

EPISODE 3

Quotes:

Speaker A: The difference with having these creative projects which blend in heritage as well, um, is it enables our participants to have more confidence and, um, increase well being.

Speaker B: And I think that architecture is almost like a metaphor for the work we're doing, bringing in nature and creativity and heritage together.

[INTRO]

HR: My name is Halina Rifai and I'm a podcast producer and mental health advocate. I was asked by The Baring Foundation to take a deeper dive into their work surrounding a report written by Director David Cutler titled '*Creatively Minded at the Museum*'.

The report was written to highlight targeted work by museums to engage people with mental health problems, especially using participatory arts.

In this podcast I'll be exploring a number of themes over the series which look at difficult pasts helping us understand collections, participatory arts work in hospital settings, partnerships, new generations of museum professionals, diversity and much much more.

I'll do this with the help of a number of people who work, run, volunteer and practice creative arts with museums spread over the length and breadth of the UK.

HR: We are already into our third episode, and this week, I'll be focusing on two museums located in South West of England and exploring how these museums may take a place-based approach with heritage and health partnerships across the city and also, how social prescribing can come into this.

Part 1: Salisbury Museum

HR: We begin in South Wiltshire at Salisbury Museum. Located opposite the city's cathedral, they house archaeological collections containing prehistoric material, including from Stonehenge; the Pitt Rivers' Wessex collection; and a fine medieval collection including finds from Old Sarum, Clarendon Palace and the city itself.

They have recently embarked on a National Lottery Heritage Fund supported project, *Past Forward: Salisbury Museum for Future Generations*, which will deliver new permanent galleries, a flexible learning and events venue along with new activities and community outreach.

The museum is one of four project partners, along with ArtCare at Salisbury District Hospital, Wessex Archaeology and Wiltshire Creative.

I spoke with Amy Hammett, Community Curator from Salisbury Museum, her role is to connect the community to the museum and vice versa, and also Leigh Chalmers who is the heritage inclusion manager at Wessex Archaeology who are the lead organisation for the Well City Salisbury project of which Salisbury Museum is part of.

We enter the conversation as Amy explains how Salisbury Museum has taken into account it's community and location help look at mental health wellbeing...

[INTERVIEW]

Amy Hammett: The one big step that the museum took was signing up for the Well City project as a partner, uh, which enabled it then to be able to provide free courses with those with mental health needs. We're central to the city, so the location makes it quite an easy venue to get to. Next year, our venue will be closing for a partial refurbishment, and then our plan is to hire spaces in the areas of high population to take that opportunity to be out and about in our community, uh, and hopefully make it accessible to people living in that part of the city.

Halina Rifai: And Leigh have you got anything that you want to add to that at all?

Leigh Chalmers: I think, as Amy said, they're brilliantly placed because they're smack bang in the centre of the city and they've got a lot to offer the community in terms of access points and the creative opportunities that they're presenting. People kind of rifting off the museum collections. So there's lots there for people to get excited about and to be interested in and to learn from.

Halina Rifai: Yeah. What are some of the factors that have come to light that you feel the museum can aid in terms of wellbeing, in your location? So whether that be creative activities, group meetings for isolation and so on.

Amy Hammett: Yes. The difference with having these creative projects which blend in heritage as well is it enables our participants to have more confidence and um, increased wellbeing, um, and the change I've seen, just looking at the change of um, a person from how they are when they first start the course to when they end it is just incredible. Um, so even after the uh, project has ended, it's certainly something that I would like to continue at the museum is having things that tap into mental health and help improve wellbeing. Our participants have really enjoyed the time that they've spent with us and the time that they've spent with other participants. They mentioned quite often that they want to meet up and they might want to continue that particular artform. And they have asked, is there a space in the museum? Now, at the moment we don't have that space, but what we're hoping is with our, um, Big Capital project and our refurbishment, that with the installation of a Community space would potentially have more capacity to do things like this. And therefore Well City will have a much longer effect because then we can try and fit in with what the community wants.

Halina Rifai: Yeah. And I think it's a challenge time and time again for everyone that works within any creative means is that there's always such a short shelf life when it comes to funding, to projects, deadlines, whereas these things have to be continuous and have some longevity and going on what you've said there with regards to the change that you saw in

people leads nicely into my next question, which surrounds the kind of theme of social prescribing. And do you feel that your work has already, or has going forward, the ability to alleviate pressures from services who specifically deal with mental health and wellbeing?

Amy Hammett: Uh, yes. So lots and lots of peer support. It's absolutely crucial, I think, in Well City, um, it's something we've seen across the board. And Leigh will talk about her own experiences of that with her courses. Without the peer support, I don't think Well City would work as well as it does because they're all so encouraging of each other. They know they're all in the same boat and they just really take care of each other and really uplift each other. These kind of things can be preventative measures to uh, someone's mental health not getting worse because they're making friends, because they're getting out. Um, so this will naturally take uh, away pressures from um, more prescriptive methods like counselling and um, therapy sessions.

