

MUSEUMS, HEALTH AND WELLBEING:

HOW SCOTLAND'S MUSEUMS MAKE US HEALTHIER AND HAPPIER



Foreword

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Visiting museums makes people happier. Anybody who loves exploring exhibitions and wandering through galleries understands this – and it’s also borne out by scientific research.

As a central part of our cultural ecosystem, Scotland’s museums and galleries have an enormous, and often underestimated, impact on our collective health and wellbeing.

As part of our work to demonstrate the social value of the museums sector, Museums Galleries Scotland commissioned a literature review to establish the extent of peer-reviewed academic research on the impact of museums.

For all visitors, engaging with museums can bring benefits. **Visiting museums is shown to result in greater general wellbeing** and is even associated with living longer.

That benefit can be even stronger when museums offer dedicated services, such as the wonderful work done to support people with dementia or to improve mental health.

Research commissioned by Culture Counts found that **80% of Scots believe there are physical or mental health benefits to engaging with culture, arts and creative activities.**

When asked about social prescribing, 53% of Scots said they were likely to engage with the historic environment if referred by a medical professional – more than those interested in being recommended to engage with sports.

This report summarises the evidence for the impact of museums on health and wellbeing and highlights some of the existing work done across the country.

With the right support, there is so much more that can be done.



Summary of research

Our literature review of peer-reviewed, academic studies has found that engagement with museums can lead to a range of benefits for health and wellbeing.

IMAGE 1:
 Art for Baby,
 Gallery of Modern Art, Glasgow

IMAGE 2:
 Members of boat club at
 Scottish Fisheries Museum, Anstruther



- » A positive impact on mental wellbeing.
- » Reduced stress and anxiety.
- » A lower rate of developing depression.
- » Reduced isolation and an increased sense of identity.
- » Participation in museum activity can reduce chronic pain.
- » A lower rate of developing dementia in later life.
- » Visiting museums and galleries is associated with increased longevity.
- » Improved outcomes for people with dementia and their carers.



What museums can offer

Reminiscence sessions for people with dementia

Reminiscence sessions have been shown to improve communication, ease agitation and reduce social isolation in dementia sufferers. This engagement can also have a positive impact on those who care for people with dementia, with research finding carers are happier and less stressed.

Social prescribing

Social prescribing is where medical professionals can refer individuals to community services to complement other forms of medical support. Museums can offer opportunities to engage with culture and heritage to support health and wellbeing.

Outreach in hospitals

Museum outreach activities in hospitals have been shown to have a positive impact on patient wellbeing.

Volunteering opportunities

Volunteering can help develop skills, reduce isolation and support wellbeing by giving people a sense of purpose. Many museums offer opportunities to volunteer and some are run entirely by volunteers.

Mental health support

Museums provide a range of activities that can support mental health, both prescribed by medical professionals and more informal sessions.

IMAGE:
Irvine Harbourside's
Men's Shed gather at
The Scottish Maritime Museum

Case studies

IMAGES 1 & 2:
Soap carving, part of the
Prescribe Culture initiative
run by University of Edinburgh's
Museums Services

PHOTO CREDIT:
Hannah Ayre



Student mental health support

Prescribe Culture is a mental health and wellbeing initiative run by the **University of Edinburgh Museums Services**, pro-actively engaging with social prescribing, sometimes referred to as community referral or non-pharmacological support.

Prescribe Culture aims to use heritage experiences as a form of self-help for students with mental health issues. The Prescribe Culture programme provides support for the growing number students experiencing mental health issues,

by drawing on research which has found cultural activities to be a beneficial, non-clinical way of managing mental wellbeing.

The initiative comprises of two programmes, **Take 30 Together Virtual** (T30TV) and **Programme 6**. T30TV gives students the opportunity to escape, explore and e-socialise through virtually visiting destinations such as Edinburgh Castle, Vancouver Art Gallery, Museum of Technology and Transport in New Zealand and the Shangri La Museum in Hawaii.

Students are led by a guide who has extensive knowledge of the heritage site, collection or exhibition during the virtual visit.

'Programme 6' is a 6-week series of 90-minute workshops with a cohort of ten to twelve students. Every session begins with an exploration of a heritage object, site or archive, followed by tea/coffee/biscuits and finishing with a creative hands-on activity, such as bookbinding, street photography or creative writing.

Case studies

continued

IMAGE 1:
Museums Dementia Socials,
St Cecilia's Hall, University of
Edinburgh's Concert Room
and Music Museum

IMAGE 2:
'Art Helps' pack produced by
National Galleries of Scotland and
the Play Team at the Royal Hospital
for Children and Young People



Museums Dementia Socials

Museums Dementia Socials is a partnership that offers people affected by dementia a regular, informal Friday morning guided visit to a museum, gallery, or zoo.

St Cecilia's Hall, the University's Concert Room and Music Museum, hosts the socials once a month and the programme includes a cup of tea and cake, a discussion around some of the rare instruments on display, and a short concert.



