Inspiring Futures: Volunteering for Wellbeing

Executive Summary
2013 – 2016
Social Return on Investment
Introduction by lead partners

IWM North part of Imperial War Museums and Manchester Museum have worked in partnership since 2006. In March 2013 we were successful in a new application to the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) to develop and deliver Inspiring Futures: Volunteering for Wellbeing (if). This unique project was delivered across ten heritage venues to collectively achieve improvement, consistency and quality in volunteering practice as a key route to transforming wellbeing.

We set ourselves ambitious goals in terms of evaluation. We wanted to measure the impact and value of this project and evidence the effectiveness of socially responsible volunteering practices for improving wellbeing, and reducing social and economic isolation. To do this we chose to work with Envoy Partnership to carry out a longitudinal study following a Social Return on Investment methodology.

Through evaluation and identifying our stakeholder outcomes we have developed if into a leading example of a project that has been committed to learning and evidencing whether its activities had a sustainable impact, and a social return over time.

In addition to this report the project has also developed a website that provides further information, films, case studies, evaluation reports and a good practice guide which draws on extensive experience of setting up and delivering socially engaged volunteer programmes. www.volunteeringforwellbeing.org.uk

We are delighted to present this evaluation report which reveals that, over the past three years, significant evidence has been collected to demonstrate that museums and galleries can be highly effective settings for addressing social needs and supporting essential services to unlock improvements in public health and wellbeing.

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Executive Summary

From October 2013 – December 2016 IWM North and Manchester Museum delivered a volunteering, training and placement programme across 10 heritage venues in Greater Manchester. The project, Inspiring Futures: Volunteering for Wellbeing, or if for short, can be viewed as an exemplar in partnership working to tackle wellbeing inequalities.

The project led to improved quality of life and life satisfaction amongst people who were from disadvantaged backgrounds. This report demonstrates that museums and galleries can:

- be highly effective settings for supporting local services to improve peoples’ wellbeing
- improve pathways to meaningful life opportunities in the community

“We used our unique galleries, collections and staff expertise as the main sources of training, inspiration and learning.”

if TEAM

The if model has been unique in providing both a stimulating and reflective environment in tackling social isolation and wellbeing inequalities. It helps people from disadvantaged or vulnerable backgrounds to believe in themselves. This project increases confidence and self-worth and most importantly it helps people realise their full potential to take that next step in supporting their own wellbeing.

For at least 75% of participants, it has helped transform their lives or positively change their perception of their own abilities and skills.

The project trained and supported 231 participants from Greater Manchester into volunteering positions within museums. There was a specific aim to focus on recruitment of young people aged 18-25, older people aged 50+ and armed forces veterans.

Participant recruitment was aimed at people who were long term unemployed or facing low-level mental wellbeing challenges and/or social isolation.
The evaluation has demonstrated significant improvements in participants’ mental and emotional health. It has led to improvements in their creativity, aspirations, life satisfaction, social connections and reductions in stress. The programme has also led to increased levels of volunteering and citizenship, changed attitudes to museums and heritage settings, and attitudes to participating in volunteering projects. Additionally, over 30% of participants have been inspired to secure entry to further education, or to gain paid employment. In this area if compares well with many other “in to work” projects, even though employment is not the core focus of if.

For example, the previous government’s “Work Programme” job conversion target was 11.9%. Currently, the new “Work and Health” programme (DWP) considers an ambitious 30-40% conversion target.

The tracking of participants’ outcomes in the long term shows that, on average, participants benefit for three years. In total, we estimate that the project has generated social and economic value of approximately £2 million across the three years, once the impact of other partners has been considered. £557,200 was invested over the three years of the project. This means that approximately £3.50 of social and economic return is created for £1 invested.

“This evaluation tells us that for every £1 invested, this programme generates £3.50 in social and economic value.”

10 museums & galleries in Greater Manchester embarked on a three year project
231 local people recruited over three years
75% in receipt of a benefit allowance
Over 75% report a significant increase in wellbeing after a year
Almost 60% report long term sustained wellbeing improvement over 2-3 years
30% gained employment or other new opportunities for getting into work

“We wanted to find out how volunteering in heritage could help people at risk of isolation, and who were struggling with unemployment, mental health or disability.”

