Mental Health and Heritage: working in partnership
Four linked projects in Surrey

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Content

What is Mental Health and Heritage: working in partnership? 3

What is the wider context? 4

What did the partnership projects do? 5

What were the benefits? 13

What are the next steps? 17

Who are the main contacts? 18

What other information is available? 20
What is Mental Health and Heritage: working in partnership?

Surrey, East and West Sussex (SEWS) Mental Health Project: 2008-2011

The SEWS Mental Health Project was a 3-year project funded by Renaissance South East. It was developed because people with mental health issues are considered to be under-represented in museum visitor figures and were identified as a priority group in the South East Renaissance Plan 2006-08 for museums in the region.

The project had three phases: phase one – research and development; phase two – consultation, evaluation and training; phase three – good practice projects.

Mental Health and Heritage: working in partnership

This report covers the third phase of the project, which enabled four heritage organisations in Surrey to build partnerships with each other, sharing skills, expertise and knowledge to support the projects’ development and build a support network for further work.

Evaluation was based on the MLA’s framework Inspiring Learning (www.inspiringlearning.org.uk), with particular reference to the Generic Learning and Generic Social Outcomes.
What is the wider context?

The research, development and delivery of this project took place over a period of change which is still on-going. For example, under the Health and Social Care Bill, primary care trusts and strategic health authorities are to be phased out by 2013. Councils will take on the public health role of care trusts and local consortia of GPs will be responsible for planning and buying health services.

Government reforms to the health service and other areas of government are based on the policy of transferring power to local communities.

‘[It’s] about helping people to come together to improve their own lives. It’s about putting more power in people’s hands – a massive transfer of power from Whitehall to local communities.’

Big Society, Office for Civil Society

No Health Without Mental Health, February 2011, sets the context and strategy for the mental health sector. The primary aim is to mainstream mental health in England, putting it on parity with physical health. The strategy highlights the cost to the country of mental ill-health and recognises it as a key factor in social inequality. It places emphasis on wellbeing, with the health and wellbeing of people seen as important as the economic health of the country. No Health Without Mental Health links Government departments, with improving mental health and wellbeing as a cross-departmental responsibility. Health and wellbeing boards are currently being set up.

Commissioning has been part of the wider funding picture for some time. It provides the cultural sector with opportunities to be solely commissioned or to contribute to a commissioned service as a partner provider.

With the continued emphasis on commissioning and the wider changes, evidencing the impact of the work of museums and heritage organisations is essential. During this project, evidence of different kinds has been captured to demonstrate the impact they can have on people’s health and wellbeing by working with partners in the mental health sector.

The evidence gathered demonstrating the impact of the Zigzag Stories project on participants’ health and wellbeing is now being used by the support worker and occupational therapist to help to build a case for future funding.
What did the partnership projects do?

Guildford Heritage Service: Zigzag Stories

**Partners**

Cassie Herschel-Shorland  
Heritage Access Officer  
Guildford Heritage Service

Liz Ellis  
visual artist and Curator of Community Learning at Tate Modern

Rachel Brennan  
Occupational Therapist  
Guildford and Waverley OT Locality Service working with Surrey and Borders Partnership NHS Foundation Trust

Karina Jones  
Support, Time and Recovery Worker  
Surrey County Council Support, Time & Recovery Team (Adult Mental Health) in Guildford & Waverley

Art in general is therapeutic. I found it was good to do art in a non-home environment. It was good to have a focus, using the museum. The project had a beginning and an end. The exhibition made a focus to the whole project package, I wouldn’t have thought of this (Zigzag Stories project) on my own. The stimulation of the museum and the gallery and other people was important.

Participant, Zigzag Stories

“The coming to this group has been a lifeline for me. It’s helped me be a child again but also to be a grown up and have a voice. You surprise yourself with what you can do...”

Participant, Zigzag Stories

The evaluation of Zigzag Stories has provided Guildford Heritage Service with a wealth of evidence that demonstrates the impact on users’ health and wellbeing.
Zigzag Stories was planned by Guildford Borough Council Heritage Service, in collaboration with leaders of service user support initiatives within the Surrey and Borders Partnership NHS Foundation Trust.

Participants were drawn from mental health support organisations in Guildford that are supported by the Trust:

**Insight Art**, which offers art facilities and encouragement to people experiencing mental health problems.

**Street Level Art**, a creative support group for homeless people with mental health problems.

**Coffee Lounge**, the coffee shop at Guildford Adult Learning Centre, which enables people with mental health problems to become involved in supported volunteer work. The aim is to aid confidence and skills, working towards recovery and return to social/work environments.

