiscence session, six is an ideal group size, ensuring all participants can join the activity

❖ Cumbria Pilot example:

A local organiser insisted that as many of her Day Care Centre members be involved in as many sessions as possible. Although the atmosphere during the discussions was lively, it took longer to get to know people individually and some interesting contributions were not able to be recorded.

Involvement of staff and volunteers can be a real asset for reminiscence projects.

Understanding Need and Gaining Trust

Understanding the needs of older people and gaining their trust is essential for any project involving older people. Time spent getting to know your prospective project participants at an early stage is well worth it. Do not underestimate the amount of time needed to gain trust, nor how quickly it can be lost.

Get advice in advance

•   If the group of people are part of an established group, your first starting point should be with the people who are already working with them, such as the Day Care Centre manger

•   Find out from them what the needs of the group are e.g. disability, dietary needs such as diabetes, health and emotional needs, and try to plan sessions with these in mind

•   Discuss your activity plans with group leaders or organisers, to get their input on the suitability of the activities

❖ Cumbria Pilot example:

"We've really liked the way that… [they] have come in, become very, very friendly. The first time they came in they brought sweets and asked about could they remember these sweets, which brings it out in a very natural way, you know? Getting to know them very slowly which they did the first couple of weeks. I think they've been really good… And they've befriended them. They've gone that step further and they've befriended them." Age Concern staff member

Observation

•   Observing a group in their own environment can be a useful way to find out about their individual and group needs and help you plan better sessions and activities

Inclusion

•   Plan your activities so that as far as possible, everyone can be included. Involve staff from the partnership so that particular needs of individuals and the group, including physical, intellectual and emotional elements have been considered

Gaining trust

•   Become a known and trusted face

•   If participants offer to lend source material, give a written receipt, take good care of the item and return it when promised

•   Respect and value a participant's contribution

❖ Cumbria Pilot example:

In the weeks before reminiscence sessions began, Third Age learning Initiative project staff found it useful to join in with regular Lunch Club activities such as whist, to learn more about individuals and the group dynamics. With information from these observations, staff were able prepare activities better tailored to the group's needs.

Running Successful Sessions

❖ Tips from the Cumbria Pilot projects

Variety

Use poems, music, multi sensory items and objects from museum handling collections to cater for all needs and learning styles.

Pace

When running a discussion session around a particular topic, pitch it at a suitable pace for the group involved. Do not try to go too fast. Older people may take longer to develop the conversation.

Empowerment

Work towards participants driving the session, saying as little as possible yourself. You are there to keep the discussion moving and on course.

Let the participants keep each other on track and decide who will speak. The group will discipline itself, given time and the right leadership.

Remember you will not succeed in making people talk about anything they do not wish to discuss.

Involvement

Try to make sure that everyone feels included. Some people need encouragement to talk about themselves and tell their story. Raise self esteem. Be aware of the quiet ones, and try to bring them into the discussion.

Do not use demeaning techniques like 'Talking Sticks' to get people to speak one at a time. A conversation should develop naturally. Imagine you are talking to friends.

Sensitivity

Be sensitive to individual needs: some people do not want to be in photographs, some do not want to participate in sessions.

Be sensitive to the personal nature of some memories. Always start with gentle, uncontroversial subject matter, but remember that any subject can trigger a sad or unpleasant memory for someone. There are no "safe" subjects.

Be careful that a reminiscence session does not develop into a 'therapy session' unless you are qualified in this area. Being sensitive is not enough.

Rewards

Try to make sure everyone gets something to take away or look at after the project has finished. Always give copies of photographs you have taken.

Respect

Remember to thank participants for their contribution after the session.

Never accept any personal items without permission and documentation (such as a museum temporary loan form). Be scrupulous about things borrowed, give them back on time, and in pristine condition.

Health and Safety

Ensure there is always a trained member of staff from the partner organisation present at all sessions for medical and legal protection. Know where your role ends and someone else should take over.

Ask about fire drill, medical cover as well as usual routines of the centre. Make sure you have contact details and emergency numbers.

Find out if Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) checks and certification are needed if working with vulnerable people.

Introducing new people to a group

Taking any outsider into a session (even if they are from a funding organisation) must all be pre-arranged and sanctioned by the organising body. New people must be properly introduced to the group.

