Who Cares?
Museums, health and wellbeing

A collaboration between health professionals, six major museums and art galleries in the North West of England and researchers from the Psychosocial Research Unit at the University of Central Lancashire.

Renaissance North West has coordinated and funded the Who Cares? programme.
Foreword by Dr Jane Whittaker and Sandra Hibbert

Introduction to the Who Cares? Museums, health and wellbeing programme

Tullie House Museum and Art Gallery, Carlisle

The Harris Museum and Art Gallery, Preston

Bolton Library and Museum Services

The Manchester Museum

The Whitworth Art Gallery

Manchester Art Gallery

The Who Cares? research: what can museums do for health and wellbeing?

Contacts

Resources
We urge health professionals, whether in the NHS, voluntary, public or private sectors, to make alliances with museums and galleries in order to use the remarkable resources that they can bring to our work.

The Who Cares? collaboration between the Whitworth Art Gallery, the Royal Manchester Children’s Hospital and Manchester Hospitals Schools Service has opened up the enormous potential of museums and galleries to enhance the health and wellbeing of patients and staff.

In the hospital we sometimes forget and think of the community as being ‘out there’ but these projects remind us that the Gallery thinks of us as part of the community! We were thrilled that the Whitworth wanted to reach out to us at Royal Manchester Children’s Hospital and Manchester Hospitals School.

It has been of great benefit for patients and staff to leave the hospital and work with the Gallery’s collections and exhibitions and for the Gallery to become part of the Hospital and School. Some of our staff have attended Continuing Professional Development days at the Whitworth which included meeting with curators as well as objects. They have reminded us that there are many different ways of viewing our patients and that there is much more to patients than their illness.

Our patients have used the Gallery as a space to explore ways of interacting with the world. Galaxy House (part of the Children’s Hospital) has become an exhibition space for the Gallery. Art helps health professionals see beyond the illness and reminds the patient that they are still a person.

Dr Jane Whittaker
Consultant Psychiatrist, Galaxy House, Central Manchester Foundation Trust, Royal Manchester Children’s Hospital

Sandra Hibbert
Head of Manchester Schools Hospital and Home Teaching Services
This booklet outlines the work carried out by the six participating museums in the Who Cares? Museums health and wellbeing programme. It also describes some of the emerging themes in the research about the programme carried out by the University of Central Lancashire.

The 2010 BBC Radio 4 series A History of the World in 100 Objects has revealed the strong presence of objects in our imaginations. Even when the radio listeners could not see the objects which were described in the programmes they became lodged in our minds and taken in as a kind of inner object. For centuries museums have used objects for learning but their hold on our imaginations and hence our inner life is less exploited. The Who Cares? programme has been tapping into this phenomenon and revealing how museum collections can be used to enhance health and wellbeing.

One reason why the radio programmes were so powerful is that we are well rehearsed since infancy in holding objects in mind. A visitor to a museum encounters objects which evoke all sorts of associations, not necessarily pleasant. These associations can be harnessed by skilled museum and health professionals to enrich a person’s experience.

One of the British Museum’s One Hundred Objects is an eighth century Mayan relief which depicts a royal blood-letting ceremony. A prominent psychotherapist, Susie Orbach, was asked to comment on the relief from the perspective of today and she draws parallels between the ceremony and the practice of self harm. Dare we make such connections between apparently remote museum objects and everyday harmful practices of the 21st century? And where might they lead us? Can we use museum collections to explore our frightening depths as well as to remind us of beauty and resilience? What if museum resources were made more easily available to the population as a whole and their potential brought to the attention of health professionals? These are some of the questions that the Who Cares? programme set out to explore.

The programme is showing how museum activities can help to improve health and wellbeing. Some of the work is about enriching lives through handling objects, looking at art or making art. Other projects, when working closely with health professionals, directly addressed the participants’ mental state. The projects worked with community-based organisations such as a group for homeless people, health-based partners such as a young people’s psychiatric unit in a hospital and with residential and day care centres run by the public or private sector. The practitioners they worked with are psychiatrists, nurses, care workers, artists, community workers.

The work is an extension of the museums’ learning or outreach programmes to those who are unable to use the museum as other,
healthier, people can. It is part of the museums’ commitment to equality. In fact two things are emerging. Firstly, a specialist practice carried out by health professionals and museum staff which uses collections and museum spaces to run intensive programmes for small numbers of people which have overt therapeutic intentions. Secondly, a broader practice of using museums to enhance wellbeing through making the mainstream activities of museums more easily available to a wider population.

