

NMDC response to DCMS call for evidence on approach to Loneliness Strategy

July 2018

The National Museum Directors' Council (NMDC) represents the leaders of the UK's national collections and major regional museums. Our members are the national and major regional museums in England, Northern Ireland and Scotland, the British Library, the National Library of Scotland, the National Archives and Royal Botanic Gardens Kew. NMDC acts as an advocate on behalf of members and their collective priorities and provides them with a valuable forum for discussion and debate and an opportunity to share information and work collaboratively. While our members are funded by government, the NMDC is an independent, non-governmental organisation. For more information about NMDC and our activity see our website: www.nationalmuseums.org.uk

NMDC has not carried out specific research into the impact of museum programmes on reducing loneliness, however, a wide range of initiatives have been developed across the sector to engage the groups identified as being more susceptible to loneliness; addressing issues such as wellbeing, social mobility, illness, disability and recovery from trauma, providing opportunities for young people and promoting community cohesion. NMDC does not directly deliver services to tackle loneliness but represents a broad range of museums that contribute to supporting social relationships. The following examples are just a snapshot of the work being undertaken by museums.

1. Museums are perhaps not widely perceived as agents of social change. However, museums in the UK are playing an increasingly active role in providing support, care, training and lifelong learning in the communities they serve. Museums use their collections, spaces and expertise to enhance people's wellbeing and life chances by engaging with visitors and users at the personal and community level. They are increasing their social impact by developing new ways of working with audiences and communities: growing public participation, co-production of museum work and events, and sharing collections and knowledge in ways that can change people's perspectives and wellbeing.
2. Museums of all sizes, with collections ranging from fine art to social history, are taking up this challenge – often in partnership with community groups, charities and public sector organisations. This type of work helps museums to be more sustainable, and the public benefits it generates underline the continuing importance of museums as a public service.
3. A recent survey¹ by the Museums Association confirms more museums than ever are targeting engagement work towards specific groups and communities to increase their social impact.

¹ <https://www.museumsassociation.org/download?id=1244881>

4. The survey found that a large proportion (74%) of museums in the UK work directly with local community groups. More than half work regularly with museum friends or supporters associations (59%) and youth groups (55%). Large percentages of museums work with health and wellbeing providers (46%) and disability groups (47%). Smaller but significant proportions of respondents said they had worked with black, Asian and ethnic minority communities (23%), environmental groups or campaigns (18%), LGBTQ+ groups (19%), refugees or asylum seekers (15%) and gender equality groups (12%). The percentage of museums saying they work with many of these groups has increased significantly since the Museums Survey 2017.

5. A wide range of museum programmes have been developed to engage with the groups highlighted by DCMS as being 'more likely to experience loneliness', including:

6. The Imperial War Museum's (IWM) Inspiring Futures: Volunteering for wellbeing (2013-2017) provided longitudinal evidence that museums and galleries are highly effective settings for supporting local services through "social prescribing" to improve peoples' wellbeing and health recovery. From October 2013 – June 2017, IWM North in Manchester and Manchester Museum delivered a volunteering, training and placement programme across 10 heritage venues in Greater Manchester to collectively achieve improvements, consistency and quality in volunteering practice as a key route to transforming wellbeing. Over 230 people were recruited, 75% of people were in receipt of a benefit, many of whom were long-term unemployed, isolated and struggling with poor mental health. IWM's heritage venues provided a stimulating and reflective environment to support social isolation and wellbeing inequalities. It helped people from disadvantaged or vulnerable backgrounds to believe in themselves, increase their confidence and most importantly helped people realise their full potential to take that next step in supporting their own wellbeing. Over 75 % of participants reported a significant increase in wellbeing after 1 year, 30% found employment or new opportunities for getting into work. The findings show that the project has generated social and economic value of approximately £2 million across the three years. Projects like this could alleviate resource pressures on local health care and support services. At the same time the project has changed perceptions about galleries and museums as assets for recuperation and improving health.

7. By working in partnership with specialist organisations such as charities, care providers and community groups museums are able to use their collections and devise specific programmes to draw people back into society and tackle loneliness and isolation. The significant impact of this work – using comparatively small amounts of public funding to make a major difference to the lives of vulnerable people – should be championed and supported by DCMS and the Department of Health. National Museums Liverpool receives funding from local Health Trusts and Care Commissioning Groups² to run the award-winning House of Memories, which targets carers and health and social care providers and helps them to deliver a positive quality of life experience for people living with dementia. House of Memories provides health, social care and housing professionals and family carers with a training programme to increase dementia awareness and understanding based on the museum's collection and role at the heart of the city's life. To date more than 11,000 people have undertaken the training. The programme demonstrates how a museum can provide the health and social care sector with practical skills and knowledge to facilitate access to untapped cultural resources, often within their locality.

