Methodological investigations in capturing the impact of museum activities on older men, living with mental illness.

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Background to project

Museums are increasingly positioning themselves as providers of therapeutic experiences for older people and their carers. There is a need amongst the sector to find ways to evaluate this work and to communicate its value to different stakeholders.

This project was an exploration of methods for evaluating a program of activities with older men with mental health issues previously developed by the project partners. The team sought to find unobtrusive methods that would not affect impact of the program.

The project was jointly funded by ISR and the Institute for Ageing.

What did you do?

The focus of this project was a Men’s Group programme delivered by Beamish to a small group of older men with different mental health conditions. The programme incorporated conversation and meaningful activity in Orchard Cottage, pictured, in 6 weekly sessions. University staff, museum staff & an occupational therapist worked together to devise a combination of people-centred non-obtrusive evaluation methods, which provided insight into the impact the programme had on the participants. This involved a structured observational tool, which was used during sessions, lifestory narrative interviews and diaries. University staff worked with the museum staff on the analysis and interpretation of the collected materials.

What difference did it make?

The project enabled staff at Beamish Museum to look differently at their own practices and to hear the men’s perceptions of the sessions. The project has reinforced the importance of their role as facilitators and the value of the sessions. The project provided a training opportunity for the museum staff & promoted discussion within the museum around evaluation & impact. The project had a positive impact on the participants themselves. They valued the opportunity to take part in the Men’s Group and the chance to take part in a research project which might make a positive impact on other people’s lives. Details of the project were also shared at an Allied Health Professional Trust-wide conference.

“It has been a good example to share with others at the Museum about the different ways that the Museum can be used to support health and wellbeing, rather than just ‘reminiscing about the old days’ and that these benefits are not exclusively for older people.”

Michelle Kindleysides, Health & Wellbeing Coordinator, Beamish Museum