Museums are well versed in using objects to impart information, we are beginning to explore the way in which objects can enable people to find meaning. Unlike information, meaning cannot be given to people, we have to find it for ourselves, and it is the facilitation of this potentially transformative process that museums are now exploring.

Myna Trustram
Tullie House Museum and Art Gallery has been working in partnership with health care organisations to deliver a sustainable Arts in Health programme in Carlisle and District. The programme was for carers and their elderly clients (including those with dementia) in care settings. The aim was to use the collections and exhibitions to inspire creativity and enhance wellbeing. The focus was on developing the confidence of carers to run arts activities with clients. Volunteers from the museum supported the programme. A ‘Taster Day’ was held at the start of the programme, inviting health care professionals to find out about the programme. This gave a flavour of the programme and an idea of the health benefits of such activities. There were three strands to the programme:

1. Training for carers and volunteers in using different art forms to stimulate clients: arts and craft, poetry, and music and movement. For instance, an artist used the Pre-Raphaelite gallery to work with carers on sketching and silk painting. Starter packs about each art form were provided to enable carers to replicate activities after the training.

2. Six workshops were delivered by creative practitioners to day care centres and residential care homes in arts and craft, poetry, and music and movement. The practitioners used the museum collections for inspiration to devise activities for the clients to take part in. For instance, the Museum’s Carlisle Lives exhibition was a popular source of motifs for music and movement sessions: footballs, football scarves, banners and hats. The Museum’s holiday handling collection was used and music from the museum’s Amati violin was played. The creative practitioners provided mentoring for the carers.

3. Sharing and learning sessions, following the training and workshops, provided the opportunity for carers and volunteers to get together to discuss the impact of the programme on their practice as carers and volunteers and on them as individuals. These sessions were invaluable in giving feedback and taking the programme forward.

In previous programmes the museum had found that carers were unable to give sufficient time to the work. For Who Cares? the museum ensured that the carers were released from their normal duties in order to devote their full attention to the full programme of training, projects, mentoring and sharing.

The programme was evaluated through feedback forms, comments, photographs and video.

Susan Child and Angie Ball

“Fantastic words in poems that I would never have thought possible for someone with dementia.”

“It’s very therapeutic. The doctors had never heard about the Arts in Health programme and were really impressed with the effect it was having.”

“Morale booster for me, more confident, more motivated, boost to my self esteem. I’m proud of what we have achieved, the service users are proud of themselves, their families are amazed.”
In planning its health and wellbeing work the Harris used the findings from research which mapped arts and health provision in the area covered by Central Lancashire Primary Care Trust. The projects that developed were cultivated through close partnerships with local organisations and freelance community arts workers. They have all involved adults from vulnerable backgrounds.

The more vulnerable the group, the more difficult it was to deliver services at the Museum. Evaluation has shown that on these occasions, off-site delivery was in itself successful and that considerable time and nurturing is needed during the engagement process to generate enough confidence for vulnerable participants to venture into the Museum.

The Harris has carried out three projects for Who Cares?: with an NHS Mental Health Race Equality Team, with a disability equality information service charity and with a supported housing scheme. The first two projects went very well but since more can often be learnt from difficulties than successes, we have chosen to describe the latter project.

Foundations is a housing scheme in Preston for people experiencing homelessness and takes referrals from adults that are registered with Preston City Council. The Harris initially organised eight sessions with a performance poet, Chanje Kunda. The aim was to help the participants to develop social and life skills, confidence and self-esteem in order to help them move towards volunteering or employment. Two introductory sessions were held at Foundations, with the others planned to take place at the Museum. The plan was for the group to meet with decorative art, fine art, social history and contemporary art curators, to view collections and then use this experience as a catalyst for creative writing with Chanje. The group came to the first session supported by their key worker, to view a contemporary exhibition by the artist Simon Faithful. However, future sessions took place at Foundations because of the constraints posed by the shift patterns of the key worker and therefore their regular availability. This led to misunderstandings about the schedule and the intentions of the project.

The subsequent sessions were very effective and so an additional four sessions were held to work towards producing a booklet of poetry. The booklet intertwines poems by the participants and illustrations of objects from the Museum’s collection.

