

## Living memories: Guide for Nottinghamshire Heritage Sites - How engaging with Elderly visitors can increase your income

Through the Living Memories project conducted in the summer of 2019, we identified 5 ways in which heritage sites in Nottinghamshire can boost mental health in the elderly, as well as increase their own annual income.

### 1. Why Care Home Providers and their elderly residents are waiting to spend money with you

Unless it is a specialized facility, the residents of care homes are generally a mixed bunch of elderly people 70+ with very mixed abilities and mixed needs. Some will be in a care home because they have dementia, some because they are physically disabled or on respite, and others have chosen to be in in a care home simply because they don't want to have to look after themselves any more. But days can be long in a care home – and as one resident quoted 'We have nothing to do, and all day to do it in.' So boredom is a major problem, and as a result, lack of mental stimulation and connection to the outside world, is leading to loneliness, and a decline in brain function in the elderly.

But that's where the museum and heritage providers can play a massive part in reversing these effects – whilst increasing their own income. Elderly people love verbally and visually reminiscing as it connects them to their pasts and the things and people that they have lost.

Regardless of their reasons for being in a care home, their individual need for mental stimulation and empowerment is an essential part of their wellbeing. Mostly the resident of care homes have suffered a great loss of independence and identity as a result of becoming elderly or going to live in a care home, and that's why museums and heritage sites are perfect places for them to connect with who they are. In most cases the care home residents have lost their health, their homes, their careers, their spouses, their pets, their friends, their hobbies, and their sense of value to others and to society. As a result of these losses they can feel hollow, lonely, angry, depressed and hopeless. It is vital for their mental wellbeing that they can still connect with the things that they have otherwise lost – the things that they did, or had, when they were younger, and more independent.

Museums and heritage sites hold valuable resources that will enable people in residential homes to connect to their pasts and to feel more empowered, thereby improving their mental health.

By enabling them to access your site with ease, they will not only have a wonderful day out but your collection will also boost their mental health. This will occur in the following ways:

- They will reconnect with the objects that they used to have in their homes during their happiest times.
- They will remember happy days out with their family and friends.
- They will feel empowered as they see and smell the machinery that they used to operate, and remember how they contributed to society – and what their own skills were.
- They will reconnect to their childhoods and feel closer to their own parents (who most of them still miss, and talk to – especially in states of dementia)
- The smells of the rooms, and the sight and feel of the objects will stimulate their brain activity, improve their recall ability, and bring back memories that will release endorphins – keeping their brains active at a cellular level.

And on top of that, they can bring a new richness to your collection by sharing their memories of that object/place/person – why not record their memories and create a valuable archive?



## 2. Why care home providers and over 65s are NOT currently visiting your site

In many cases, when care home staff arrive at a heritage site with their residents, they find that the sites aren't fully accessible to those who are no longer able bodied. So now, when deciding where to go, they look for information on websites and leaflets to ensure that their needs will be taken care of.

Disabled access is not just about providing lifts and large toilets, there are many other factors that elderly people and carers have to take into consideration when deciding which heritage site or tour to take up on a day out e.g. Are the paths suitable for wheelchairs? Are there any steep hills to get to the site? Are there disabled toilets without steps? Can they get wheelchairs around the buildings with ease?

When researching where to take a group of residents on a day out, websites and leaflets are used by the care home staff. It is physically extremely hard work taking a group of elderly and disabled residents out for the day, and so they want the experience when they get there to be as easy as possible.

There is currently a lack of information on heritage websites and leaflets as to whether a person who has mobility issues, or who is in a wheelchair will be able to access all parts of the site. As it can take 1-2 hours to get the residents ready and onto a minibus, they need to have confidence that everything will be easy at the site, and that those residents will have everything that they need when they get there.

Some of the places that they research are rejected because of the lack of confidence that they will have a positive experience on their visit. Therefore care home providers and elderly people will continue to visit the sites that they know give them easy access. So please ensure that your leaflets and websites contain information about the following:

## Essential information that you need to provide for potential care home visitors in your standard marketing literature:

### ✓ DISABLED PARKING:

Many care homes will hire a self-drive mini bus for the day to bring residents to your site. These are long, and have hydraulic lifts at the back that extend further out than the bus. One of the main problems is finding a disabled space wide enough and long enough to park this vehicle and get the residents out safely.

### ✓ EASY ACCESS TO AND FROM THE CAR PARK:

I.e. firm paths that aren't muddy or made of gravel. Wheelchairs in care homes are mostly self-propelled and so the person pushing has to bear the entire weight of the user, and the heavy chair – therefore cobbled, and gravelly pathways are virtually impossible to push a wheelchair over. Only firm and level pathways are considered disability friendly. Try pushing a member of staff around your site in a wheelchair, to see how heavy it feels.

### ✓ REFRESHMENTS:

An easily accessible sheltered café or seating area where a cup of tea or water can be purchased. Most elderly care home residents need to sit down with a drink within 20-30 minutes of being active. Consider offering gluten free or pureed options.

### ✓ DISABLED TOILETS:

A nearby disabled toilet that a wheelchair user can access easily is essential i.e. no stairs to access. An obstacle of any more than 2 shallow stairs will make the effort of getting into the toilet unsafe – even with a ramp - and so the care home is unlikely to stay at your site or return.

## 3. How engaging with care homes now, will boost your revenue massively

Museums, heritage sites and tour providers are collectively throwing away £100,000s every year by not targeting the age 65+ demographic.

The care home sector is worth approximately £15.9 billion to the UK economy, and of the 11,000 care homes in the UK, approximately 500 of these are in Nottinghamshire. That's 500 care homes in Nottinghamshire that could each bring a group of their residents regularly to spend money at your site or on your tours.

There are 12 million people aged 65+ currently in the UK, and over 200,000 65+ people in Nottingham and Nottinghamshire alone. By 2025 it is predicted that there will be nearly 300,000 people aged 65+ living in Nottinghamshire – over a quarter of the Notts population.

Attracting them to your site will be lucrative. For each care home resident that you attract, they will each have a carer spending money with you too. The ratios are generally: One carer per resident that attends in a wheelchair, and at least one carer per two able bodied residents.

## 4. What you need to do to ensure that your local care homes, or any other local 65+ groups, visit and spend money with you

Target them! Create leaflets and website pages especially for local care homes and elderly community centres.

### ESSENTIAL INFORMATION TO INCLUDE IN YOUR LEAFLETS AND ON YOUR WEBSITE:

- Where you are located e.g. in minutes from the city centre
- How long would an average visit be?
- Do you have disabled parking that is close to the site?
- Can the car park easily accommodate a long



mini bus that has a rear hydraulic ramp – the usual method that care homes use on day visits.

- Do you have disabled toilets that don't involve any stairs to get to?
- How accessible is your site from the car park? E.g. walking distance, is there a proper path and wide easy gate entrance?
- If it is a large site, do you have wheelchairs that can be hired?
- Is there a sheltered café available on site?
- What is there to do at your site that will help reminiscence?

Once you have created your leaflets with the above information, post them to the local care homes for the attention of the Activities Co-Ordinator (Currently, emails very rarely get opened) – ones within about 10 miles are the most likely to visit your site – ask them to pass them on to relatives too by placing them next to the signing in book.

**OFFER A FREE TALK ABOUT YOUR SITE TO THE CARE HOME** (And of course to other local 65+ groups in your area who are always looking for days out)

This will get you in front of the staff and the residents, and you can reassure them how easy you will make it for them to visit your site. Once they have visited, and have felt looked after it is highly likely that they will come back every year – if not more often.



**Top Tip:** When you do your talk in the care home, make it energetic, engaging and inclusive. Move around the room a lot, make eye contact, and ask them lots of questions that encourage them to share their memories/knowledge of what you are talking about. They are often hard of hearing, have sight problems, or find it hard to stay awake, so if you keep your presentation very inclusive and conversational, they will love it. Use objects, music, photos from your collection.

The residents will be mostly local so they will remember the places and things that you are talking about and will love sharing their memories – in fact sharing memories is the most empowering and exciting activity for someone living in a care home – so if they can connect with what you are talking about they will have a brilliant time... and you will learn so much from them in return.

## **5. Create events aimed at the Elderly and their carers**

A special annual 'Free Entry for people 65+ and their carers' event will ensure that you fill your tours. This will encourage care homes to bring their residents as a planned annual event, and also encourage them to bring their families for a day out. They will then spend money in your café and on souvenirs. You could theme these days too, to encourage multiple visits.

### **What periods of history are likely to appeal more for your talks and events?**

The 1940s is still very popular with care home residents due to the timeless ballads and the memories of the communities coming together during the war years.

However, this is by no means the sole time period that is of interest to care home residents. In fact, the generations that are going into care homes now were very young during the war, so wartime memories have been taken over by memories of dancing, working, days out with their families and partners, school days, the cars that they drove, the sweets and comics that they enjoyed, memories of being evacuated as children, getting married, the town that they lived in etc. Icons from the 50s and 60s like Marilyn Monroe, John Wayne and Elvis Presley.

So if you concentrate on giving a wide offering of experiences then that will give them reason to keep inviting you back for talks, and it will also encourage them to visit your site several times in a year.

### CHECK LISTS:

You have a wonderful heritage site that elderly visitors really want to visit, so make it the best experience for them and they will reward you with loyalty.

In addition to this document, on the website you will also find checklists to make you aware of the assets that you have that will enhance the heritage experience that you give elderly care home residents – or any elderly visitors. Fill them out and then proudly offer your services to the thousands of Nottinghamshire care home residents that are waiting for your invitation.

Give them a wonderful experience and they will return time and time again, knowing that their day out will be perfect.

For more information [www.nottinghamshire.gov.uk/livingmemories](http://www.nottinghamshire.gov.uk/livingmemories)

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