Seven creative workshops took place from late summer 2010 to early 2011, in which participants were invited to design and make concertina books. The idea behind the books was to encourage people to respond to heritage sites in their artwork and at the same time to produce something to share with or show others in a display. The concertina book format allowed people to:

- create an artwork suitable for 3D display as well as being small/flat enough to take away, carry about or easily store;
- create an artwork that is a complete piece after either a small number or many pages depending on how people are feeling;
- develop a piece over time as a journey or story inspired by the heritage sites and collections;
- learn new techniques or use their preferred techniques in a different way.

The work was inspired by Guildford’s heritage sites and collections, such as medieval tiles, illuminated books, a smock, Roman pottery and the Lewis Carroll Exhibition. The Zigzag stories were displayed in an exhibition at the museum for 6 weeks.
Partners
Janet Nixon
Senior Heritage Projects Officer
Surrey Heritage
Surrey History Centre

Janie Cottle
Michael Andrews
Care workers
Woking Mind

“I was amazed by what went on behind the scenes…”

“I liked looking at the great big maps because I’ve lived here all my life.”

“It was intriguing (to find out) how newspapers are being kept for people in the future.”

Participants, Looking About Us

The power and impact of photographs was key – how they can be effectively used for evaluation, advocacy and marketing but also to engage participants in the experience of visiting a heritage site.
Surrey History Centre has previously worked with Woking Mind and through various events, activities and projects has developed an excellent relationship with the managers. For the Looking about us project they worked in partnership to develop a project to encourage in-depth engagement by participants with a selection of heritage sites and collections in Surrey.

Woking Mind is affiliated to Mind, the national Mental Health Charity. It provides social support and assistance to adults who have difficulties with their mental health. Its services are based on drop-in centres held at CornerHouse in Woking and St. Michael's Church. It runs a programme of events from these centres including trips out to local attractions.

A small group of participants were identified from the users of Woking Mind, and a timetable of heritage visits was drawn up. As well as visiting Surrey History Centre, the group also visited the other museums involved in the project: The Lightbox, Woking and Guildford Museum and The Watts Chapel, Compton (at the time of the project Watts Gallery was closed to the public for refurbishment). They also visited other local heritage sites: The Spike, Guildford and Shere Museum.

Participants used digital cameras to record their experiences and reactions at the sites and follow-up reviews were written up after each visit. On previous group visits to museums and heritage organisations, there had been little engagement with the content and displays. This project encouraged greater interaction and focus, with more time spent in discussion about the heritage, both at the venue and afterwards.

“During the course on the project, a participant moved from a position of caution, being unsure about the level of involvement he wanted to have, to offering to become a volunteer at the Surrey History Centre.”

Project lead, Looking About Us
“Many of the group have talked about depression and loneliness and find that The Cellar offers them an opportunity to socialize, to make art, to learn, to discuss, to feel they belong to a ‘community’ of caring, like-minded people who understand each other’s problems and support one another. These remarks have been reiterated throughout the sessions. There is always pleasure expressed at meeting up and a very positive, supportive vibe amongst the group and enthusiasm to learn.”

Project lead, Big Issues Project

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**Watts Gallery: Big Issues Project**

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**Partners**

Helen Hienkens-Lewis  
Head of Learning  
Watts Gallery

Sheila Wallis  
Artist in Residence  
Watts Gallery

Amanda Beswick  
Cellar Art Group Manager

Emma Goldup  
Deputy Manager  
Cellar Café

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The Watts Gallery will continue to use the log book for future projects as it provided an effective method both for capturing evidence and keeping in touch during the project.
Watts Gallery has established a series of workshops through the Big Issues project, which involve an artist in residence working with groups of people at risk of social exclusion, including participants with mental health issues. These workshops have proved immensely positive, with reported benefits to the participants such as reduced self-harming, improved self-confidence and a return to education and learning.

Participation in this project enabled the Watts Gallery to work with The Cellar, further developing and extending the reach and impact of the Big Issues project.

The Cellar in Godalming is open to everyone. It aims to provide a safe environment for local people with a variety of needs including mental health issues, to come and talk to staff and volunteers, as well as with each other.