“I am suffering from disability and depression, I need to attend all possible group sessions and day centres to avoid isolation. This helps me to get out of my house, integrate, socialise and make friends.”
The Who Cares? project at Bolton brought together participants with mild to moderate mental health issues who were referred by their GPs through a partner organisation called Active Health. A psychotherapist delivered arts and museum object based sessions over a course of 20 weeks for the participants, and mental health awareness training for curators.

Participants used the collections as a springboard for their own therapeutic and creative endeavours. For example, Egyptian masks were used to explore the masks individuals may feel compelled to wear in order to ‘fit in’. Making connections with the collections has been central to the work.

An enormous amount of pleasure was derived just from meeting and learning from the curators and handling collections. Participants have done various additional activities in the museum. One woman donated a piece of her artwork to the Aquarium; another is looking into volunteering; others come to public events; while several have signed up for the Saturday morning textile sessions. One member of the group gained so much confidence that she has now gone on to lead a jewellery making session. She has also joined an arts and craft group at her local library where she will take it in turns to lead and share her many talents.

What elements were vital?

- the five minute relaxation at the beginning of each session
- the ground rules including permission to express
- working at the participants’ pace when working with the collections
- reflecting at the end of each session.

What could have been done differently?

- clearer information available to participants about the aims and objectives of the sessions and a flavour of the course, prior to enrolling and for partners promoting the sessions
- the initial questionnaires used by health partners could be a little more probing in order to refer patients to the most suitable courses for them
- volunteers able to commit time on a regular basis.

Lory Povah
The Manchester Museum has long been delivering activities that promote people’s health and wellbeing, so we were well placed to initiate the two projects which were our contribution to Who Cares? At the heart of both projects was a creative course, and both used the collection and curatorial knowledge to inspire creative responses from participants.

The participants of ‘Integrated Inspiration’ visited collection stores with curators, examining and learning about objects, from ancient coins to butterflies. They then wrote both group and individual poems under the direction of performance poet Chanje Kunda. An anthology of the poems was published and some of the participants performed their poems at events held at the Museum. Some of the poems were displayed, alongside the artefacts that inspired them, in cabinets at the Manchester Royal Infirmary.

‘Health Rocks’ took inspiration from the Museum’s fossils, rocks and minerals collections. For this course too, participants spent time with curators and collections, finding inspiration from the aesthetics and the sense of meaning that the specimens carry. The artwork produced by participants, in the form of hand-made books, was displayed in the minerals gallery at the Museum with objects from the Museum’s collection. Through mindfulness and ‘wellbeing five a day’ exercises led by course tutors from Start (part of Manchester Mental Health and Social Care Trust), a wellbeing trail was created based in the pre-historic life galleries. The trail leaflet encourages visitors to explore the fossils gallery through the five wellbeing actions: connect, be active, take notice, keep learning and give. Each action focuses on a specific object in the gallery.

Both projects worked with local people and museum volunteers. Health Rocks also involved service users from Start and people were openly recruited to Integrated Inspiration. It was promoted through drop-ins, self-support group leaders, an open day at Zion Community Health Centre and Job Centre Plus staff. Interested people were then invited to a taster day and subsequently signed up to the course.

Self-referral is an interesting route to take for a museum, particularly when working under the theme of health as it gives the participants control in decision making and a stronger commitment to remain involved, which can have a positive effect on an individual’s sense of wellbeing.

Some people from the Integrated Inspiration project have continued with their writing and published poems in local newsletters. The group continues to meet informally at the museum once a month.

For further details of the projects please visit the museum website http://www.museum.manchester.ac.uk/whatson/exhibitions/healthrocks/

“I have started writing again after a long period of depression and poor mental health. I have found the course a wonderful opportunity to meet other people with similar interests and to increase my self confidence.”
The Whitworth Art Gallery

The Whitworth Art Gallery’s partnership with Manchester Schools Hospital Service began with a strand of work called ‘Creativity and the Curriculum’, a collaborative arts and health project delivered at the Leo Kelly Centre. This is an innovative centre that offers full-time education to primary and secondary pupils who are out of school with long term illnesses, including mental health problems and pregnant schoolgirls. Students visited the gallery and were introduced to exhibitions and artworks, and used these as stimuli to explore their own identities.

