Summary Report: Guidelines for involving people with mental health issues in heritage projects

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MARCH 2022

THANK YOU FOR YOUR INTEREST IN THESE GUIDELINES

This overview document provides a project summary along with the guidelines themselves. For further details as to how the guidelines were produced, please see the full report, which you can find on our website (www.solent.ac.uk/march-plus-project).

Please cite the full report as:

Burnell, K., Everill, P., Baxter, L. Makri, E., Watson, K., Monckton, L., Gradinarova, D. (2021). *Guidelines for involving people with mental health issues in heritage projects*. MARCH Network Plus Fund Report

!!Call to action: We need your help!!

We are asking organisations that view the guidelines to take part in a survey to understand the impact the guidelines have in practice. We will ask you how you intend to use the guidelines and the changes that you intend to make, if any, as a result of using the guidelines.

We will also follow up your experiences after 6 months, and after 1 year.

To take part in the first phase, please visit the MARCH Plus Project website and click on the link to the survey (www.solent.ac.uk/march-plus-project).

If you would like more information, please contact Karen Burnell on the email address marchplusteam@solent.ac.uk. By making contact with us you are not committing to take part. The survey has been approved by Solent University's Research Ethics Committee.

Project Summary

Introduction

Heritage interventions to support mental health and wellbeing have become a focus of research and policy. In 2018, Historic England produced a framework outlining ways in which heritage can positively impact wellbeing (Reilly, Nolan, & Monckton, 2018). Since then there has been a move towards social prescription of heritage interventions (Historic England, 2019).

While there are benefits to active participation, there are also potential risks to those who receive support as well as risk to the non-renewable historic remains and landscape that form the core of these projects, and it is essential that best practice is observed in order to protect both participants and those heritage assets.

Definitions

A 'heritage project' in the context of this report is defined as one set up to facilitate active participation in, and engagement with, heritage with the explicit intention of supporting mental health and wellbeing. It is therefore considered an *intervention,* as opposed to passive/receptive engagement.

We refer to 'mental health issues' throughout the report, to reflect the language preferred by our lived experience researcher. Mental health issues are distinct from 'wellbeing' which is understood to be a holistic judgement of life satisfaction, whereas mental health issues refer to symptoms of psychological distress.

Purpose of the Study

This report presents the results of a UKRI MARCH Network Plus funded project carried out between November 2020 and May 2021, which saw an expert panel develop best practice guidelines for organisations offering heritage projects as interventions for people who live with mental health issues. This was achieved through a Delphi process, which utilised the skills of those with lived experience of mental health issues, as well as mental health and heritage professions equally, bringing together their expertise to create a practical and beneficial tool based on real-life experience.

Summary of Findings

Ten thematic areas were developed under three headings: Project Preparation, Project Delivery, and Project Follow-up. A particular focus for the guidelines concerned aspects of safeguarding, understanding risk, and duty of care, as well as the expertise that should be brought into the project delivery in terms of the appropriate management of both heritage/ historic environment asset, and mental health.

Summary of Guidelines

This section presents a summary of the guidelines as an introduction for policy makers and interested professionals. The full set of guidelines is presented in the main body of the report, and this should be used by practitioners looking to establish heritage-based initiatives designed to support mental health and wellbeing. This supplements conventional health and safety considerations and requirements for risk assessment.

Project Preparation

- Project Aims and Anticipated Benefits
- Group Composition
- Initial Contact and Joining a Project

Project Delivery

- Working in Partnership
- Safeguarding Responsibilities
- Project Delivery to enable participation
- Staff expertise and training
- Model of delivery

Project Follow up

- Expectations for Evaluation
- Post project support

Project Preparation concerns aspects of what projects should explicitly aim to achieve, considerations as to who target participants should be and why, and how initial contact should be made along, with considerations of ways to support initial engagement.

Project Delivery concerns the importance of working in partnership (e.g. heritage organisations seeking support from mental health professional and vice versa), safeguarding responsibilities, project delivery to overcome ongoing barriers and support participation, expectations for staff expertise and training, and the model (but not content) of delivery that might be most impactful.

Project Follow up concerns expectations for evaluation and the types of post-project support that may be required.

In all sections there are components the panel considered *essential* in the delivery of a safe and effective project. Those that reached consensus once they had been reframed as optional are presented as *desirable* components. The guidelines are presented as a checklist in the Appendix. It is hoped that these guidelines can assist all organisations, big or small, funded or un-funded, in the delivery of safe projects that support the mental health of those involved, as well as enhancing and protecting the historic environment that provides the setting for these interventions. They may also help services to identify trusted projects that can be signposted to by social prescribers or similar link workers.

Appendix: Guidelines Checklist

Components (E= Essential, D= Desirable)	✓	How will this be delivered in the project?
PROJECT PREPARATION		
1. Project Aims and Anticipated Benefits		
Any organisation that aims to design and deliver heritage projects to people that are experiencing mental health issues should aim to:		
E	**Improve overall wellbeing** through the following objectives:		
E	- **Educate** (e.g. by providing formal and informal learning, inspiring further research and new projects, enhancing participants' skills, leading to further educational or employment opportunities such as further study).		
E	- **Create a purpose and a focus** (e.g. by engaging in a meaningful activity with defined goals and outcomes).		
E	- **Promote diversity and inclusion** (e.g. by enhancing access to heritage, by creating a sense of community, by creating awareness around mental health).		
E	- **Empower** (e.g. by allowing participant's views to be valued, aiming to boost self-esteem and confidence, creating a sense of belonging).		
E	- Allow participants to carry out an activity in **a safe environment**.		
E	- **Encourage social skills and connectedness** (e.g. by promoting team working).		
E	- **Generate further support** (e.g. by providing signposting to further support, by promoting social prescribing as an enabling mechanism).		
E	**Enhance heritage** (e.g. by widening the perspectives on heritage through engagement with a wide range of participants, by offering a new dimension to heritage by the contribution of the stories and experiences of those taking part).		

2. Group Composition			
Any organisation that aims to design and deliver heritage projects to people that are experiencing mental health issues should ensure that:			
E	The composition of the group is determined by the aims and objectives of the project organisers (i.e. to support those with a specific mental health issue or those who share type of experience e.g. veterans), and is clearly communicated with potential participants.		
E	The composition of the group is connected to the resources available to the project (e.g. a group that seeks to engage people with complex mental health issues would need more resources to run it safely, including appropriately trained staff).		
3. Initial Contact and Joining a Project			
Any organisation that aims to design and deliver heritage projects to people that are experiencing mental health issues should:			
Provision of Information			
E	Ensure that signing up to the project is **clear and straightforward**		
E	Offer participants an **"orientation pack"** with detailed information on what the project will entail		
Sharing information			
E	Collaborate with other professionals and/or organisations to ensure **highly trained staff are present** if a participant needs them		
E	Collaborate with other professionals and/or organisations to offer **access to external mental health support** if a participant needs it		
E	Collaborate with other professionals and/or organisations to **co-create a wellbeing plan with the participant**		
Contact with project providers			
E	Collaborate with other professionals and/or organisations to arrange **conversations or assessments** with potential participants prior to the		

	activity to identify potential triggers/needs and to co-create plans to cope with these		
E	Collaborate with other professionals and/or organisations to arrange **conversations or assessments** with potential participants prior to the activity to identify individual goals and to co-create plans to support these		
Nature of initial engagement			
E	Allow a trusted contact, a peer or a former participant to accompany the person to the first session		
	When organising a heritage project for people that are experiencing mental health issues an organisation could:		
D	Collaborate with other professionals and/or organisations (e.g. mental health professionals, social prescribers, volunteer organisations) in order to generate greater awareness among potential participants, or to actively refer participants to the project.		
D	Consider offering taster sessions and/or open days to help individuals overcome anxieties or other barriers to full participation.		
PROJECT DELIVERY			
4. Working in Partnership			
Partnerships with organisations, professionals, and those with lived experience			
Any organisation that plans to involve people experiencing mental health issues in heritage projects should ensure that:			
E	Projects include support/mentoring from mental health professionals		
E	Projects include support/mentoring from heritage professionals		
E	All individuals facilitating or offering support are vetted for their suitability		
E	The roles of those facilitating and offering support are clearly defined		
E	Projects are co-created with people with lived experience of mental health issues		

An organisation that plans to involve people experiencing mental health issues in heritage projects could:			
D	Benefit from partnering with other organisations and/or individuals to organise and carry out those projects.		
D	Benefit by support offered by peers.		
D	Benefit by support offered by volunteers.		
D	Benefit by support offered by carers.		
D	An organisation that wants to organise heritage projects for people that are experiencing mental health issues but lacks resources and knowledge to do so, could benefit from starting by engaging with small projects and build scale based on experience.		
Enhanced Link Working			
Any organisation that involves people experiencing mental health issues in heritage projects would need to use methods to inform and direct individuals to these activities, such as:			
E	Signposting through health care networks		
E	Signposting through charity and community groups		
E	Signposting through social prescribing		
E	Signposting through cultural and heritage groups		
E	Online media		
E	Word of mouth and personal testimonials		
To inform those who are digitally excluded, or not affiliated with any organisations, organisations could use:			
D	Local press		
D	Leaflets		
D	Events and fairs		
5. Safeguarding Responsibilities			