The structure and content of the programme drew on the experience of developing the Big Issues project. The Cellar established The Cellar Art and Craft Group and four workshops were run by the Gallery’s artist in residence, facilitating creative sessions. Focussing on skills development and inspired by the works at the Gallery and the buildings themselves, participants worked in clay and mixed media.
The clock keeps on ticking
The light comes through the window
The clock is on the wall
The clinking and clanking of the chime
It's time to get up.

The clock keeps on ticking
People passing by.

The clock keeps on ticking
Time for breakfast
Time for lunch
Time for dinner
We wander around waiting.

The day has ended.
The clock keeps on ticking.

Extract from script, Speaking Our Minds

The performance had a tremendous validating effect on the participants, while for those attending the cabaret it was further evidence of the capabilities and creativity of those with mental health problems.
Speaking Our Minds was a project at The Lightbox, based on creative writing produced by mental health service users in response to the objects and documents from the Brookwood Hospital collection. The Lightbox worked with Woking Community Play Association to produce a cabaret performance, with performers including professional musicians, Woking Community Play Association members and project participants reading their own work.

The aim of the Woking Community Play Association is to bring Woking’s history to life on the stage, involving every part of the community. The Play Association works closely with community groups in all stages of the production of the plays from creative writing workshops to the final performance.

Workshops were run between December 2010 and March 2011, in which the selected pieces of writing were set to music and songs arranged. Other pieces of writing were chosen as short readings. The cabaret also featured photographs of the objects from the Collection which had inspired the creative writing. These were projected on to the wall behind and above the performers.

The project aimed to help participants to use creative writing as a way of deepening their understanding of the objects and documents in the collection, at the same time exploring both wider and more personal issues surrounding mental health.

The cabaret had two performances, one at The Lightbox and one at Surrey History Centre.

I never thought I could ever stand up
And speak in front of an invited audience
I have so enjoyed being part of this group
The rehearsals have been fun and over the weeks I have grown in confidence until I have reached the stage instead of being racked with fear of standing up in front of people to speak, I am going to really enjoy the performance.

Creative Evaluation piece by participant, Speaking Our Minds
What were the benefits?

**Heritage sites as special places**

“It’s a peaceful environment here and if you are stressed, it gives you a breathing space.”

Participant, Zigzag Stories

“Time for peaceful contemplation in quiet and beautiful surroundings...”

Project lead, Big Issues Project

**An enjoyable social experience**

“It was lovely to be in the Museum and to be part of things, not just see it on TV.”

Participant, Zigzag Stories

**A positive learning environment**

“They shared a new learning experience in which they felt their ideas and opinions were valued and contributed to the group in a mutually beneficial way.”

Project lead, Big Issues Project

“One participant] has been a revelation. He had no interest in history or photography and he only came along as his girlfriend wanted him to join our merry band. He ended up by asking... the professional photographer how he could best use the light and in what way for his pictures and is so into it all now.”

Group leader, Looking About Us

“It was also important to have access to stimulating historical collections and encouragement to go somewhere they might not have gone before. Their self-confidence was boosted and ability to go into other venues, how to use the museum and gallery, how to make sense of the surroundings and feel that your interpretation is valid.”

Partner, Zigzag Stories
Enjoyment, Inspiration and Creativity

The project delivered benefits in terms of doing something creative, having a sense of achievement and trying out something new.

“[A participant] really wants to look into her traveller heritage more and has joined a special website for this purpose. Without the Surrey History Centre, she would never have thought about this.”
Group leader, Looking About Us

“[One participant] seemed to discover an interest in fashion and although [she] had a broken foot for most of the trips, never gave up.”
Group leader, Looking About Us

“When enthused, this changes participants’ focus and mood and enhances creativity and opens people up in a positive way.”
Partner, Zigzag Stories

“There’s a story behind everybody’s eyes…”

“The jewellery is beautiful. Some of the objects have given me direction for my own ideas.”

“The project has inspired me to use pastels, chalks, crayons and be more experimental.”
Participants, Zigzag Stories

Countering stereotypes

“This gave me focus and an objective. It encouraged me to work at home. It contributed to others’ understanding of mental health issues. It makes other people think the mentally ill are not useless. We can make a real contribution towards artistic appreciation.”
Participant, Zigzag Stories
Health and Wellbeing

Participants and their group leaders reflected on the positive impact of the project on their health and wellbeing.

For some, it was about the therapeutic effect of making art: “...several individuals mentioned their feeling totally relaxed and absorbed when concentrating on drawing.”