This was followed by an Arts and Health Mentoring Scheme. Volunteer undergraduates from Manchester’s universities were trained in mentoring by ReachOut! (a mentoring charity) and then made weekly visits to children on the renal, neuro rehabilitation and oncology wards and the residential psychiatric unit. Engaging in creative activities and accessing the Gallery’s handling resources, children are able, even if only for a short while, to forget about the medical interventions they may be experiencing.

Our final strand of work within the Who Cares? initiative was ‘Healing the Hospital Environment’. This aimed to transform the clinical environment of Galaxy House, the residential psychiatric unit at Manchester Children’s Hospital, into a warm, welcoming, and colourful space. Through consultation, collaboration and consent a 16 week programme of artist led workshops and creative mentoring activities enabled artists to work with the children, their families and staff at Galaxy House. They have made artworks and environmental pieces to enhance the unit.

The Gallery commissioned an Artist in Residence, Lucy Burscough to work within the unit. Responding to and inspired by the Whitworth’s collections Lucy produced two murals in the children’s living and games rooms. She continues her residency and is currently making portraits of the children for the exhibition ‘Who Cares? If you only see the illness, you miss the person’ 26 March – 21 June 2011.

Wendy Gallagher

“We have a selective mute student who is totally engaged with the media/art project. Animated, smiling and talking to the undergraduate students and happy to be filmed. This showed real progress in terms of her involvement and engagement.”

Stephanie Burke, Head of Creative Learning, Manchester Schools Hospital Service.

Marion Thomas, Ofsted Lead Inspector

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Stephanie Burke, Head of Creative Learning, Manchester Schools Hospital Service.
Manchester Art Gallery developed projects with health sector partners, working with adults and young people with mental health issues.

These projects aimed to:
★ encourage participants to see the Gallery as a place for them
★ use collections as a focus for discussion and as inspiration
★ help people connect with one another
★ provide transferable skills
★ provide a chance to work through an artistic process
★ aid the development of self-reliance and coping strategies

One such project was ‘Say it with’, an arts and wellbeing course on the theme of flowers. It was run in partnership with Start Manchester, part of Manchester Mental Health and Social Care Trust and an organisation that has been a partner for Manchester Art Gallery for some time.

Participants included people who had been referred to Start and people from another community group. It was a deliberate attempt to offer an art course that was also a social opportunity, particularly for those who feel anxious in social situations.

The course ran for twelve weekly sessions and included art appreciation, drawing, creative writing, paper mosaic, printing and ceramics. Participants and curators explored the symbolism of flowers in art and the medicinal properties of plants. The participants made ceramic tiles featuring their poetry and flower images and these were displayed at the gallery.

The Gallery is also taking collections into a hospital. Objects from the Mary Greg collection of everyday domestic objects have been taken to the Young Oncology Unit at the Christie Hospital. The sessions sought to engage young people with cancer related illnesses in discussion and creative activities. They allowed participants to be ‘young people’ first and foremost as opposed to ‘patients’.

The Gallery has also developed a partnership with Wigan Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS). Young people who attend therapy at Wigan CAMHS came to the gallery once a month, with a psychiatrist, to look at and discuss artworks chosen on particular themes. The themes related to those used in the group therapy sessions that the young people attend, such as relationships, identity or bullying. The young people also worked with artists to explore art materials and techniques and learn about the creative process.

Staff from the Gallery and staff from the mental health service had different approaches to working with groups which made the work initially challenging. Despite the drawing up of a detailed partnership agreement at the outset, work had to be done along the way to clarify staff roles, project goals and ways of working.

The projects allowed gallery staff to explore in-depth what galleries and museums can offer to people with health issues. This work sits comfortably alongside other learning work that the Gallery undertakes which is about widening access and giving people high quality experiences of engaging with collections and historic buildings, and opportunities for creativity. The difference with this work is down to building successful partnerships with health staff where strategic and ideological objectives are aligned in ways that are sensitive to people’s particular health needs.

Leisa Gray
The Psychosocial Research Unit at the University of Central Lancashire investigated a series of inventive Who Cares? projects across the six museums in order to discover how access to museum activities might affect health and wellbeing. A key conclusion is that the programme has revealed great potential. It has shown that collections can be made available to disadvantaged groups in ways that can improve wellbeing.

