

MLA EAST OF ENGLAND LEARNING NETWORK PROJECT

Background Information

Service name	Museums Luton, Luton Cultural Services Trust
Description of activity / project	Education work with volunteers in museums without professional education officers
Timescale (or ongoing)	April 2007 – March 2009 (The evaluation report covers the work carried out since April 2007 – March 2008)
Main audience / user focus	Volunteers in museums without professional education officers and which are entirely run by volunteers.
Partners	Stotfold Mill Mill Lane, Stotfold, Bedfordshire Woburn Heritage Centre Museum Old St Mary's Church, Bedford Street, Milton Keynes
Project / programme objectives	To assess the impact of my work with volunteers by focusing on Generic Learning Outcomes and Generic Social Outcomes
GLO and GSO piloting objectives	GLO Knowledge and Understanding GLO Skills GLO Attitudes and Values GLO Enjoyment, Inspiration and Creativity GLO Activity, Behaviour and Progression GSO Health and Well being GSO Strengthening Public Life
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1. **What** were the key outcome(s) measured
GLO Knowledge and Understanding
GLO Skills
GLO Attitudes and Values
GLO Enjoyment, Inspiration and Creativity
GLO Activity, Behaviour and Progression
GSO Health and Well being
GSO Strengthening Public Life

2. **How** you measured the extent to which the outcome / outcomes were met
(Include any of the following developed for your project: questionnaires; interview or focus group guides; observation schedules)

I devised a questionnaire with open ended questions for the volunteers to complete. To make my report manageable for the Learning Network, I only used this method to measure the outcomes. However, I have also collected anecdotal evidence and photographs which will assist me in my overall evaluation later in the year.

3. **Who** you collected evidence from
Volunteers that I have been working with closely since April 2007

4. **Who** collected the evidence?
Learning Development Officer

5. **How** you analysed the evidence
I evaluated the questionnaires and looked for quotes or thoughts from the volunteers that supported the GLOs and GSOs I was trying to measure. I summarised my findings in a written report. I felt this was the most effective method on this occasion as the sample of evidence was quite small.

6. **How** you presented the findings
(Include a summary of the findings)

I wrote a written report summarising my main findings from the completed questionnaires

7. **How** you used, or plan to use, the findings
(For example to inform service development or for advocacy)

I will disseminate my findings to various people in the region for advocacy purposes.

My written report will be circulated to the East of England Hub, who fund my post.

I will also disseminate my work to the Herts, Beds and Luton Education Forum as many of the museums that I work with attend that forum.

I will disseminate my work to the volunteers that I work with and their respective management teams.

My colleague Eleanor Markland and I will disseminate the knowledge and understanding that we have gained (in particular of the Generic Social Outcomes) to the Learning and Access team at Museums Luton.

8. **Comments** on the piloting process
(Including what you learned, what went well and any challenges or problems)

Evaluating aspects of my work is something that I have been grappling with for some time. The Learning Network gave me the perfect opportunity to actually evaluate an

important aspect of my work with volunteers. I also wanted to use the Learning Network to further improve my knowledge, understanding and usage of Generic Social Outcomes for professional development purposes. The piloting process has given me a valuable insight into GSOs and how they can be measured. I now feel confident that I can start to use these effectively in further evaluations. It has also highlighted the importance of GSOs for a wider purpose in terms of advocacy to funders, partners and the local authority.

Having a group of 'critical friends' who I could contact for help, support and advice during and after the workshops was invaluable as it gave me the opportunity to talk through some of the issues that I was facing which made the process far more simpler.

9. Finally, give details of anything that surprised you about the piloting process. I was pleasantly surprised at the positive response of the volunteers to the questionnaire and the speed with which they responded as I was under a very tight deadline to complete my analysis of the findings before the final Learning Network workshop. Also, as important as evaluation is it can be tiresome for people to take part in the process. However, the volunteers responded splendidly by being so willing and generous with their time.

I was also quite surprised about how difficult it could be to measure generic social outcomes and how it was important to ask the right questions. The Learning Network demonstrated (especially in the final workshop) how the process of asking the right questions to measure social outcomes could actually be achieved.

**Learning Network
Evaluation report
March 2008
Fatima Choudhury**

**Intended audience: East of England HUB (Renaissance in the Regions)
Project: My education work with volunteers**

Quantitative Evaluation

I have worked with five volunteers since being in post as Learning Development Officer. One volunteer is from Woburn Heritage Centre Museum, another is from Leighton Buzzard Railway Museum and there are three from Stotfold Watermill. All three museums are in Bedfordshire.

The volunteers have been involved in their respective museums between two and eight years. All five volunteers are retired from paid employment. Their ages range between 50 and 65. Four of the volunteers have a specific remit for education for their museum. One volunteer is the company secretary. Four out of the five volunteers completed the questionnaire.

I deliberately kept the questions open ended in order to capture a diverse and detailed response from the volunteers.

Qualitative evaluation

Impact on volunteers

Through my involvement with the volunteers I was looking to evaluate the impact of my work on the volunteers' specifically focusing on Attitudes and values, Enjoyment, inspiration and creativity, Activity, behaviour and progression (GLOs), Health and well being and Strengthening public life (GSOs).