Project lead, Big Issues Project

The encouragement and opportunity for self-expression were also important.

“It’s been good to have interaction and be encouraged. Great for someone who was not taught to read and write.”

Participant, Zigzag Stories

“Being part of a group like a touring dance troupe
Bringing life to my bones as I speak my mind
Enjoying the flow of the thoughts I’ve held for a while – locked behind a mask of happiness and a forbidding smile.”

Creative Evaluation piece, Participant, Speaking Our Minds

“I am in a shell when I am at home, when I am here the shell opens.”

Participant, Zigzag Stories

Recovery

There were also opportunities for life skills to be developed and built up.

“This project links up with small steps of recovery:

- getting to (an) appointment on time
- feeling part of something
- dealing with anxiety
- being accepted for who you are and working to schedule
- a springboard for future creative projects”

Partner, Zigzag Stories
Achievement
The quality of the work produced by the participants also shows their focus, engagement and co-operative approach. Several people were able to produce, perform and display work at a higher level than they had ever expected of themselves.

Confidence and Self Esteem
A major benefit of the project was seen to be improved confidence, linked to a sense of achievement and of participants’ work being valued.

“At the celebration launch I felt like a star and part of everything. It was a wonderful and strange feeling. Being able to do art was wonderful.”
Participant, Zigzag Stories

“The creative process has managed to help free the fear and do it among a group of people – I suffer from acute anxiety – it helps me hear my own voice… it connects me to musical instruments …violin, accordion, which are beautiful and soothing….”
Participant, Speaking Our Minds

“A feeling of belonging and being included in something is very positive. This is sometimes after having the experience of being actively excluded from many places.” Partner, Zigzag Stories

“For some people it has helped with their self esteem and also has given them a way of improving their depression through social interaction and creativity.”
Partner, Big Issues Project
What are the next steps?

Guildford Heritage Service has found that the participants and partner organisations are keen to continue with the project. There are ideas for extending it, visiting other sites and producing a jointly created art work. It is seen as important for sustainability that the partnership can be maintained within existing budgets and it is increasingly recognised within the service that this is a key part of its work. Future sessions are planned to include collections and exhibitions officers and links with other colleagues.

The Lightbox will continue to work with the existing group and hope to extend to new people who have been engaged through the project. Their creative writing responses will be used within a planned exhibition, as readings on screen, or in audio points. Their work with people with mental health issues has been officially recognised within the Borough Council as contributing to fulfilling their remit for working towards inclusion in Woking.

Surrey History Centre is about to begin a linked project, Revisiting Archives. This will continue to focus on the Brookwood collection, working with small groups and including recorded interviews with mental health workers. The heritage visits can be extended to more sites within Surrey, using the Surrey Museums Committee as the link with the Woking Mind group. They are planning to purchase cameras in order to continue with the same method. Surrey History Centre will also help Woking Mind to develop funding bids, for example, for a project based on a heritage football tournament in connection with the Olympic and Paralympic Games, 2012.

Watts Gallery now has an established partnership with The Cellar in Godalming. The Art group meets regularly and there are plans for Watts Gallery to run short projects three times over a year. As yet the funding is uncertain but the new link with Cellar and the evidence that has been built up by past work should serve to give a strong grounding to future bids.
Who are the main contacts?

Project managers:
The Surrey, East and West Sussex Mental Health Project (2008-2011) was researched, managed and developed by Sonia Rasbery and Jocelyn Goddard throughout its phases. Both have expertise in working with a wide variety of non-traditional museum audiences and a background in developing, managing and evaluating projects.

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What other information is available?

Health and Social Care Bill

No Health Without Mental Health

Adult care budgets/ personal budgets
Think Local, Act Personal: New sector-wide partnership agreement for transforming adult social care
www.puttingpeoplefirst.org.uk/_library/PPF/NCAS/Partnership_Agreement_final_29_October_2010.pdf

Big Society
www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/big-society

NEF – 5 ways to wellbeing
www.neweconomics.org/projects/five-ways-well-being

Arts in Health: national resource for creativity and health
www.cultureandwellbeing.org.uk

South East Public Health Observatory
www.sepho.org.uk/

Surrey health and wellbeing commissioning

Inspiring Learning
www.inspiringlearning.org.uk

Happy Museum
www.happymuseumproject.org/
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Surrey History Centre and Woking Mind
The Lightbox and Woking Community Play Association
Watts Gallery and The Cellar Art Group at The Cellar Café

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