Heritage volunteering boosts wellbeing

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An innovative HLF-supported project has revealed the significant benefits of volunteering at museums and galleries.

Made possible by a National Lottery grant of £528,700, the Inspiring Futures: Volunteering for Wellbeing project recruited over 231 local people, who were long-term unemployed, socially isolated or had mental wellbeing challenges, in a bespoke training programme at IWM North, Manchester Museum and Museum of Science and Industry.

The training gave participants the confidence to take on volunteer placements at some of the most prestigious heritage venues in the North West, including the Whitworth Art Gallery and People's History Museum.

Released to mark Volunteers' Week 2017, the project's evaluation has shown the outstanding impact participants' experiences had on their health and wellbeing.

Outstanding impact

[quote]"I can see life in a different way now. I want to get out there and get a job."[/quote]

The project evaluation found that:

- Over 75% reported a significant increase in wellbeing after a year
- Almost 60% reported long term sustained wellbeing improvements over two to three years
- More than 30% of people gained employment or other new opportunities for getting into work

Participants also reported improvements in cognitive ability and an enhanced sense of belonging.

One participant said: "I can see life in a different way now, I don't want to stay home, lonely and depressed any more. I want to get out there and get a job so that I can become more independent financially and enjoy more quality time with my daughter."

An example for heritage venues across the UK

The project's success has led to talks with the Central Manchester Clinical Commissioning Group and Mental Health services, exploring the possibility of 'social prescribing', where patients would be prescribed museum and gallery volunteering opportunities to improve their health.

[quote=Nathan Lee, Head of HLF North West]"This is an inspiring project that should be used as an example for heritage venues across the UK."[/quote]

Nathan Lee, Head of HLF North West, said: "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."

To hear the stories of the participants and read the full evaluation report visit the project website.



Ros Kerslake with volunteers from the Improving Futures: Volunteering For Wellbeing project at Manchester Town Hall Graham Fotherby

Celebrating National Lottery investment in the North West