² <http://www.liverpoolmuseums.org.uk/learning/projects/house-of-memories/>

8. The National Portrait Gallery has been working in partnership with children's hospitals in London for over 15 years, sharing inspirational stories of men and women in the Collection and providing access to free, high quality arts activities. Playful Portraits is the new iteration of a programme developed to provide creative arts activity for young people in children's hospitals. Partnering with Great Ormond Street Children's Hospital, Evelina London Children's Hospital at St Thomas', The Royal London Hospital at Whitechapel and Newham University Hospital the Gallery provides much needed arts activity during school holidays when the hospital school is shut and activity for young people is limited. These programmes deliver physical, cognitive, social and emotional benefits to patients, a positive creative experience for families and a motivating opportunity for hospital staff to collaborate with the Gallery team to deliver benefits to patients.

9. The project Cornish Gig Project at the National Maritime Museum in Cornwall concentrated on teaching new skills and abilities to Forces personnel trying to adapt to civilian life after exposure to hugely stressful situations during their time in the military, while at the same time instilling a sense of pride and worth in the participants, which would bolster their self-confidence and encourage them to deal with the difficulties they faced. It was felt that the construction of a pilot gig would deliver these goals and would also demonstrate that the popular sport of gig racing can be open to a wide range of disabled athletes. Approximately 40 Wounded in Service participants, selected with guidance from Help for Heroes, benefitted from the project, their ages ranging from early 20s to mid-50s. One participant described the project as life changing and signed up to a boat building course as a direct result. In April 2016 the boat was presented to Help for Heroes on the Isles of Scilly, in time to take part in the World Pilot Gig Championships, following an "Epic Row" by some of the participants from Falmouth to Scilly. The pilot gig, having been donated to Help for Heroes, is now based at the charity's Plymouth Centre and is regularly used for recreational and competitive purposes by WIS Armed Forces personnel and Veterans.

10. The Science and Heritage Career Ladder (SHCL) is a sustainable and structured employment-based training programme run by Birmingham's Thinktank. Its aims are to provide employment for young people, structured training and raise awareness of science, technology and heritage-based careers. Since 2008, 61 16 – 17-year olds have taken part. Thinktank's inspiration came from a need to make the museum more inviting and relevant to the diverse communities in its immediate vicinity. The community need was the provision of paid job and training opportunities for young people, in an inner-city area of high deprivation and worklessness. By recruiting young people from its immediate local areas, Thinktank's staff has become more representative of Birmingham's communities in terms of ethnic and socio-economic diversity, and has helped establish better links with new audiences. The programme also directly supports a number of national, regional themes: diversifying the museum workforce by addressing the underrepresentation of people from black and minority ethnic backgrounds, and people from socio-economic C2DE in science communication and museum workforces; the stagnation in numbers of young people choosing science to meet the pace of job creation; and participation in a programme of evaluation to examine the role of youth educators as learners and teachers in informal science learning sites, including the impact of our career ladder programme on young people's higher education paths and career decisions.

11. Norfolk Museums Service 'Into Museums Pass' is an initiative to enable some of Norfolk's most vulnerable people to access collections for free – the pass is for anyone aged 16-21 who is unwaged, temporarily housed, homeless or in supervised lodgings.

12. Tate, with agreement from Government is currently seeking to appoint its first young 'Trustee for a New Generation'. Having consulted with 16-25 year olds, the new Trustee would be a voice dedicated to bringing the next generation to the highest level of Tate's decision-making. Tate has also just launched £5 exhibition tickets for the same age group to ensure that young people have fair access to the collection. Both projects are the legacy of Tate's four-year 'Circuit' programme which engaged 175,000 people under 25 in England and Wales.

13. These are just some of the projects being delivered by museums across the country, many of which are tackling the underlying causes of loneliness in society. Strategic funds to support partnership working across government agencies and local authorities to deliver on specific policy goals (such as the Prime Minister's Challenge on Dementia) are an effective and targeted use of public investment which allow museums to develop creative and participative responses to health and social challenges, often in partnership with the NHS, social care providers or charities. This sort of funding is particularly valuable to museums whose fixed costs (maintaining buildings, caring for and providing public access to collections) can make it difficult to find space in budgets to begin this sort of work.

In case of any queries regarding this response or if you require any further information please contact Kathryn Simpson, Policy and Projects Manager, National Museum Directors' Council kathryn.simpson@nationalmuseums.org.uk / 020 7942 4076. I confirm that NMDC has read and understood the terms of submission regarding disclosure.