Leigh Chalmers: And I think the peer to peer support is part of the sustainability of your project as well. We have people going off and they take walks together now, or they're meeting up and they're going to another group in town that maybe they're paying for. In terms of the social prescribing, we really changed our model quite early on in the first year of our funding. So for the first two courses we were just working with referring partners. But that was really broad brush, that wasn't just GP surgeries, it was uh, third sector and other voluntary organisations in Salisbury could refer people onto our courses. But actually we realised quite quickly, didn't we Amy, that that was a barrier to participation for people with low to moderate mental health needs who maybe actually haven't gone to seek help yet. So then we started to, we opened it up so people can self refer. So now in our Well City courses it's pretty much a 50 50 split. So in our courses we have a really good mix of people who are coming together to share their experiences, um, kind of within the safety of all of our groups and all of the courses that we're running.

Halina Rifai: Yeah, the final question, and you can answer, uh, this in any way, shape or form that you want, but what are some of the things that you've both learned from the projects and that you think could be evolved more in the future to help the community of Salisbury?

Amy Hammett: Well, for me, the project working in itself has been an opportunity to share learning, to share skills, share contacts. We bounce ideas off each other, we try different things and we learn from them. Um, and by doing it as four partners, instead of doing it independently, it enables us to reach an understanding and develop that understanding far more than we ever would have as individual organisations. This is the first time I've worked on a product of this level and I can really see the benefit of it. And the more arts and heritage organisations that work this way, the more that we can develop really effective projects that are making a difference.

Leigh Chalmers: And can I just add to that? And the other thing that we really pride ourselves on and we take a lot of care about is we look after each other. So as project partners and as facilitators and for our artists, we have supervision. So every six weeks we will have a supervision session where we can go and we can talk about how our projects are or something that might be troubling us or bothering us. So we're looking after our mental health as we do this project. And that's very much the ethos of Well City. It's that everybody who's involved in it is looked after and is treated with care and respect. The ripple effect of

Well City Salisbury is that as a partnership, as four organisations, we all look after each other. For me that's been a massive benefit, just to see how we've flourished ourselves within the structure of the project.

HR: Location can often be argued as a hurdle for people when it comes to access and Salisbury have considered this from different points of view. With the museum being central to the area, this can provide an easy route however, the future consideration of expanding to new areas is encouraging, especially as people often move out or away from cities due to aspects such as cost of living. I found the comments about heritage sparking confidence really interesting, I wonder if part of that can be attributed to people knowing not only where they are from but also a greater understanding about their surroundings which both may leads to improved mental wellbeing. The Creative Courses being offered by Well-City Salisbury spurring on peer to peer support is fantastic and something that can often come out of these types of activities. If that is going to alleviate the pressure from professional health services in a preventative measure also is a huge positive. But it's also the firm consideration by the partners to work collectively to create a better understanding AND ensure that the staff's mental health is also protected which is notable.

Part 2: Holburne Museum

HR: We now travel to Bath to visit The Holburne Museum. A small, independent museum founded in 1882 as Bath's first art museum, it houses the collection of Sir William Holburne (1793-1874). An award-winning extension by architect Eric Parry in 2011 created new spaces for additional galleries and a garden café. As well as displaying portrait miniatures, Renaissance bronzes, ceramics, silver, and embroidery the museum is renowned for its eighteenth-century British portraits. A new vision to bring contemporary art to the region has resulted in an increasingly varied exhibition programme including international artists.

The Holburne has 15 years' experience facilitating and managing their expanding Pathways to Wellbeing programme which museum-based community engagement programme. It supports people with lived experience of mental health issues and social isolation to engage with local heritage and creative art activities, delivering measurable improvements in mental health and wellbeing.

I spoke with Holburne Museum director Chris Stevens and Learning and Engagement Lead and Pathways to Wellbeing Programme Manager Louise Campion and posed similar questions from my conversation with Salisbury Museum beginning with how the museum has taken into account its community and location to help look at mental health wellbeing.

[INTERVIEW]

Louise Campion: The programme really came out of a small piece of work, um, that happened many years ago, uh, when a previous, uh, colleague working in engagement noticed that one of the things about the museum is it's surrounded by a beautiful public park, Sydney Gardens and that the Holburne was sharing a space with, um, people that were rough sleeping, people that were homeless who were, um, spending time, um, and meeting in the park. And she saw an opportunity to engage and work with those people, um, and

share some of the things that were going on in the museum, um, and work with, um, homelessness charity, Julian House, to, um, create creative opportunities for people. Um, so the program really started from that point, and those people would come and meet, um, in a small building, um, that's next to the whole bun in Sydney Gardens. And it's called the Gardener's Lodge, um, because the gardener used to, used to live there. It's less grand, it's less formal than, obviously, the large main hobby building, which has a neoclassical facade, which can often be a barrier for people walking through the door because they feel that they're not the right kind of person to walk into the hobin or that they have a lot of feelings around coming into a building that they think might not be for them. So the lodge is a fantastic intermediary space where we can meet together. And that was the base for this initial group. One of the things that was recognised was that really, for many of the people that came, it really was the mental health and the challenges that they were facing, which was the focus and where the creativity was really helping for them. And so that became the focus of our work. And we really developed the rest of the program very organically in response to people's needs and the things that people in our community were telling us they needed. And also our partners in mental health and third sector, uh, organisations who were contacting and asking us if we could host or provide opportunities for people that they were working with.

Halina Rifai: One of the things that I wanted to ask was what are some of the factors that have come to light that you feel the museum can aid in terms of wellbeing, when it comes to your location?

Louise Campion: We're currently working with, uh, Leicester University, uh, with a PhD. Student who is looking at the sort of geographical and spatial elements of the museum and also what's happening in the groups in order to understand what it is that is happening and why people are experiencing, undoubtedly, what we see, which is the benefits of improved well being and mental health. What she's beginning to show, um, and helping us to understand what exactly is it about the museum and the surroundings that are, uh, uh, having these benefits. We're beginning to understand that the particular geography of the Holburne being surrounded by Sydney Gardens, that is part of our offer. That we are very close to nature and we are very close to this area of beauty. We often do go outside and create outside, actually, the very fact that the museum has the Georgian facade and the galleries. But then we also have this contemporary extension that's added onto the back of the museum effectively, and that was designed to bring in the greenness and everything outside. So there's a lot of glass. And I think that architecture is almost like a metaphor for the work we're doing, bringing in nature, uh, and creativity and heritage together. One of the things that is coming out for us is this idea of care and museums, of places of care, because what they traditionally do is care for, uh, objects.

Chris Stevens: It raises some really interesting questions about sort of moving slightly away from the programme itself to how you present the museum that I think a lot of museums for a long time have been very anxious in the desire to attract younger audiences, are very anxious about the fact that we're rather quiet and sedate. And how do you live up and, um, make the place noisier and busier? It's an interesting kind of thing to grapple with how you distinguish something which is positively slow and reflective, contempt, haven, if you like, as distinct from somewhere that's sort of solemn and severe. Um, and I think celebrating the positive qualities of the museum, but then thinking about how you make that clear through, I don't know, maybe through just sort of comfortable furnishing and stuff. So making it clear to

people that they're welcome to sit and spend time and have a sort of refuge from the kind of noise and bustle of your 24/7 phones and internet and so on is a really interesting thing to work through.

Halina Rifai: Yeah, everything you've both said there is such a fantastic sentiment in terms of connection. I know in your case study, it said we don't provide art therapy, but we do recognise the therapeutic value of creativity. Based on that and all the themes that you've spoken about and the projects and people that you're working with, do you feel that your work is already, or has going forward, the ability to alleviate pressures from services who specifically deal with mental health wellbeing?

Louise Campion: Yes, because we already have a, uh, social prescribing kind of system in place, where colleagues from the Adult Mental Health Services and actually also CAMS, which is the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service, do refer or signpost often, um, people that they've been working with to our groups. We also have referrals from primary care, so from GP surgeries. When people are, ah, working with social prescribing link workers, we actually have people coming through different pathways, either early on, as a way of potentially helping people to not develop very poor mental health. So it's a way of kind of responding to early need. But then at the other end, also, perhaps after people have experienced very poor mental health and have maybe even been in hospital, we do have a clear place to help. A lot of the people that we have engaged with us are still engaging with us five or six years later. Because the Holburne and, um, their experiences of museums have meant that's one of the things in their life that they do also some of the skills and the confidence that they've developed through coming to the groups they take into their everyday lives, and it becomes part of their lives. And it can be that they redefine themselves as artists or creatives.

Chris Stevens: I, uh, think one of the things that comes out of that is that, uh, there is increasing recognition that programmes like this are sort of providing a mental health service that is much more cost effective than traditional medical interventions. But there's a systemic kind of problem in that it's funded in a very short term way. So we've run these programmes in different forms for eight or ten years, but it suffers along on kind of three year, uh, one year funding packages. So you create this extraordinary thing and these long term relationships, but you never actually know how long term it's going to be. And there's a great sort of paradox in this shift from a traditional idea of a museum to a museum as a place of caring and wellbeing, where you've got something which is 140 years old and everything around the ethos of caring for a collection is that it will be here forever. But then this sort of human relationships, we don't know whether we will be able to carry on after April or in two years time or whatever it is. There's a sort of deeper systemic issue that our sector needs to kind of address. I think.

HR: Place doesn't necessarily have to relate to geographical location, it can be something on a microcosmic level but there are many layers to which place is something significant at Holburne. The park that surrounds it, the architecture of its building but also the space of respite which is provided to those visiting and creating. The theme that Louise and Chris raise about museums being places of care with regards to objects and how that can represent how care can be given the adults has to be highlighted. Especially Chris's point about regarding the relationship and attention between object and person. Similar to

Salisbury, they are used as a referral for primary care and other services which is something that can be argued as not being spoken or publicised enough at times. Especially as Louise says, the change they see in people particularly when it comes to confidence and someone perhaps redefining themselves.

Part 3: Outro

HR: We have reached the end of our third episode, thank you for taking the time to listen and to my guests. You will find out more information about both museums in the notes to accompany these episodes. Next time, we meet Jane and Phoebe from Dulwich Picture Gallery and look at museums training a new generation of professionals.