

NATIONAL MINING MUSEUM SCOTLAND – ‘MEMORIES IN YOUR HANDS’ CASE STUDY

The National Mining Museum Scotland’s ‘Memories in Your Hands’ project allows mining communities to access the national coal mining collection in a meaningful, enjoyable and practical way. Our collections have amazing potential to stimulate reminiscence work and support the communities they originated from, so we wanted to develop a free community outreach resource targeted towards those who, because of diminished mobility or degenerative disease, can no longer visit the site.

With the practical support of Alzheimer Scotland and the Scottish Football Museum, and the financial support of the Museums Association’s Effective Collections Scheme, we were able to develop an outreach programme which has benefited our communities since its introduction in 2012.

The project began with a thorough reassessment of our collection conducted by the Education and Curatorial Teams. Formal training was provided by Alzheimer Scotland to enable the collections review to be focussed on delivering a final product which met our audience’s needs and expectations and supported their rehabilitation in a residential or hospital environment. The Teams quickly determined that the most effective way of categorising the collection was chronologically and developed four themed resources:

- 1940s
- 1950s
- 1960s
- ‘Home Sweet Home’

Each loan box contains handling objects related to the theme, instructions for using the resource, recommendations and top tips from Carers, photographs and information sheets as well as a handling pillow and rug and a trolley for easy transportation. A bespoke mobile museum case, ‘The Wee Hutch’ was also developed by design company Fifex to allow users to create their own mini-exhibitions for display. This was a crucial element of the project as Staff used their training and experience of working with Dementia Sufferers and their Carers to devise a resource which enabled users to integrate their personal objects with the Museum’s collections. The aim of this element of the project was to foster better relations between Residents and their Carers, to provide the stimulus for better communication and introduce a focal point for activities. A sustainability budget was also built into the project to allow us to deliver and pick up the boxes if the users are unable to do so.

The resource has been in high demand travelling across Scotland allowing access to over 1500 users at more than 20 organisations, many of whom have borrowed the resource multiple times. To keep us with this demand we aim to further increase our offer and develop two new boxes by 2014.

The project has facilitated better relations between the Museum and the dispersed Mining Communities and enabled the practical use of artefacts which had languished in storage for years. Crucially, the resource has developed with its users. Every kit contains feedback books to record the users' experience of the resource to enable future recipients to benefit from the wisdom of those who have trialled the kits. This way, the Museum can respond to any issues that affect delivery – adding further items or explanatory text if required, and the majority of the guidance materials for future recipients have been developed and augmented by Carers and Medical Staff, rather than collections experts.

National Mining Museum Scotland has received a great deal of positive feedback from users who have found the boxes a great help in delivering activities to those in their care.

'Many, many thanks to you for the fantastic reminiscence boxes – they are filled with great memories and will be a fantastic asset to our treatment programmes...' [Louise Paul – NHS Lothian]

'These boxes are fantastic for Reminiscence work, thank you so much for lending them to us so our Resident could share their stories with us.' [CISWO – Glennie House, Auchinleck]

Not only has the project strengthened the museum's relationship with the local community, it has established long-lasting partnerships with local charities and care homes, whose staff have both used the boxes and helped shape their development. It has also been highly beneficial for the Museum Staff allowing for increased partnership working and knowledge exchange between the Educational and Curatorial teams and funding a significant programme of Staff training. Furthermore, the collections review aided the Museum to attract further funding from the Scottish Government to purchase a new Adlib database system, as the project data helped to demonstrate the immense benefits of effective collections management.

The project was led by the Museum's Education Officer, Keeper and Curatorial Assistant, who worked part-time on the project delivery for twelve months. The set up and training costs were modest, costing under £7k. The Museum has preserved a restricted budget of £3k to facilitate the maintenance of the resource, meet the delivery costs and fund the development of future themed resources.

National Mining Museum Scotland would like to thank the Museums Association, Alzheimer Scotland, the Scottish Coal Industry Special Welfare Fund, the Scottish Football Museum, Midlothian Community Hospital and all of the project's users to date for their help and support in the project's delivery. Using collections in a meaningful way is at the heart of the Mining Museum's ethos, we are immensely grateful to our supporters for helping us to realise our ambitions and deliver a project which has benefitted our communities and demonstrated the potential of our collections.