Attitudes and values

One of the questions that I put to the volunteers was how they felt as a result of the discussion meetings that we hold on a regular basis to discuss ideas and possible ways forward. The responses have shown that these meetings have been valuable in terms of *"moving forward with ideas to bring schools into the mill"* and *"generating new ideas"* and a *"wider understanding of how to bring what we have in the mill to a wide range of school children"*.

Volunteers also said that they felt *"positive"* and *"keen to learn latest ideas"* and that it helped to achieve *"good links with the school"*. In addition, the answers also demonstrated that these meetings have an almost 'mentoring' nature to them in that they *"have encouraged us to keep going when schools have been slow to come to us"* and *"has enabled us to progress faster than we thought possible"*.

Skills

The volunteers also felt strongly that they had made new contacts within the wider museum sector. One volunteer wrote, *"I now know many people I can go to for help and advice. I now feel part of a larger team than just meeting with the trustees/volunteers"*. Another volunteer said that the most useful contact was staff at

Mill Green Museum. Evidently, being able to meet with volunteers and staff in similar museums has a beneficial effect on the volunteers. One volunteer has found *“new companies to work with to assist us in approaches to interpretative material”*.

One of the intended learning outcomes of my work is that volunteers will be able to network more effectively with schools. Certainly, the volunteers felt that *“we now have a good relationship with the local school and they see us as an additional and worthwhile resource”*. An unexpected outcome was that volunteers *“got to know more people involved in our own mill as well as teachers in local schools”*.

Another key aspect of working with volunteers is raising awareness of the work that the volunteers were doing within their own museums. All four volunteers were communicating their involvement and projects by regularly reporting at Committee meetings, the Marketing Committee, Trustee meetings and to other volunteers,

Knowledge and understanding

By developing sessions for schools the volunteers have clearly enhanced their knowledge and understanding, skills, attitudes and values and enjoyment. Volunteers have clearly enjoyed *“working with young children”, and enjoy their “time at the mill”*. The volunteers are now more aware of *“becoming increasingly aware of what the mill has to offer children as a range of learning experiences” and the “importance of local history in the community”*.

Activity, behaviour and progression

Through discussions with the volunteers I hope to encourage them to become aware of the opportunities that the museum can offer to schools and also enable the volunteers to think differently about the services they can deliver to children and young people. Two of the volunteers felt very strongly that the work we were doing has led them to think differently... *“more hands on – for all ages. Make it an experience rather than pure information”*. In terms of what I am trying to achieve with the museums that I am working with this is a very significant quote. I think that museums have a tendency to uphold the belief that we possess all knowledge. However, it is vital to find ways to engage people of all ages with our collections and make it relevant to them.

Another volunteer said that the meetings have *“changed the way we think about school visits, it has also changed our thinking in the way that we do all of the development of services to people of all ages”*. For these volunteers thinking about schools visits has also opened the way that they view any potential visitor. One volunteer did not feel that he was thinking *‘differently’ but it has helped with “our thinking and planning”*. For another volunteer, it seemed to actually strengthen her belief that museums are a great resource for schools and for family visits.

Social outcomes

As my involvement with volunteers has increased I was keen to capture the dedication and passion that volunteers contribute to the sector. In particular I wanted to measure the impact of the involvement of volunteers in their respective

museums against the social outcomes of Health and well being and Strengthening public life.

I asked the volunteers whether through the work we have been doing it made a positive contribution to their health and well being. I received a varied response to this question. One volunteer felt that it was an *“awful question”*! One volunteer wrote that, *“it encourages me to continue to participate in the work we are doing, which might mean an otherwise less active lifestyle”*. Another volunteer felt equally positive and that the experience was *“stimulating for body and mind”* and that *“mixing and being involved in a worthwhile community project, which should stand the test of time, can be both physically and mentally tiring, but one sleeps very well and contented.”* One volunteer found this a hard question to answer *“..given my state of health this is a hard one to answer – my wife would say that I want everything done yesterday and therefore it is stressful. I would say that there is some truth in this but it is my main hobby and I get a lot of personal satisfaction out of it”*.

What is evident is that the volunteers enjoy the contribution and involvement that they make to their respective museums. All volunteers felt strongly that they had a stronger relationship with the local community as a result of their continued involvement. One volunteer said that she was *“now involved in other community projects and activities”*. All volunteers felt equally strongly that they had a better understanding of how their museum could benefit the local community.

Conclusion

Perhaps the most significant findings is the impact of my work on the activity, behaviour and progression of the volunteers in terms of allowing them to see the wider potentials of the museum for schools and how important it is to make museum visits ‘hands on’. The involvement with the wider museums community has also benefited the volunteers. In terms of social outcomes, the volunteers clearly enjoy their involvement with the museum and it has allowed them to see the benefits of their museum to the wider local community. All four volunteers are working hard to make their museum a focal point for the local community by raising the profile of the museum and promoting its’ offer.

My project is by no means at an end. The evidence collected here and reported upon so far gives an indication of the impact of my work on the volunteers with whom I am working. This will form part of a larger evaluation report of my role at the end of the year. I hope to use the methodology used in this pilot to evaluate the impact of my work with curators in future months.