Echoes of War: Somerset on the Home Front

Evaluation Report
This report evaluates the ‘Echoes of War’ project run by the South West Heritage Trust (SWHT) from March 2018–February 2019.

By looking at the programme of events and activities which were undertaken during the project we are able to reflect on the successes of the project and what we have learnt.
Echoes of War aimed to provide opportunities to learn about Somerset’s experience of the First World War on the Home Front, including food production and medical care through participating in a varied programme including:

- Volunteering
- School workshops
- Accessing learning resources
- Event days
- Talks
A First World War allotment with potting shed was created in the orchard of the Somerset Rural Life Museum.

Working with a volunteer to carry out primary research into food production and the home front during the First World War in Somerset, 8 interpretation panels were created to engage visitors with this significant part of the county’s heritage.

Research included ensuring that the correct varieties of produce were planted and consulting the minutes of the following boards held at the Somerset Heritage Centre:

- Somerset War Agricultural Executive Committee – Allotments and Gardens Sub-Committee
- Somerset County Council War Agricultural Committee
- Board of Agriculture and Fisheries
Unfortunately, we weren’t successful in our aim to work with Discovery. Despite a number of positive meetings with the group it was decided that the project didn’t meet their client’s needs and that the organisation didn’t have the resources to support the clients in these roles. It is hoped we may work with the group on other projects in the future.

We are continuing to work with other volunteers, however, to maintain the allotment.
From March – July a programme of workshops were held at the Somerset Rural Life Museum for teachers and pupils to engage with real historic artefacts as inspiration to create their own artwork exhibition.

The object was a guest book from Hinton House, which was turned in to a hospital during the First World War.

The exhibition was held at the museum and a local community arts centre, The Red Brick Building.

- 1413 pupils participated in the Take One Programme.
- 900 people visited the Red Brick Building during the period of the exhibition.
To commemorate the 100th anniversary of the end of the First World War the Museum of Somerset held an open workshop with artist Jon England to create a collaborative artwork on Remembrance Sunday.

The work was a continuation of a commission England had done for SWHT to commemorate the start of the First World War in 2014. Using poppy seeds and varnish visitors could add to the piece depicting a wreath similar to that on a war memorial with the caption ‘Every Seed a Life’.

221 visitors to the museum contributed to the artwork on the day.
Using both real and replica items a schools pack was created to enable GCSE students to learn about the First World War with a particular focus on medical care.

Items included in the box included:

- Video interview with author and Shell Shock specialist, Suzie Grogan.
- Transcripts of a soldier’s diary written in the trenches.
- Replica Gas Mask, toiletries and first aid material for use in the trenches.

The box was loaned to a local secondary school for use by Year 11 students as part of their GCSE history lessons. There are 192 students in the year who will have had access to the box.

The box continues to be part of the offer provided by the SWHT Learning Team for use by schools in the county.
On 12th May 2018 Somerset Rural Life Museum held a Living History day to celebrate the opening of our First World War allotment and to explore the impact of the war on those left at home.

- 264 visitors on the day.
- 90% agreed or strongly agreed that they had learnt about what life was like for the people of Somerset during World War One.
- 95% agreed or strongly agreed that they understand more about the roles of women and children in Somerset during the First World War.
- 83% agreed or strongly agreed that they had learnt about local food production during the First World War.

On the evening of 6th November the Museum of Somerset played host to historian Peter Hart. 40 attendees heard Hart speak on the fighting on the Western Front in the final 6 weeks of the Great War in 1918.
Echoes of War: Somerset on the Home Front has been a successful project in a number of ways:

- In total 18,905 people have engaged with the project activities and had an enjoyable experience.
- Volunteers have had the opportunity to develop new skills and take pride and enjoyment from their work.
- We have engaged with a wide range of audiences from the local community.
- Our visitors have developed their understanding of life in rural Somerset during the First World War.
- Local schools have had the opportunity to engage with real objects from the First World War.

For future projects we would like to develop how we work with the Discovery group to best support their needs. We would also like to engage a wider group of volunteers to carry out similar research work.