Volunteers? Curious people!

The case study of the Still Curious Project – Red House Museum –

“You can’t do enough for a good guv’nor”

Pete, Still Curious Project Volunteer
WHO ARE WE

• Established as an independent **charity in 2014**;
• To promote **outstanding cultural experiences** to both its residents and visitors;
• **23 attractions** across the county: museums, galleries, arts centres
• Huge variety of workshops, classes, events and projects for both young and old, in schools and in communities
• Particular emphasis on reaching people who are vulnerable or disadvantaged and would not normally be able to access arts and culture.
• Care for **2.5 million objects** that relate to Hampshire’s rich and internationally important cultural heritage.
• A large number of **volunteering** roles available including: front of house assistant, café volunteer, tour guide, costumed interpreter or handyman, plus specialised roles at venues.
The building dates from 1764 and was the parish Georgian workhouse for Christchurch and Bournemouth;

The building became the private museum of Herbert Druitt (1876 – 1943), an avid local collector with a passion for textile and fashion, bygones and archaeological material;

In 1951, the Red House Museum became a charitable trust and our doors have been open to the public ever since

The Museum explores the story of Christchurch from before the Ice Age to modern times
PROJECT’S BACKGROUND

• 1 in 5 people in Hampshire are 65 years and over.

• The population of people over 65 is projected to increase to over 333,000 by 2023.

• Long term conditions such as dementia and social isolation adversely affect the wellbeing of older people.

• Christchurch has double the country’s average number of people with dementia.

• One of the key audience in the community for the Red House Museum, has been identified as older people, with a focus on vulnerable older people.
Our social impact focuses on working with key **partners** and community groups, to engage **those most in need of activities** that will improve their **health and wellbeing**, and increase their learning and pathway opportunities.

The project aims to find ways cultural engagement can provide solutions and interventions that have a positive impact on key local priorities.

We are now increasing the accessibility and enjoyment of the local heritage for people with dementia and carers.
PROJECT’S OBJECTIVES

• Create an accessible activity space on the ground floor of the museum

• Develop new participatory programmes of activities for people living with dementia and their carers

• Shortlist and provide *ad hoc* training to a group of volunteers in order to ensure the long legacy of the project

• Develop new community partnerships
PROJECT’S ACTIVITIES

1. Dementia-friendly heritage health walks (*Tuesday Strolls*) – led by trained *volunteers*

2. Curiosity Café facilitated by *volunteers*

3. Heritage Curiosity Boxes (*volunteers’* involvement will be key)
PROJECT’S ACTIVITIES

1. **Dementia-friendly heritage health walks (Tuesday Strolls)**
   - Under the ‘Walk for Health’ scheme from the Council
   - Around Christchurch
   - To learn about the local heritage (Points of Interest)
   - Led by fully trained volunteers
   - In partnership with the local Council

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PROJECT’S ACTIVITIES

2. Curiosity Café
   • Drop-in events including talks, demonstrations, hands-on activities
   • Aimed at increasing the enjoyment resilience and wellbeing of participants (plwd or carers)
   • Led by fully trained volunteers or external leaders
PROJECT’S ACTIVITIES

3. Curiosity Boxes
   • Contain museum artefacts suitable for handling during workshops
   • Designed to encourage conversation and learning through the interaction with a collection of ‘mystery objects’
   • Not about reminiscence
   • Create an air of mystery around what is being seen
   • To be used internally or to be taken out
   • **Volunteers** are key part in the creation of the curiosity boxes and in the delivery of the sessions.
Who are the project’s key players

Museum’s staff
Museum and **Project’s VOLUNTEERS**
Activity Leaders
Who are the Still Curious Volunteers?

- Good character, patient and empathic
- Hardworking
- Must be able to work as part of a team and take the initiative when necessary
- Must be able to work under pressure and have good time management skills
- Must be willing to receive training
- To be able to follow guidelines and instructions and adhere to safe working practices
- Previous experience of working with vulnerable adults
- Must be able to be STILL CURIOUS!
Training Summer-Autumn 2019
How do we monitor our project?