Creative play for children in hospital

National Galleries of Scotland works with the hospital **Play Team** in the Royal Hospital for Children and Young People to deliver creative sessions, resources and art materials for children and their families whilst they wait for appointments or throughout the treatment process.



Supporting addiction recovery

The **Skylark IX Recovery Trust** is a small charitable organisation that works in collaboration with the **Scottish Maritime Museum**, and with funding from the National Lottery Heritage Fund, to deliver woodworking and boatbuilding skills training to people at **Alternatives**, who are recovering from drug addiction. The Trust hopes to expand and build the Spirit of Skylark Centre in the Museum grounds over coming years.



IMAGE 1:
A member of the Skylark IX
Recovery Trust boatbuilding crew
at the Scottish Maritime Museum

IMAGE 2:
Art for Baby,
Gallery of Modern Art, Glasgow

Mental health support for parents

From 2019-2020 The **Gallery of Modern Art** ran '**Art for Baby**', a programme designed to support mental health aimed at parents with babies.

'Art for Baby' were informal sessions for parents with babies. They were centred around making something simple and creative in a relaxed and welcoming environment. The programme was attended by 900 participants over 12 months.

Case studies

continued

IMAGE:
Reconnect project, The McManus:
Dundee's Art Gallery & Museum



Using art in hospitals

The **Grampian Hospitals Art Trust** is an award-winning arts and health organisation which exists to enhance the wellbeing and experience of all who spend time in NHS Grampian hospitals, whether patients, visitors, or staff.

The Trust hold a collection of over 4000 artworks either commissioned or purchased over the past 30 years that are on rotational display over 34 NHS Grampian sites.

NHS staff are involved in the curatorial process of organising exhibitions, which has had an extremely positive effect in communicating the Art Collection as a valuable cultural asset.

Cultural engagement during the pandemic

The **McManus: Dundee's Art Gallery & Museum** launched **'Reconnect'**, a six-month remote learning and engagement project to help combat isolation heightened by the pandemic.

'Reconnect' enabled the museum to continue to provide cultural engagements, resources, and experiences for community groups with long term health conditions and families groups. This ensured that isolated 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. Participant groups involved are from Alzheimer Scotland, Home-Start Dundee and Tayside Healthcare Arts Trust.

All project activities are designed to spark imagination and support shared remote learning experiences, utilising the museum's new temporary exhibitions.



IMAGE:
My House of Memories app,
High Life Highland

Digital resources for people with dementia

High Life Highland worked with museums and archives across the Highlands to create content for the **My House of Memories** app, a digital museum resource which enables users to share memories.

My House of Memories is designed for use by anyone but is especially helpful for people living with dementia and their carers. The app features pictures of objects from across the decades, brought to life with sound, music, and descriptions.

It provides easy-to-use resources for helping people explore things that resonate with them, prompting conversations that are interesting, fun, and therapeutic.

Users can now browse objects from museums from across the Highlands, with a special function to save particular items to a personal memory box. Themes include school, work, leisure, and maritime memories. All Highland content was developed and trialled locally with people living with dementia and their carers.

Tackling loneliness

Cupar Museum and Heritage Centre provides monthly talks on topics related to local heritage to help combat isolation and loneliness of older people. These events are usually held alongside **Age Concern Cupar**.

Case studies

continued

IMAGE:
Dementia Outreach,
V&A Dundee



Community health and fitness

In 2019 **Grampian Transport Museum** produced and hosted the **Alford 10K Running Festival**.

Grampian Transport Museum has always attracted cycling events and activities but were keen to host a 10K running race to reflect the huge increase in popularity of distance running in the area. The aim was to develop the inaugural event into a festival of running and spark a future interest in running for attendees. The event allowed GTM to enter the highly topical world of health and fitness. This new audience attended in good numbers and with great feedback.

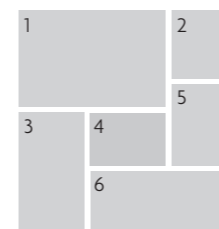
Dementia outreach

To make sure the museum is accessible to as many people as possible, the **V&A Dundee** offer free tours, workshops and outreach activities for local groups and care homes. These efforts are designed to reduce isolation and provide opportunities for people to feel connected.

Considerable work has been carried out with multiple partners including the Scottish Dementia Working Group, Care Inspectorate and Life Changes Trust to develop and test the programme.

V&A Dundee have worked closely with Alzheimer Scotland and offered three virtual tours in late 2020 reaching nearly 100 people, providing the ability to access cultural opportunities remotely.

Front cover images



1. Museums Dementia Socials, St Cecilia's Hall, University of Edinburgh's Concert Room and Music Museum
2. Dementia Outreach, V&A Dundee
3. Art for Baby, Gallery of Modern Art, Glasgow
4. My House of Memories app, High Life Highland
5. Reconnect project, The McManus: Dundee's Art Gallery & Museum
6. Skylark IX Recovery Trust's boat building crew at the Scottish Maritime Museum

For further information on what museums are doing and how to support or get involved, please get in touch with Museums Galleries Scotland.

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