

Ways of seeing: A model for community partnership working

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Abstract

This project was devised by staff at The Cambridge Resource Centre for individuals recovering from mental health problems and the Fitzwilliam Museum Education department. The aim was to move towards a program that was inclusive and did not involve segregated access for people recovering from mental health problems. Sessions took place at the Resource Centre and were open to mental health service users and the general public. A five-week course gradually moved away from the Resource Centre and into the museum.

A quote from a participant: "I walked past a couple of paintings in the museum that we had looked at previously as a group. I felt such a shiver of delight as I looked at a painting I'd otherwise paid little mind to – thinking about what I knew about it now. The joy of recognition; the beginning of knowledge & skills."

Some participants signed up for a ten-week course taking place in the Fitzwilliam Museum and at Kettle's Yard. Members of the public booked places on the course (30% of the places were allocated to those referred by the Resource Centre). Participants visited different departments within the museum and met keepers, technicians and other staff as well as taking part in group discussions and debates. This project was rigorously evaluated using questionnaires, discussion and consultation.

Ways of seeing

The Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge works in partnership with the Cambridge Resource Centre,¹ to deliver a rolling program of talks and events known as *Ways of Seeing*. This program has been running since January 2007 and is currently in its third year. It is a program that is aimed at people with or recovering from mental health problems although others are also welcome to take part. The overarching aim of *Ways of Seeing* is to create an environment or community of interest enabling people to participate in events without the stigma of a 'mental health label'.

History

The idea for the program developed out of an informal arrangement between a local day centre and the museum (users of the day centre plus a staff member visited the museum where they were met by a member of the education department and taken on tours and into the education studio for practical art sessions). Restructuring in the partner organization led to a hiatus in the partnership but by October 2006, staff at both organizations were well placed to think about reviving the program.

Planning in partnership

In breathing new life into this partnership, a careful planning process was adhered to. It was recognized by both organizations that there had to be absolute clarity in the definition of each partner's roles and responsibilities. For this reason, a *partnership agreement* was drawn up by the Museum and

¹ The Cambridge Resource Centre is staffed by the Cambridge Social Inclusion Team – part of Cambridge and Peterborough NHS Foundation Trust. The Resource Centre works with individuals recovering from mental health problems and helps these individuals identify the changes they would like to make and how they might work towards achieving them. The Centre also works in partnership with other community providers in education, work, the arts and leisure to develop opportunities for users of the centre. In addition to this the Social Inclusion team are developing a community based resource that includes a café, an internet café, an exhibition space and rooms that partner organisations can use to lead workshops/sessions for visitors to the centre.

staff from the Museum and the Resource Centre had to commit to the terms and conditions agreed to therein².

A careful planning process inevitably threw out yet more questions about what we were hoping to achieve and why we do the work we do. There was general consensus that providing targeted provision for 'closed' groups may be a good way to get things started but how should we continue? Were we, without intending to, contributing to further social segregation? In June 2004, the Social Exclusion Unit of the Government published 'Mental Health and Social Exclusion'. This report demonstrated how segregated services for people with mental health issues contributed to social isolation and poorer mental health and therefore led to poorer community participation.

We had this report in mind when we asked ourselves the following questions:

- Is it enough to ensure that people can come in on a chaperoned visit?
- Where do we go from here? How do we move on from a member of staff meeting up with a 'closed' group?
- What can we do to promote understanding of the needs of individuals among our different audiences? Is it possible that we could successfully integrate seemingly disparate groups of people?
- And lastly, how can we encourage participants to be not just a 'consumer' but an 'active citizen'?

Taking these questions into account we defined our collective aims:

- To encourage non service users to visit the resource centre.
- To encourage service users to visit the museum.
- To engage all participants with the museum's collection - initially in outreach sessions at the Resource Centre and then in the museum itself.
- To gradually integrate the audience into the mainstream museum audience.

Finding the participants

With the agreement drawn up and the aims and hoped for outcomes identified, it only remained for us to start promoting talks and events and build up a participant base. Staff at the Resource Centre took care of this. Some participants were referred to the program by care workers whilst others found out about it when visiting the Resource Centre for other reasons. Posters advertised the program within the centre and the general public found out about it via a poster campaign on the street where the centre is located (a relatively busy public thoroughfare).

What does the program involve?

The program starts with two drop-in sessions in January and February. The concept is that if these are enjoyed, attendees will be encouraged to sign up for a five week course in April and May. The last week of the course is held at the museum. All sessions are led by a member of museum staff and attended by at least one member of staff from the Resource Centre. This is a discussion based program – encouraging people to look at art, talk about it, formulate ideas and communicate and share those ideas with other participants. We use paintings from the museum's collections as a shared experience external to anything that may be going on in an individual's life. Often these discussions do take a personal turn and that is not discouraged, although staff work together to gently steer the direction of the session if need be. We aim to encourage people to have the confidence to

² The agreement functions as a form of risk management, including information about staff to participant ratios, maximum group sizes, guidelines about what will happen in the event of an incident occurring etc. Both organisations are involved in drawing up the content of the agreement and absolute clarity about where responsibility lies is an integral element of the agreement.

speak up in the group and to boost their self esteem as well as to learn something about art and art history.³

The next component of *Ways of Seeing* is a ten-week summer school held at the museum, with two sessions taking place at Kettle's Yard. The summer school is promoted to the general public in the Museum's *What's On* guide. Fifteen places are available and five of these places are reserved at a concessionary rate for people referred by the Resource Centre. Participants can sign up and take part in this course in the knowledge that they are now part of a mainstream public program at the museum. At this point we engage colleagues in the facilitation – technicians, curators and administrators have taken the lead in different sessions. Participants make behind the scenes visits to different parts of the museum and meet with members of staff they may not otherwise come across. In this way, we are attempting to encourage staff from across the museum to engage with new audiences. No one is labeled or stigmatized and everyone is an equal in these information exchanges.

Conclusion

This program is not expensive to run and is sustainable. It involves engagement with individuals over an extended period of time. It is an example of a mutually beneficial partnership where both organizations involved work together to encourage participants upon the program to achieve success with their longer term goals.⁴

Contact

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³ Evaluation results demonstrated a desire to learn more about art history across the group. In 2008, one participant went on to study history of art at Cambridge University, two participants regularly book places on courses run for the general public and five regularly attend lunchtime talks held in the museum. This represents over 50% of the overall group.

⁴ Details about the Museums community and outreach work: www.fitzmuseum.cam.ac.uk/dept/education/outreach/ (accessed November 25, 2009)

