

## CASE STUDY

# Reconnect

## The McManus Art Gallery & Museum

The COVID-19 pandemic had a significant impact on access to culture. The McManus responded to this challenge by partnering with [Alzheimer Scotland](#), [Home-Start Dundee](#) and [THAT \(Tayside Healthcare Arts Trust\)](#) to deliver *Reconnect*, a remote engagement programme. Kim Galligan, Learning and Engagement Assistant (Digital) for Leisure and Culture Dundee, outlines the project and its impact on families and community groups.

### ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

#### PROJECT OVERVIEW:

- Ran from January to August 2021
- Online and remote delivery
- Focus on partnership work

#### FUNDED BY:

- Art Fund
- THAT (Tayside Healthcare Arts Trust)
- Leisure & Culture Dundee

#### THE McMANUS ART GALLERY & MUSEUM:

- Established in 1867
- Explores the art, history and natural history of the Dundee area
- 158,000 visitors in 2018

### THE PROJECT:

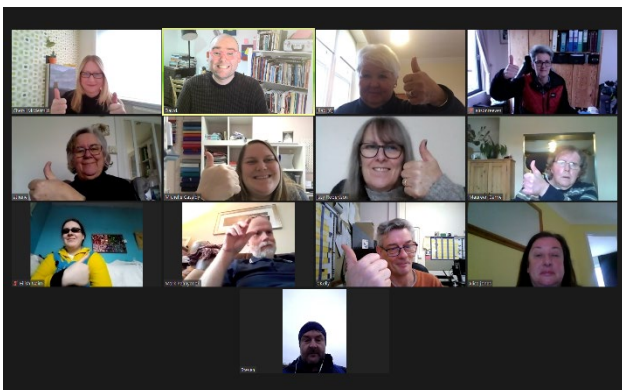
*Reconnect* was an ambitious six-month remote learning and engagement project to help combat isolation heightened by the COVID-19 pandemic. The project was designed to enhance positive cultural participation and ensure that isolating and shielding participants could still benefit from the rich experiences the museum has to offer.

An integrated team of museum educators, curators, cultural partners and freelance artists were brought together to support those most in need. All project activities were designed to spark imagination and support shared, remote learning experiences inspired by the museum's 2021 exhibitions [Time and Tide: The Transformation of the Tay](#) and [A Love Letter to Dundee: Joseph McKenzie Photographs 1964-1987](#).

Activities included digital reminiscence sessions, online sessions to develop skills in photography, a wide range of family-friendly digital activities, free art kits and artist-led workshops, as well as specially choreographed dance sessions. Participants also had opportunities to share their own stories and co-produce final project artworks and publications.

**“Being part of the programme has given me a push to leave the house and interact with the world and begin to see the beauty of life again.”**

Project participant



## CHALLENGES AND SUCCESSSES:

- *Reconnect* enabled the team to build relationships with hard-to-reach groups through the provision of high-quality, creative engagement.
- The team developed new skillsets to support the delivery of remote learning and engagement, including cross-departmental team working, video conferencing, skills with Microsoft Teams, Zoom and additional skills using the Microsoft office suite of apps.
- The project was presented at the 31st Alzheimer Europe Conference. This presentation explored the values and challenges involved in creating a comfortable and informal virtual social environment. It also discussed the potential of using tailored learning resources as 'starting points' to spark conversation about memories and to make personal connections in a time when we had to stay apart.
- All participants and staff felt that the technical side of working remotely presented some difficulties. Some problems encountered were getting logged into online meetings, muting and un-muting microphones, microphone feedback and sound distortion. It was difficult to read facial expressions and body language to make sure that people didn't speak over one another.
- It was challenging to respond to the rapidly changing COVID-19 guidance, and to adapt the project at short notice to follow these rules.

## THE IMPACT IT HAS MADE:

- Participants developed an awareness of museum's collections and an appreciation for cultural participation as a tool to increase wellbeing and combat social isolation.

- Participants learned more about Dundee's cultural heritage, gained confidence and a sense of personal and civic pride, and overcame challenges through participation in safe, supportive environments.
- The McManus established sustainable partnerships with local community groups and cultural agencies, diversified its audiences, and developed new staff skillsets and COVID-friendly learning approaches.

## LESSONS LEARNED:

- During *Reconnect*, we found that remote working can be very successful and that once we had adapted our approach, resources and working methodologies, we delivered a largescale engagement project that reached participants at a time of great need. We were flexible in our approach and were prepared to adapt our project as COVID-19 guidance changed.
- As we delivered the project and got to know the participants, it became easier to break down some of the preconceived barriers museums can present. The sessions quickly became about us addressing participant's needs, adapting the project to meet those needs and providing opportunities for participants to make social connections.

## GUIDANCE:

- Be adaptable, especially in the post-COVID environment. Have a few options that will help you deliver the project or parts of it if your preferred method of delivery becomes restricted or unavailable.
- Test your equipment before you begin but don't worry if you do encounter a few technical difficulties, the more you practice the easier digital tools are to integrate in your project.

## USEFUL RESOURCES:

Email: [The Creative Learning Team](#)

Visit: [The McManus website](#)

Visit: [The Loving Photography Gallery website](#)

Watch: [The \*Reconnect\* project video](#)

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