The study asked what can museums offer that is distinct from other cultural activity? It also tried to identify the specific significance of museum collections for particular groups. For example it may be obvious that a homeless adult will use a museum differently to a sick young person, but working with those differences requires attentiveness from museum staff and their partners. Creating the conditions for such attentiveness and communication with partners is key to developing successful and sustainable projects.

Unfamiliarity with the needs of groups provoked imaginative responses from museum staff. There was evidence everywhere of sensitive and thoughtful work, but it is important to stress that this was emotional labour. People running projects were often uncertain and unsettled; some experienced anxiety; some identified with participants, some went home and cried. Some people appeared to be carrying through taxing programmes with little day-to-day workplace collaboration or supervision. In most cases staff showed considerable ‘staying power’ and the work proved productive, but it revealed the importance of good support. The quarterly Who Cares? network meetings provided a valuable opportunity for reflection and exchange of experiences, as did the research and evaluation process. A key recommendation of this research is that this sort of work requires staff support structures that respond to the personal as well as the professional impact of the work.

Many of the projects employed artists who introduced visual art, crafts, poetry and performance into the projects. Generally these relationships worked well with a shared understanding of objectives. In particular, there was appreciation of the ways in which participants might relate imaginatively to the properties and qualities of objects (including artworks) and how this imaginative relation could be a route to communication and enhanced self-awareness.

Some partnerships were already well-established, others were initiated for Who Cares? Established relationships with health and social care professionals which had evolved over time enabled work of sophistication and depth. However with some newer partnerships there were misunderstandings and difficulties in communication where objectives and priorities between museum staff and partners appeared to conflict. Where there were no partners, the need for them was revealed when staff encountered behaviours to which they were uncertain how to respond, or where those behaviours were in tension with the needs of other museum users. The problems encountered indicate the importance of careful preparation and inter-professional working. Despite presenting challenges and requiring time and patience, sound partnerships are central to sustainable practice in this area. Work targeted at specific groups is labour-intensive and unlikely to be a funding priority in a period of financial stringency.
Most projects were oriented to mental health and well-being, but serious illness, physical disability and social exclusion were also represented. Accessibility of buildings and collections was an issue for all groups, whether activities were on or off-site. Museums are iconic local representatives of high culture. The projects provided a point of entry and mediation, though for some groups such as homeless people this was more problematic than others. There is much work to be done to improve accessibility, and while the use of collections, displays and exhibitions is central to this work, some groups have needs which need to be addressed through direct relationships with people. Working with partners to develop relational skills in museum and art gallery staff and the recruitment and training of volunteers will be key to providing the relational context for this work.

Museum objects were used in a variety of ways by participants: as a source of information, a means to familiarise themselves with the institution, a cultural resource that connected them to local histories and identities. This form of relation can be thought of as connectivity which imparts a sense of access to a shared culture. However, of particular importance to some was the opportunity for a more personalised, intimate relation to objects which generated a sense of attachment. Attachment relations are facilitated by work which allows an embodied relation to the objects such as handling (when possible). Attachment entails identification with the object and happens when an object is ‘chosen’ for its personal significance. Such objects were played with and came ‘alive’ for participants during creative work. For example, poetry was written from the perspective of the object. Imaginative identification with objects extends tactile and/or visual responses and emotional range. However, it also involves greater risk, exposing loss and longing. This can be difficult material for museum staff and artists to work with. It demands a secure group environment and careful attention to process.

Group work skills proved essential and participants benefited from being part of a group. Some participants used the attachment they developed to museum objects as a route to communicating personally with other group members. In particular, the objects allowed participants to bring up difficult issues for sharing with the group that may otherwise have remained buried. This sharing also enabled the group to bond over shared fears and hopes, and forge group identities. The relationship with artists and with staff was also important, and participants spoke of staff as new ‘friends’ who enhanced the museum and gallery experience. These relationships pose new challenges and opportunities for museum staff who need to develop skills and knowledge in areas such as mental health.

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These are some of the resources used to develop the Who Cares? programme.

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Museums for changing lives
Renaissance in the Regions is the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council’s (MLA) national £300 million programme to transform England’s regional museums. For the first time ever, investment from central government is helping regional museums across the country to raise their standards and deliver real results in support of education, learning, community development and economic regeneration. Renaissance is helping museums to meet people’s needs and to change people’s lives.

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