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ROYAL SOCIETY OF ARTS ARTICLE - ‘NETWORKED HERITAGE - GREATER MANCHESTER: DEVOLVING HERITAGE TO CITIZENS’ NOVEMBER 2016

£1

“Volunteering for Wellbeing programme...builds skills and confidence in participants through working with heritage materials, addressing the critical issue of social isolation through a supported programme of volunteering experience and personal development. There is a clear opportunity for a region recently in receipt of a £6bn public health budget to take note of the very real impact these cultural heritage projects, and others like them across GM, are making.”

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A small portion of the value created is for local care services, housing providers, and central government. Value was also created for the partner venues who gained well-trained volunteers and increases in operational capacity. This has led to improvements in access to the collections for visitors. In total Manchester venues have gained an estimated additional 30,000 hours of volunteering to date; this includes the hours volunteered by participants who continue volunteering with the museums after completing their placements; (47% of the hours were volunteered in this way, c. 110 in total).

**Over 30% of participants have been inspired to secure entry to further education, training opportunities or to gain paid employment.**

The improvement in health and wellbeing among participants has led to interest from Central Manchester Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG). The CCG wants to explore the possibility of a future project where patients are referred via their GPs. This reflects how the if model can present innovative and joined-up solutions to tackling local health and wellbeing challenges. Such a project would then help alleviate resource pressures on local health and care and support services in Manchester. At the same time the project has changed perceptions about galleries and museums as assets for recuperation and improving health.

Volunteers’ wellbeing was measured over a three year period, using a number of wellbeing indicators, some drawn from the National Accounts of Wellbeing and some from the Warwick Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (WEMWBS). Figure A shows that, before participating in the project, participants’ levels of wellbeing are significantly below the national average. On completion of the training and placement programme, participant wellbeing increases on par with the national average. It also shows improvements across the different areas of wellbeing in later years, especially around self-confidence, sense of purpose, and sense of belonging.

Volunteers became inspired by the programme, and gained a real sense of direction around taking part in activity or work in the future, and a greater belief in their ability to contribute. They were supported by training content around application processes and presentation of self to others. Many volunteers were inspired to continue volunteering beyond the full 16-week training and placement experience.

The evaluation also measured participants’ perceptions over three years on whether they had learned new skills, improved knowledge transfer, and improved their overall employability because of participating in if. There are improvements for volunteers across their skills and volunteering. Figure B shows that some of the largest changes are about developing new skills attractive to other employers, gaining a sense of direction about work, and transferring new knowledge to others.

“**I’ve gained more confidence, had none before, it all came from alcohol and now it comes from socialising and mixing**”

“If Volunteer

“**Has the course changed my life? Yes, and more. It has actually given me back my life, a life seemingly lost to lack of hope and depression. I am the real Me again**”

“If Volunteer

“**Family have noticed significant improvement in my mental health, and are very proud of me because they doubted I’d be able to cope**”

“If Volunteer
Q: “The following statements (summarised in graph) are about your general level of Life Satisfaction and Wellbeing that may or may not have resulted from the if volunteering programme. Please rate how often you feel each statement happens for you” (Attribution scored separately)

No.=57 (baseline, BEFORE if), No.=36 (Years 1, 2 & 3)

Q: “The following questions (summarised in graph) are about your view on further Volunteering and Employability that may or may not be a result of the programme. Please rate your level of agreement with these statements” (Attribution scored separately)

No.=57 (baseline, BEFORE if), No.=36 (Years 1, 2 & 3)
The destination of if volunteers after the project was measured. This is shown in Figure C; c.28% of participants progressed to employment or employment training e.g. a place on a project, traineeship or work experience.

Improvements in employment and employability are particularly valuable. In Greater Manchester, the number of unemployed people has increased by c.55% since 2008, to around 132,300 by 2014-15. Youth and long-term unemployment have been rising most dramatically. There is therefore an increasing need for projects that can support people into work.

Most participants were receiving financial support because of their employment status. 75% of the if cohort were in receipt of a welfare allowance. Of those, 33% met the criteria for Disability Living Allowance (DLA) or Employment Support Allowance (ESA). This indicates a number of complex needs. Poor mental health is strongly associated with social deprivation, low income, unemployment, poorer physical health and increased vulnerability. Economic inactivity can lead to further deterioration in health.