Feedback forms (from guests to us/project)

Volunteers’ feedback (from us to us/project)

Project Staff feedback (from me to us/project)
How do we monitor the effect of our project on the Still Curious volunteers?
Volunteers’ feedback: expectations before joining

I am not sure what I expected when I joined. I think partly I just wanted to find out more. Hopefully be part of providing activities which would help the carers of people with dementia with day to day life and give them some support. This was because a dear friend of mine has dementia and I watched the disease progress and her husband struggle with the decisions he was forced to make and day to day life. I feel most volunteers have a dementia based reason behind their involvement. I can certainly say that that goal has been reached through some very good training and quite open discussions within the Still Curious group. I believe we have quite a good cohesive team which works well. I certainly have learnt a lot more about dementia and thoroughly enjoyed the training sessions. It was good being in the beginning of the project and helping put the activities together but perhaps required more commitment than I envisaged at the beginning.’ SP
Volunteers’ feedback: expectations before joining:

I wanted - to be part of a friendly team

- in direct contact with members of the public
- involved in something that helped pwd and their carers
- gave me a feeling that, although retired, I was still doing something worthwhile

The Still Curious Project Coordinator, Paola Palma made contact with me and outlined what support the project was aiming to provide to pwd and their carers and the training being set up for the SCV’s. She conveyed her enthusiasm to me and I thought it would be really interesting to be part of the new project. PH
1) For me personally I feel very privileged to be part of an exciting project. The elderly and people suffering with mental health can get overlooked. So it's an area I am so pleased to put my time into. Also I like the fact that we are offering something to the hard working carers. I feel that also is so important. I value that fact that we open the project up to all people from all cultures and gender types. It is diversity friendly.

2) The leader is flexible and supportive so that I can fit the project around my work commitments. I enjoy being part of something bigger. I am pleased it is very professional and we have been offered training and support. I feel valued by the leader and the team. I also have enjoyed meeting the volunteers and workers at the Red House. That's been a big added bonus of doing the volunteer work which I did not expect.

3) I feel there is a good mix and variety of sessions some promoting healthy lifestyles. Paola has been mindful to make sure the facilitators pitch their sessions at the right Dementia friendly level.

4) I feel the leader has the needs of the dementia persons and their carers at the centre of her project and its development. I think it is great that she is ready to adapt things for the benefit of the project.

5) I think we are a good supportive group and as we have pretty much been in it from the start and we are getting to know each other and each other's strengths. I think we will have to be mindful of others' needs to be "inclusive" if and when new volunteers join us.
I been working as a SCV for the past 7 months and the enjoyment and satisfaction I have derived from the project and seeing it grow from ideas to reality has *exceeded my expectations*.

Without doubt, the driving force of the SC project is Paola and her commitment, enthusiasm and passion has been transferred to and reciprocated by the SCV’s. There is a lot of truth in the old adage that you can’t do enough for a good guv’nor.

*The preparatory work setting up the support activities has been interesting and I think we have all improved our written, verbal and interaction skills in the process.*

*The communication - meetings, emails, SCV feedback - between the Project Coordinator and the SCV’s is excellent so you always feel in the loop.*
Positives and Negatives

The positive comments and written feedback the team has received from the pwd and their carers gives everyone the feel good factor. I get the vibes that the regular attendees to the support sessions now regard the volunteers as their friends.

Realistically, we know there is nothing the team can do to cure dementia but if the Tuesday Stroll and Curiosity Café just give a couple of hours enjoyment and ease the great responsibility the carers carry 24/7 then I think we have done a very worthwhile job.

So I guess the SC project is a two way street: we give support in an interesting and enjoyable way to the pwd and their carers and their obvious appreciation is our reward.

Negatives? Not really. To be honest, just a few minor frustrations/disappointments:
- the activity room is too small and cannot accommodate all the pwd and their carers who would like to attend the sessions.
- some of the SCV training could be improved by making it more focussed on the specific activities of the team. Some of it felt like off the shelf, generic, tick the box training. BUT providing any sort of training should be applauded.
Yes, I’ve always felt that my small input to the project and the SCV team has always been gratefully appreciated. Once again, it is Paola who has always been so generous in her praise for the team’s efforts and created an atmosphere whereby all the SCV’s respect, value and appreciate the input of each of the members.
‘A great cause. Amazing volunteers who get on together, help each other and show great empathy and commitment.’

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The positive contribution of the team hugely out weights some of the difficulties that can be encountered:

- Small venue
- Too many volunteers – everybody wishes to take part in all the activities
- Potential clashing with other activities in the museum
- Small working groups (buddies) becoming protective or their roles and wanting to own responsibility to the detriment of the group
Still Curious Volunteers
Still Curious volunteers’ wellbeing? Of course!

Just another normal Tuesday Stroll: our guests showing their appreciation to Curious Volunteers Pete and Anne (below, far left)

Thank you for listening!

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