Improving Futures: Volunteers take the lead at IWM North

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The three-year project, Improving Futures: Volunteering For Wellbeing, will build on the huge success of the previously HLF-funded In Touch project which, as part of its evaluation, highlighted the need for greater public involvement and volunteer opportunities at key heritage venues across Greater Manchester. It also highlighted the potential heritage volunteering has to change people's lives.

The new Improving Futures project is a life changing social learning programme, which uses the heritage assets of IWM North, Manchester Museum, Museum of Science and Industry and other partner venues to help volunteers move away from social and economic isolation. It will provide personal development opportunities to those who need help reintegrating into society.

225 people from a diverse range of backgrounds - including people between the ages of 16-25 and over 50 years old, as well as ex-service personnel - will be given the chance to become volunteers and benefit from a bespoke training programme accredited by Manchester College. They will get the chance to work with some of the most prestigious heritage venues in the North West, including the Whitworth Art Gallery, Manchester City Galleries, People's History Museum, Manchester Jewish Museum, Dunham Massey and Ordsall Hall. These venues in turn will be able to cultivate a valuable volunteer base that will enhance the visitor experience and provide access and interpretation to the collections.

This is the first major project to measure the impact of responsible volunteering in the heritage sector on health and wellbeing, exploring how it can combat social and economic isolation. IWM North and Manchester Museum hope the project will demonstrate enormous benefits to volunteers, museums and society.

Learning opportunities forming the core of this project will include a varied range of heritage training courses, work placements at the selected venues, volunteer-to-volunteer mentoring, and the chance to visit and learn from a range of national and local heritage venues. The scheme will help to create three new posts and a paid internship placement, who will work across both Manchester Museum and IWM North.

Sara Hilton, Head of Heritage Lottery Fund North West, said: "The Improving Futures project provides a unique opportunity to create a diverse and highly-skilled volunteer workforce in Greater Manchester. We at HLF know the far-reaching benefits volunteer time, dedication and passion can bring to heritage organisations and we are committed to providing participants with the skills and knowledge they need to make a real difference. This is an inspiring project that should be used as an example for heritage venues across the UK."

Graham Boxer, Director of IWM North, said: "We are delighted to have Heritage Lottery Fund support. Together with the support of so many partners across Greater Manchester we will recruit and provide opportunities for participants to volunteer, find work and learn more. Improving Futures: Volunteering for Wellbeing represents an exciting opportunity to continue our pioneering work developing inspiring volunteering opportunities, training and support to individuals who might not normally visit and engage with museums. We can now take this further by developing robust evidence of how volunteering in museums can change people's lives and support wellbeing, as well as practical tools for advocacy and

supporting other heritage organisations developing their own volunteering practice."

Nick Merriman, Director of Manchester Museum, said: "This is fantastic news for the Manchester Museum, IWM North, our partners and the wider sector. Improving Futures will have a significant impact on the organisations it involves, transform the lives of those we engage and create a lasting legacy for heritage volunteering. At the Manchester Museum, the project encompasses our core values, ambitious plans and commitment to engaging communities with our unique collections. We are delighted to receive the support of the HLF to capatilse on learnt experiences and take the lead with our partners on the development of socially engaged volunteer programmes."

Kate Green MP, said: "I'm really pleased that IWM North and Manchester Museum have received this grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund, which makes it possible for the museums to run the Improving Futures Programme. Volunteering is so important and benefits both the local community and the volunteer themselves. Volunteers can help make new friends, learn new skills, advance their career, and even stay healthy. It's great that IWM North and Manchester Museum are giving the opportunity for people in Trafford, Manchester and beyond to get involved in this exciting volunteer and learning project."

The multi award-winning IWM North is designed by world-renowned architect Daniel Libeskind to represent a globe shattered by conflict and explores how war shapes people's lives from the First World War to the present day. Manchester Museum is one of the UK's great regional museums and the country's largest University museum, all of its collections are designated by the government as being of national and international importance. Both have established and successful volunteer programmes already in place however this project will enable them to expand them and allow them to work much closer with the volunteers.

Notes to editors

The In Touch project, funded through an HLF grant of £424,500 in 2006, helped Manchester Museum and IWM North diversify and expand their existing volunteer groups and engage with new audiences. Approximately 200 people from Salford, Trafford and Manchester took part in a ten week training course to develop their literacy, learning and employment skills.

IWM North: IWM (Imperial War Museums) tells the story of people who have lived, fought and died in conflicts involving Britain and the Commonwealth since the First World War. Our unique collections, made up of the everyday and the exceptional, reveal stories of people, places, ideas and events. The multi award winning IWM North, in Manchester, was designed by world-renowned architect Daniel Libeskind to represent a globe shattered by conflict. The iconic building, innovative and dynamic exhibitions, use of digital media through hourly Big Picture Shows and public events explore how war shapes lives and inspire and encourage debate. Since 2002, IWM North's innovative and award-winning Volunteer Programme has provided training and skills to hundreds of people who have needed help reintegrating into society - including people who are long term unemployed, loan parents, young people in danger of exclusion, people with disabilities and refugees. It was the first programme of its kind in the cultural field and has attracted wide interest from central government and regional agencies to international cultural venues.

Manchester Museum: Manchester Museum is the UK's largest university museum and all of its collections are designated by the government as being of national and international importance. As a university museum, Manchester Museum uses its international collection of human and natural history for enjoyment and inspiration. Working with people from all backgrounds, the museum provokes debate and reflection about the past, present and future of the earth and its inhabitants and uses it collection to promote understanding between cultures and to work towards a sustainable world. The museum has a long established tradition of working with volunteers, its approach to involving

volunteers was formalised in 2003 with the introduction of Public Engagement Volunteers who pioneered object handling sessions on the museum's galleries. The award-winning In Touch programme evolved out of a strategic approach to integrating community involvement within the museum's practices. Manchester Museum seeks to remain true to the core values that have defined our distinctive approach by continuing to provide original ways for involving volunteers.

Further information

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