The research suggests that there are key benefits of volunteering in museums. In particular, participants’ interaction with visitors and with the museums’ collections leads to a strong sense of connectedness; participants feel connected to the local stories that are told in the museums. This connection to human experiences appears to lead to improved self-awareness, belonging, imagination and ability to relate better to others. Ultimately it can help improve social relationships for the participants.

**Museums and galleries can provide effective volunteering opportunities for individuals, particularly those facing disadvantage or with poor mental health and wellbeing. It shows that volunteering in museums and galleries can improve wellbeing, health and even lead to employment for the participants.**

In summary, this evaluation clearly demonstrates that museums and galleries can provide effective volunteering opportunities for individuals, particularly those facing disadvantage or with poor mental health and wellbeing. It shows that volunteering in museums and galleries can improve wellbeing, health, and even lead to employment for the participants. Finally, it demonstrates that museums and galleries can be key settings for “social prescribing” practices, and can play an important role in health recovery.

“…”This project works towards supporting our clients develop better self-esteem, a sense of contributing to others, a sense of purpose, developing more stability in their lives and hopefully it becomes a key part of getting paid employment.

As a result (for our client) there was less need for a support worker, previously they became dependent on having a support worker 10 hours a week, now reduced to 8 hours. The feedback we’ve got is they feel an increased autonomy, feeling safe and comfortable...We’ve not seen many things work this quickly...Making new connections on different levels inside of the museum has meant our client is more frequently speaking warmly of others.

(Our clients on if) may be bi-polar, or suffer from mood disorders, but being on the if volunteer programme has been stimulating, they’re really loving it…”

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**Figure C. if volunteer progression, post-project (%)**

- Employment: 20%
- Illness: 47%
- Volunteering: 14%
- Education: 8%
- Left: 2%
- Caring for Family: 2%
- Other Opportunity: 7%
• Cross-sector collaboration with local Mental Health teams, Clinical Commissioning Groups, health and wellbeing boards, social care and social housing; as well as exploring formalised partnerships with government programmes, e.g. Working Well (Greater Manchester Combined Authority) and Work & Health (Department for Work and Pensions).

• A continuation of peer support, amongst venue practitioners bringing about positive change in venue practices, as well as amongst volunteers. Peer support should be designed into the core of volunteer training/induction with a focus on mentoring; and continuation of regular best practice networking or knowledge transfer meetings amongst a growing partnership of venue co-ordinators.

• The economic benefit, especially for avoiding long-term adult social care, is potentially significant and this analysis should be further developed with other local research partners and services, including the University of Manchester.

• If evidence, delivery framework, and processes to be shared with i) local volunteer bodies and local commissioners, in order to promote proper planning of integrated, joined-up opportunities between Local Plan priorities and cultural (and natural) heritage assets; and also ii) national bodies affected by volunteering for wellbeing, such as National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO), Association of Chief Executives of Voluntary Organisations (ACEVO), the National Alliance for Museums, Health and Wellbeing, Heritage Volunteering Group (HVG), Heritage Lottery Fund, National Trust, Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS), and English Heritage.

• Venue commitment to invest in more volunteer co-ordinators and assistants as core roles to deliver superior visitor experiences, especially when connecting visitors and the venue to more diverse volunteer representation from the local community.

To read the full evaluation report or find out more about the programme please visit our website www.volunteeringforwellbeing.org.uk
About Social Return on Investment (SROI)

SROI is a form of evaluation that enables a better understanding of an organisation’s impact on people, the economy and the environment. It helps assess whether a project is good value for money and can help decision makers decide where to invest to maximise their impact. The project commissioned Social Return on Investment (SROI) consultants Envoy Partnership to find out exactly how the programme contributed to individual socio-economic wellbeing.

Envoy Partnership is an advisor in evidence-based research and evaluation, specialising in measuring and demonstrating the value of social, economic and environmental impacts. Envoy worked together with Gaby Porter, a Manchester-based heritage interpretation expert, supporting the development of engaging and sustainable heritage around the country and, Atiha Chaudry, Deputy-Lieutenant of Greater Manchester, founder of Equal Access consulting, and a local voluntary sector advocate across community development, BME networks, and public health.

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