



Norfolk's Days Out to Remember

A Case Study for working with the over 55s

1. Introduction

In 2007, Gressenhall Farm and Workhouse in Norfolk ran three days for the over 55s. Held on Fridays in May, July and September, the days attracted 623, 1,068 and 1,062 visitors, 85% of whom were aged 60 or over.

The success of the days confirmed staff's belief that over 55s are an audience that is just waiting to be invited in and welcomed to our museums and attractions – not just as grandparents but as individuals with their own interests and needs.

This report describes how the days were put together and promoted and the lessons we learnt. We hope that our story will inspire and help others to work more with this age group.

2. Gressenhall Farm and Workhouse

The museum

Gressenhall is a museum of rural Norfolk life. It is located on a 50 acre site in the heart of Norfolk. The museum includes a traditional working farm with rare breed animals and social history and agricultural collections housed in a Georgian workhouse. Recently, a major re-development has seen displays, including ones on the workhouse itself, completely refurbished. The museum attracts over 80,000 visitors a year and has over 150 regular volunteers.

Based in the Breckland Council area, Gressenhall is part of Norfolk Museums and Archaeology Service and the Cultural Services department of Norfolk County Council.

Audiences

Gressenhall has always attracted good numbers for its schools' programme, currently 10,000 visits a year. For general visitors, marketing and programme development have tended to target a family audience. The museum's annual programme includes five event days that attract from 1000 to 2,500 visitors each day, and activities for families every school holiday.

3. Context

The Issue in Norfolk

According to Norfolk County Council's older people strategy 'Living Longer, Living well' (2004), 26% of adults in Norfolk are over 65 years old and older people in the county are more likely to be on Income Support than those living in comparable counties. Older people identified as barriers to accessing mainstream services and staying in control of their own lives:

- inadequate income and the cost of services
- poor access to information
- poor transport
- lack of confidence.

'Living Longer Living Well' stated that whilst "providing high quality services for the most dependent is still a priority... the balance of services...(for older people)... should be shifted in favour of supporting more people living in their own homes." The strategy continued "More resources deployed earlier to prevent dependency could have a major impact on the quality of life of older people and their need for institutional care."

The strategy led to the adoption by Norfolk County Council of the priority to:

Support older people to live at home wherever possible and to lead independent, fulfilling and safe lives.

Museums, attractions and cultural organisations in Norfolk provide few, if any, opportunities specifically for over 55s. Gressenhall's Over 55 days represent a re-alignment of services at the museum to support Norfolk County Council's priority.

Working with Older people at Gressenhall

In 2001 the Learning Team at Gressenhall began working with older people through a partnership with Norfolk County Council's Adult Education. Reminiscence days were devised and promoted to local residential care homes and sheltered housing schemes. The days were very successful but quite small scale and resource-intensive. Early on, Gressenhall's Learning and Marketing officers consulted with key representatives from the sector. A favourite insight was that:

Many elderly groups went to garden centres for days out – for their affordability, level access and cafés but also because they were places in which they felt welcomed and comfortable.

At Gressenhall we realised we could provide all of this and more.

Subsequently, lack of resource held back aspirations to develop this work. The granting of Renaissance in the Regions* funding in 2006 made it possible for us to rekindle them.

4. Aims and Objectives

In order to obtain funding, a proposal was written and submitted to Renaissance in the Regions. The plan, which was accepted and incorporated into the East of England Renaissance Business Plan, identified the following aims and objectives:

Project aim

- To explore how museums can respond to the wider social objective of supporting older people to lead independent lives.

* **Renaissance in the Regions** is all about transforming England's regional museums, making them world class and fit for the 21st century. In 2003 museum hubs were established in the nine English regions to help deliver the Renaissance programme by working together and with other partners to make museums more enjoyable for everyone. The East of England Museum Hub is a partnership of Colchester Museums; the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge; Luton Museums and Norfolk Museums and Archaeology Service (NMAS). NMAS is the lead partner for the Hub and is therefore at the forefront of change, providing a leadership role for organisations throughout the region.

Objectives

- To devise and deliver three large-scale event days programmed to have popular appeal to an over 55 audience.
- To research and put in place additional front of house and other organisational structures to support the effective delivery of the days.
- To research and set up appropriate partnerships with local authorities and the voluntary sector to assist in the development, delivery and promotion of the days.
- To research, write and implement a marketing and communications strategy to effectively reach and appeal to over 55s in Norfolk.
- To evaluate the days and to produce and disseminate a record of findings to targeted groups.

5. Planning and delivery

a. Budget

Renaissance granted £20,000 to deliver the project. This was allocated as follows:

Backfill for Learning Manager £5,000

Rather than create a new post, we felt it would be most effective to enable Gressenhall's Learning Manager to lead on the project. This would involve championing and delivering the project by coordinating input from staff and volunteers at Gressenhall and a management consultant. The project would therefore benefit from the Learning Manager's strong existing relationships with staff and volunteers and her previous experience of developing work with older people at Gressenhall.

Management Consultant £5,000

The brief for the management consultant was to research, write and deliver the communications strategy and marketing plan for working with over 55s in Norfolk. Additionally the consultant identified and built key partnerships and provided on-going advice and support to the Learning Manager in terms of strategic planning, programme development, evaluation and dissemination of findings.

Marketing and communication £5,000

Marketing and communication were seen as central to the success of the day. Funds were therefore allocated to pay for professionally produced design and print; a small advertising campaign and distribution costs.

Event costs £5,000

Production costs for each day included marquee hire and paying freelance performers and other contributors to the day.

b. Volunteers and staff

From the start the project had the support of the Museum Manager at Gressenhall. The museum's Operations Team, which includes front of house and site staff, took responsibility for delivery of the days including staffing, production and liaising with stallholders.

The days inspired higher than usual input from Gressenhall's volunteers. With many of them themselves over 55, the days struck a chord and inspired real enthusiasm. In addition to helping with the days themselves, one group of volunteers, the Mardlers, provided vital additional assistance with distribution, direct marketing and evaluation.

c. Partners

Key partners for the day emerged from the management consultant's work researching and writing the communications strategy. The brief was to approach potential partners across voluntary and statutory sectors. This involved the museum in going into new territory, in many cases, making contact with groups, organisations or departments for the first time.

Key partners were:

- Age Concern Norfolk (embraced and helped promote the days as part of their 60th anniversary celebrations)
- Breckland Council (funded arts activity on the day and promoted local health walks)
- Norfolk County Council Community Transport section (with Age Concern Norfolk facilitated matching visitors without transport with community transport drivers)

Other groups and organisations helped promote the scheme through their newsletters and e-bulletins and by distributing and/or displaying fliers and posters. Norfolk County Council and Breckland Council provided useful help with promotion.

d. Programme for the day

We set out to make the days friendly and welcoming and to offer as many opportunities as possible for interaction, conversation and sharing. Here are the key components of each day:

- reduced entry of £4 per person (normal entry for concessions is £6.15)
- meet and greet by museum volunteers, some in period costume
- cup of free tea or coffee and a biscuit
- range of activities, some timetabled, including guided tours, enactments, sing-alongs, cart-rides, traditional farming and cookery demonstrations, family history talk and reminiscence-based arts activity
- a marquee with stalls including: craft demonstrations, sales of local produce, organisations working with older people promoting their services and local history groups
- A4, folded to A5 programme to help visitors plan their time and, with its friendly, approachable style, to reinforce the mood of the day.

With average visitors on a Friday of less than 100, additional provisions had to be made in terms of operations and catering. This included taking on extra staff to cover parking and front of house and setting up additional catering outlets.

6. Promotion

Background

The consultant's first task was to write a Communications Policy that would under-pin the delivery of the project. This provided a clear plan and timetable for the delivery of the days and was updated as new ideas emerged. It set out how we would reach our target audience, inform relevant partners about the days and later, share findings with partners and other museums.

We used a range of different ways to reach our audience. