

Project name	Kirklees Community History Service 'What's Your Story?' project
Location	Kirklees, West Yorkshire
Partner organisations	Kirklees Community History Service Dewsbury College
Contact details	Sarah Hughes – Kirklees Community History Service
Funded by	YMLAC

Introduction

The work on the What's Your Story? project aimed to:

Explore ways in which history resources, such as museum collections, buildings and archives, could play their part in providing adult learning opportunities to link in with the Government's 'Skills for Life' basic skills agenda among the local communities of Dewsbury, an area which has been identified as having a high number of adults with basic skills needs.

Make initial steps towards increasing physical and intellectual access to community history service collections among new 'hard to reach' audiences, building up links with individuals and groups to inform future developments in adult learning and audience development within the Community History Service's programme.

Promote learning in the area of local history and heritage among groups currently under-represented in our audiences.

Promote the use of community history sources to empower people to be able to find out more about their own heritage, aiming to increase community activity and community pride.

Bring together basic skills professionals (from Dewsbury College) with the wealth of resources held by the Community History Service to promote access to our collections and the possible connections between such collections and the basic skills curriculum.

Build links with other organisations involved in adult learning / regeneration / neighbourhood renewal in the Dewsbury area, ensuring that Dewsbury Museum be seen as an essential learning and community resource among such agencies, and among the communities served by them.

Programme of Work

The project forms part of the wider Kirklees Community History Service programme. The Community History Service aims to provide access to local heritage through a wide variety of events, activities, exhibitions and educational programmes, encouraging lifelong learning and community activity in heritage.

This project aimed to make initial steps towards developing new audiences among the local communities surrounding Dewsbury Museum, breaking down barriers and changing perceptions of the Museum, aiming to increase the usage of the Museum as the community venue which it aims to be.

The project is also a response to the government's 'Skills for Life' agenda, aiming to improve the basic skills of 7 million adults in the UK in the coming years. Clearly in order to attract large numbers of adults currently not accessing learning, new approaches towards basic skills teaching and learning will be necessary, in order to increase the variety and range of learning opportunities open to adults to encourage new learners. Current basic skills provision clearly attracts a proportion of the population, but there are still vast inroads to be made in attracting adults back into learning programmes which can improve their basic skills. The embedded approach of combining local history with the opportunity to improve basic skills in literacy is an area which the Community History Service and Dewsbury College's Basic Skills Team are keen to develop further, aiming to provide a new and attractive basic skills learning opportunity for the local community. The Dewsbury West and Dewsbury East wards have been identified as having a large number of adults with basic skills needs (particularly in literacy), and this programme aimed to begin to address this issue within the Museums Service.

Development work:

Became involved in the establishment of the 'Dewsbury West Neighbourhood Learning Network', a network supported by KMC's Learning Partnership/LEA Community Education & Regeneration Department, which brings together organisations such as:

- Dewsbury College Outreach Team
- Sure Start, Dewsbury Moor & Scout Hill
- FASTLANE (Families and Schools Together, Literacy and Numeracy for Everyone)
- 'Excellence in Clusters' initiative (Schools as community learning centres)
- Dewsbury West Neighbourhood Management Pathfinder
- Community Learning Providers

to co-ordinate and develop the neighbourhood learning provision available for Dewsbury West's local communities.

Worked closely with Dewsbury College's Outreach Team and the Dewsbury College Basic Skills Co-ordinator (when appointed) to develop a six-week learning programme bringing together Community History resources with the Adult Basic Skills Core Curriculum for Literacy, and to develop the learning resources for the programme. This resulted in the development of the 'What's Your Story? Literacy through History' curriculum document (enclosed) and the worksheets to go with this (enclosed).

Targeted promotion of the project and learning programme among individuals and groups located through Sure Start and FASTLANE.

Development of crèche facilities and transport contracts to support the programmes, ensuring wide accessibility.

Learning Programmes:

Established 2 ‘What’s Your Story?’ groups as follows:

- Group 1: Consisting of 12 adults whose children attend High Bank First School on the Windy Bank Estate, Liversedge. This estate is one of the areas identified as requiring support under the ‘Neighbourhood Learning in Deprived Communities’ initiative currently rolling out in Kirklees. This group were put together through the Community History Service working with the FASTLANE Literacy Development Worker within the school. The Community History Service provided the Literacy Development Worker with promotional information relating to the ‘What’s Your Story?’ programme, enabling the Literacy Development Worker to distribute this information through word of mouth and posters to parents dropping off/picking up children at the school. It was felt that this would offer an opportunity for us to promote the programme to targeted individuals falling within the remit of the ‘Neighbourhood Learning in Deprived Communities’ agenda. 11 parents came forward expressing an interest in taking part in the learning programme, forming the first group for the project.
- Group 2: Consisting of 8 adults attending a weekly Sure Start ‘Parents Time Out Group’, a social group aiming to provide parents with the chance to meet together with ‘time out’ from their child-care roles. The ‘What’s Your Story’ project was promoted to the group, resulting in the group becoming involved in this first step informal learning programme. The group falls under another ‘Neighbourhood Learning in Deprived Communities’ area, Dewsbury West, which is covered by the Dewsbury West Neighbourhood Learning Network, aiming to introduce people back into first-rung non-threatening learning opportunities.

Each group undertook six two-hour learning sessions taking part in the learning activities outlined in the ‘What’s Your Story? Literacy through History’ curriculum document (enclosed) and using the worksheets designed in conjunction with Dewsbury College’s Basic Skills Co-ordinator (enclosed).

The staff that have been deeply involved in the initiative are:

Sarah Hughes, Community Education Officer, Kirklees Community History Service
Grant Scanlan, Museums Officer (Dewsbury Museum), Kirklees Community History Service

Sharon Fallows, Basic Skills Co-ordinator, Dewsbury College
Dee Slater, Outreach Worker, Dewsbury College
Carmel Gallagher, Outreach Worker, Dewsbury College

Sam Fretwell, Literacy Development Worker, FASTLANE

Hillary Smith, Parent Development Worker, Sure Start

Emma Lee, Network Co-ordinator, Dewsbury West Neighbourhood Learning Network

Helen Featherstone, Arts Development Worker, LOCA

Amanda Howes, Freelance Artist

With further support provided by other members of Community History staff, and LEA/Learning Partnership staff.

Outcomes

Group 1 worked through all of the activities outlined in the curriculum document, concentrating particularly on oral histories relating to the local history of the area in which they live. The group members completed personal history ‘scrapbooks’ incorporating the work which they had done.

Group 2 worked through almost all of the activities, although time constraints and group preferences meant that oral history was the area least touched upon by the group. This group had become particularly interested in the history of Crow Nest Park and Mansion and therefore also had a tour of the behind the scenes areas of the Mansion (in which Dewsbury Museum is now housed). This group had, in their ‘Time Out’ group, been involved in arts and crafts work, and therefore this group expressed an interest in interpreting some of the things they’d learned about local history through art work. Their art work pieces created as part of their interpretation of the learning sessions are now on display within the Museum for 5 weeks (along with other art and craft pieces created by the group prior to their involvement in the project) in a display entitled Dewsbury Creations. A launch event was held for the display on Saturday 12th June.

All of the activities undertaken by the participants were, through the curriculum document, mapped to the Adult Basic Skills Core Curriculum for Literacy, and therefore, in achieving the learning activities outlined in the curriculum document produced for this project, the group members achieved those Literacy core curriculum standards involved.

Dewsbury College’s Basic Skills Co-ordinator attended the sessions, increasing the literacy content of the learning programme throughout, and contributing to subsequent evaluation of the project, looking towards further development of this work and possible accreditation.

A significant aspect of the ‘What’s Your Story?’ project has been the impact that the project has had on the participants in changing their perceptions and pre-conceptions about Museums, Museum activities and who and what Museums are here for. For example, formal evaluations undertaken with Group 1 included comments such as: “Surprised that there are things that we can touch with gloves on”, “surprised at how much has actually survived”, and the comment that the Museum was “a lot more

interesting” than expected. Group 2 were similarly unsure to begin with about just how interesting they might find a local history learning programme, and had in fact been a little wary of the subject of ‘history’. They had expressed a willingness to take part in the project, but in the initial session expressed the concern, “Will we have to write essays?” suggesting that they perhaps associated the subject of history with their school experiences of the subject. The group were also a little wary about ‘learning’. However, through the use of history resources in the learning sessions undertaken, the group became very interested in the history of Crow Nest Park and Mansion, and developed to a stage where they felt able to continue with their look into it’s history outside of the sessions. During the final session members of the group were discussing the possibility of starting their own local history group as part of Sure Start, which showed quite a turnaround from the initial sessions.

In addition to the impact of the project on the participants, the impact on the other organisations in the Dewsbury West Neighbourhood Learning Network has also been huge. Organisations such as Sure Start, FASTLANE and the College are now enquiring about possibilities for future partnership work along similar lines to this project, seeing the Museum as an essential learning resource. On a wider scale, through the Learning Partnership and the LEA Community Education and Regeneration department, Neighbourhood Learning Area Planning groups in other ‘Neighbourhood Learning in Deprived Communities’ area have begun to enquire about the possibility of the programme being offered within their areas. The shaping of the learning programme into the phraseology of adult learning (i.e. through the curriculum document) has clearly assisted those involved in the adult learning sphere within Kirklees to understand the potential of the Museums as learning resources which can assist in the meeting of adult learning targets. This is perhaps most noticeable in the developments in partnership working with Dewsbury College, with the College and the Community History Service now looking to the future and possible ways of offering a longer (possibly one year) learning programme with a combined dual accreditation in literacy and history. This recognition among College staff of the role that local history may have in providing embedded basic skills programmes of real interest to learners not currently engaging in literacy learning provides a significant achievement for the ‘What’s Your Story?’ project.