Any organisation that aims to design and deliver heritage projects to people that are experiencing mental health issues should ensure that:			
E	The heritage site should have policies and procedures in place to ensure the safety of its audiences and collections before the activity taking place		
E	Training should be provided to participants (?) for any activity that requires it		
E	Staff should receive appropriate preparation and debrief prior to the activity		
E	Enough staff should be in place to run the activity		
E	Ongoing support should be offered to staff/volunteers involved in programme delivery		
E	There should be reflective opportunities for staff and volunteers to talk about what went well/ not well		
E	Health and safety equipment appropriate to the activity must be in place		
E	Quality control standards should be in place for activities that require it		
E	Engagement in activities that will irreversibly impact on the historic environment (e.g. through archaeological excavation), or might cause damage to objects, buildings etc (e.g. through restoration activities), is appropriately supervised so that the project complies with the standards of the relevant professional body while also delivering benefits to its participants.		
6. Project Delivery to enable participation			
Any organisation that aims to design and deliver heritage projects to people that are experiencing mental health issues should:			
General			
E	Recognise they have a duty to help a person seek appropriate support or report the information to relevant authorities if someone discloses risk of harm to self or others		
E	Ensure a code of conduct should be signed from all taking part		
Practical			

Guidelines for involving people with mental health issues in heritage projects: 2021

E	Arrange shared mealtimes or snack times to encourage conversation and social bonding		
E	Provide practical support to participants (e.g. food, transport, accommodation if the activity is taking place away from home)		
E	Allow flexibility for participants that have family or work commitments		
Emotional/Psychological			
E	Ensure that all participants derive some benefit from the activities		
E	Ensure that reports of inappropriate or discriminating behaviour should be recorded and investigated		
E	Ensure for residential projects a responsible person should be available at all time to provide immediate assistance or support to individuals should the need arise		
E	Provide a "safe space" for when people need it		
E	Allow flexibility when someone is unwell to participate		
E	Provide a range of activities that are interesting and at varying levels		
E	Monitor the wellbeing of participants throughout involvement		
E	Allow carers that participants would like to accompany them		
E	Ensure effort should be made to avoid participants developing dependency to support staff or the project		
7. Staff Expertise and Training			
Any organisation that aims to design and deliver heritage projects to people that are experiencing mental health issues should:			
Expertise			
E	Ensure there is at least one mental health first aider on site, with more first aiders for larger groups		
Training			
E	Offer Safeguarding of Vulnerable Adults training to some of its staff/volunteers that are supporting the project		

E	Offer Mental Health Awareness training to any of its staff/volunteers that are supporting the project		
E	Offer Mental Health First Aid training to some of its staff/volunteers that are supporting the project		
E	Offer Quality and Diversity training to any of its staff/volunteers that are supporting the project		
E	Offer General Data Protection Regulation training to any of its staff/volunteers that are supporting the project and have not already received GDPR training before		
E	Ensure that training is provided by a trained instructor or a reputable provider		
Staff and volunteers that are supporting a project that aims to design and deliver heritage related projects to people that are experiencing mental health issues could:			
D	Benefit from Coaching Skills training.		
D	Benefit from Transformative Skills training.		
8. Model of Delivery			
A project that delivers heritage activities to people experiencing mental health issues should:			
E	Have some structure on its delivery based on its objectives		
E	Have some structure on its delivery based on the capabilities of those organising it		
E	Allow flexibility to accommodate emerging interests		
E	Allow flexibility to accommodate individual needs		
PROJECT FOLLOW UP			
9. Expectations for Evaluation			
Any organisation that aims to design and deliver heritage related activities to people that are experiencing mental health issues:			
E	Should measure wellbeing by a method that is agreed by the participant		

D	Could use feedback from staff/volunteers to evaluate a project		
D	Could use audience surveys to evaluate a project		
D	Could use organisation data to evaluate a project		
D	Could use feedback from participants to evaluate a project		
D	Could use a previously agreed upon validated psychological measurement to assess wellbeing.		
D	Could use financial information to evaluate the sustainability of the project.		
D	Could use financial information to assess positive economic impact derived from the project.		
D	Could use financial information to assess whether new audiences for the heritage site were created as a result of the project.		
10. Post project support			
Any organisation running a project that involves people experiencing mental health issues in a heritage project should:			
E	Signpost to further support for participants that need it		
E	Inform participants if there are any possibilities to take part in further projects in the future		
E	Encourage post project contact with other participants		
E	Offer some post project contact with participants to check on their wellbeing		
E	Should encourage independent participation within heritage or progression to new roles within the project to those individuals that are interested in future involvement.		
D	Note that individuals that are interested in being involved in future projects or seek employment/education opportunities following participation on a heritage project for people experiencing mental health issues, could benefit from guidance on career goals and progression offered by the heritage organisation that runs the project.		