

Case Study

Leeds Museums & Galleries

1152 Club



Age-Friendly

The 1152 club has now been running for nearly three years, started by our assistant community curator (ACC) in response to a local need identified for activities for older people that were free, accessible during the day and linked to local and community history.

The sessions run fortnightly every Friday in the mornings for 1.5 to 2 hours and generally include a talk or presentation by local historians/ hobbyists, light refreshments and the opportunity to socialise and reminisce but most importantly to learn – the sessions are motivated by a genuine love of learning and sense of discovery. The sessions take place in a room in the visitor centre at Kirkstall Abbey which is fully accessible and gives people the opportunity to also explore the grounds. The group has developed over the last two and a half years with committed regulars from the local area and numbers have grown from 15/20 to over 50 people.

The ACC initially did all the bookings of speakers, the publicity and the research but the group is becoming increasingly self-led. Several of the regulars have become registered volunteers and help to run the club organising the programme, the annual Christmas celebrations and research or in some cases have gone on to volunteer for other roles. If they can't find speakers or want to do something different they feel confident enough to organise tours to other museums/trips out.

We have also used the group for feedback and consultation about other museum projects/initiatives.

Funding is provided through Arts Council England but is a relatively small amount to cover some speakers' fees (though they rarely charge) and refreshments

How did it aim to reach or have relevance to older audiences? What impact did you want it to have on the size or profile of your visitor base?

We particularly wanted to attract older people as Abbey House Museum which is part of the same site is very family/schools orientated and this provided a different experience for an older demographic and all the publicity was aimed at the over 55s and this was made explicit in the material we sent out to neighbourhood networks and older peoples services in the local area – we wanted it to be very much for local people and for them to have ownership of the club. The issue now is how to satisfy demand as the room won't hold more than 50 people comfortably so it has exceeded all our expectations.

What tools did you use to measure this impact? What key indicator did you use to measure this impact?

We have taken case studies of the participants who went on to volunteer and regularly collect feedback after sessions. The ACC checks with people how they are feeling about the programme and there is the opportunity for suggestions and discussions as it is now led by them. Susan's story below is a powerful reason for the club to continue

Susan's story

My name's Susan and I've been a Volunteer Tour Guide at Kirkstall Abbey since 2015, and a member of the 1152 Club, which is a group for those over the age of 55 that meets fortnightly on a Friday morning to hear talks from an array of guest speakers.

I attended the inaugural meeting of the 1152 Club on 20 March 2015, and knew straight away the easy-going style of the group would benefit me and it has done! Plus, having to concentrate for around an hour on what I call 'an in-depth' speaker is very good for the mind. Having taken three friends to the group, we have fresh topics to discuss afterwards following the various speakers.

I arranged the first 1152 Club Christmas meal and booked the after-lunch speaker on 18 December, and this helped to enhance my organisational skills. 25 of us went for lunch at the Toby Carvery in Horsforth, and afterwards heard a presentation from the local MP on 'Traditions of Parliament'.

My appointment as a Kirkstall Abbey Weekend Tour Guide followed on from the 1152 Club. Having had major cancer treatment in the past few years, including six-months of chemotherapy (the latter taking part of my short/medium term memory), the tour guiding has aided my cancer recovery! Having initially to précis and focus my mind on many documents and booklets to create my own tour within 9 days was better than any medication! Learning new facts every time I come to the Abbey is beneficial. Also enjoy meeting and chatting to visitors and new friends being made.

Being asked to tour guide the 1152 group around the Abbey on 29 April this year lifted my spirits and my esteem and gave me general confidence about myself.

I know from chatting to other 1152 members they gain positively from the meetings, and, for me personally, Tour Guiding has been, and still is, literally a 'life saver', and thank you for giving me the opportunity to do this work.

Susan August 2016.

What other objectives were you hoping to achieve?

To continue to provide the space and time for the club to meet and to consult with members more about the site as a whole

To really build on the health and well-being it promotes and extend the model to other sites – the Sociable History Club has launched at the city museum last year providing a similar programme of monthly talks although at present these are still organised by museum staff.

Were there opportunities for this activity to be intergenerational?

Yes our Vintage Youth Club has presented at the club and also worked jointly with members on a community exhibition called ‘Decades of Youth.’ Two members of each club presented their project to the West Yorkshire Playhouse and it was written up as a case study for the Leeds Older Peoples Forum

What worked well, what challenges did you face?

The club continues to thrive. The issues are around capacity as we don’t wish to move to a formal booking system as this could deter people but we may have to limit numbers at some point.

What have been the most important things you have learned?

To be flexible and patient, to allow things time to ‘bed in’ and be prepared to change and adapt – to listen to what the participants want and give up control to them.

What will you do differently next time?

We hope to develop and expand this model!

“Top Tips” for engaging older audiences:

- The practical planning details are crucial – niggles around car parking, seating, room temperature, visual access to power points and audio levels can be the make or break of a session
- Research and consultation about interests and topics also important as that dictates levels of attendance and engagement

Author

Patrick Bourne

Assistant Community Curator, Organisation Leeds Museums and galleries