Breaks

Plan a refreshment break if one is not suggested.

Evaluation and Review

Monitor and modify your progress. Keep a record of the session and how it went. Always evaluate as soon as possible after each session and project. This will help inform and plan modifications for the next session or project.

It is useful to report back to group leaders or managers verbally after each session.

Manage your time

Incorporate timings into your session plan. Make sure your plan is flexible enough if things take longer or less time than you planned. Do not be tempted to 'make something up' to cover lack of planning.

Examining an album of photos and biographies created for a Cumbria pilot project. Photo © Cumbrian Newspapers 2004

Precious Commodity; Precious People

If precious be the minerals embedded in earth's core,
Then precious be the men who free them for our store.
If precious be the product, then precious more the men,
Especially those who sacrifice, they can't repeat again.

And what of women, children, who suffered in this deed?
Their lives thrown on the scrap heap of others' awful greed,
They too are constant preciouses, in memories that remain,
Theirs too an awful sacrifice, they can't repeat again.

Let not the memory of these folk; be blasted from our minds
By the abundance and the plenty, much easier now to find.
Their rags, their tears, their poverty, was seed that gives today,
The comfort, ease, prosperity to us who walk our way.

From 'Poems of the Pits' Reflections by John W Skelly, Volume 2, published by Haig Colliery Mining Museum, (Haig Restoration Group), Whitehaven

Some items used as 'prompts' for discussion during the Cumbria Pilot projects in Ambleside, Keswick and Whitehaven.

Evaluation

It is important to set up your evaluation plan at the start of the project. This will help you capture information as you go along and make changes during the project in good time.

Evaluation helps you:

- Reflect on what is happening and improve practice throughout the project
- Learn from experience
- Share your experience with others
- Prove what has happened as a result of the project

Adapting the project

During the Cumbria Third Age Learning Initiative the project staff continually reviewed their work with the older people. The project plan was then revised accordingly.

❖ Cumbria Pilot example:

Evaluation methods within projects:

- Reviewing sessions with day-care centre staff
- Analysis of recorded sessions
- Feedback from participants
- Interviews with all staff involved
- Observation and interviews with project participants
- Session observation

'Sal Madge', a well-known local character from the early 1800s is represented by this figurine in the handling collections of The Beacon Museum. The doll is an excellent starting point for discussions on the theme of noteable people.

Evaluating the Cumbria pilot projects

The Cumbria pilots used a variety of evaluation techniques. An external evaluator carried out an additional assessment of all four projects.

External evaluation:

The Third Age Learning Initiative projects were externally evaluated against the Generic Learning Outcomes (GLO's), which have been developed by the Research Centre for Museums and Galleries (RCMG) to measure the impact of learning in museums, archives and libraries (see also page 9).

The GLO's are:

- Increase in knowledge and understanding

- Increase in skills

- Change in attitudes or values

- Evidence of enjoyment, inspiration and creativity

- Evidence of activity, behaviour, progression

✎ Useful resources:

The full evaluation report can be down loaded from http://www.nwmlac.org.uk

See also: http://www.inspiringlearningforall.gov.uk , also Websites p.31
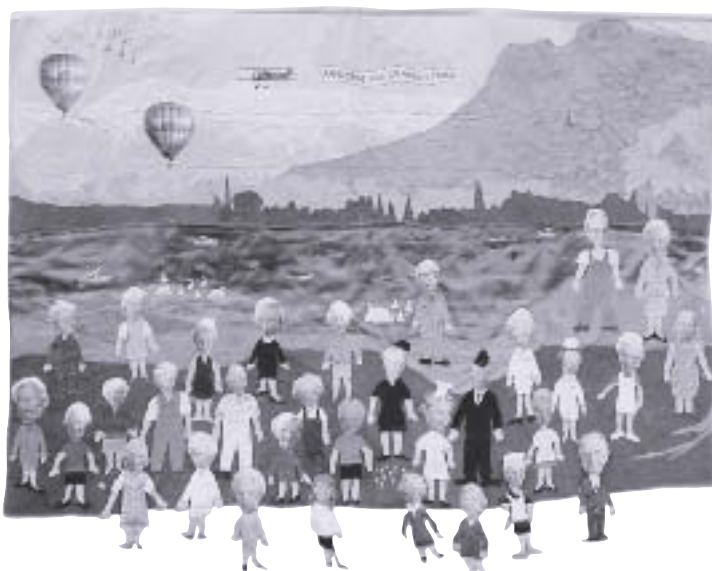
Quilted wallhanging made by participants to celebrate the Cumbria Pilot project run with The Armitt Trust, Ambleside. The figures represent each of the older people involved with the reminiscence project, and their professions during their working life.

Sustainability

Where do we go from here?

It is important to plan for the end of the project, before you even begin. Plan how you might use your project as a foundation for further development. Consider longer term implications - your project might have both positive and negative outcomes. Will your project raise expectations or demands that cannot be fulfilled in the long term?

Exit strategy

- At the beginning of your project it can be useful to write an 'exit strategy', and then review this at the end

- Discuss how your project will end with the project partners

Project Legacy

- It is important to consider how the resources your project will create can be used after your project has finished

- A reminiscence box that has being used during your project could become a permanent resource to be held at the centre when notes and prompt sheets for Day Care staff are added

- Reminiscence portfolios are not only a useful way to celebrate the end of a project, but can also be used as a resource in the longer term

❖ Cumbria Pilot example:

The Cumbria Third Age Learning Initiative projects created photo albums with portrait photographs and biographies of members and objects. These were then kept at the Day Care Centre once the project had ended.

As part of the exit strategy, a 'Celebration Event' was held at one of the participating museums and reported in the local paper.

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You can obtain the book from http://www.age-exchange.org.uk/ Also see: *The Reminiscence Handbook*

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UK Reminiscence Network, *Reminiscence Exchange* (UKRN Newsletter), No. 1, Autumn 2001. You can obtain the newsletter from http://www.reminscence-network.org.uk/

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Websites

For information on reminiscence, older people and recording

MLA North West's website:
http://www.mlanorthwest.org.uk

Partner organisations for older people:
http://www.ageconcern.org.uk/

http://www.age-exchange.org.uk/

Research into ageing:
http://www.ageing.org/

The Centre for Intergenerational Practice (CIP) aims to support the development of intergenerational practice throughout the UK and to promote an understanding of the potential of intergenerational approaches to address social issues:
http://www.centreforip.org.uk/

CRB website. To find out more about Disclosures you can contact the CRB on 0870 9090811 or visit:
http://www.disclosure.gov.uk   http://www.crb.gov.uk/

The Group for Education in Museums promotes the importance of learning through museums and galleries. It is based in the UK but has members around the world:
http://www.gem.org.uk/

http://home.freeuk.com/real-life/oralhis.html

Research Centre for Museums and Galleries (RCMG):
http://www.le.ac.uk/museumstudies/rcmg/rcmg.htm

Publications and information on issues connected with working with older people available from:

http://www.le.ac.uk/museumstudies/bookshop/rcmg_publications.htm

http://www.niace.org.uk/

http://www.oralhistory.org.uk/

http://www.oralhistory.org.uk/advice

http://www.oralhistory.org.uk/ethics/

Museums' Reminiscence Network
http://www.shcg.org.uk/scripts/related_index.asp

Social history, curators' group
http://www.shcg.org.uk/scripts/related_index.asp

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Comparing prices of technical equipment:

http://www.camuser.co.uk

http://www.inquitaudio.co.uk

http://www.hpreston.co.uk

http://www.kelkoo.co.uk/

http://www.priceguideuk.com/index.asp

Acknowledgments

Cumbria Third Age Learning Initiative Projects

This guide is the result of four pilot projects which were part of the "The Third Age Learning Initiative" supported by MLA North West and the Northern Rock Foundation. The project started in October 2002 and completed in February 2004.

The initiative aimed to improve services for older people in Cumbria's museums. In order to achieve this the pilot projects explored ways of working in collaboration with older people's groups, and their representatives.

Third Age Learning - An introductory guide

Third Age Learning

This guide has developed from the experience and evaluation of the 'Third Age Learning Initiative', a pilot project involving four museums in Cumbria. It offers an introduction for museums who are interested in developing their work with older people.

MLA North West…leading the creation of outstanding, innovative and inclusive museums, libraries and archives for England's North West.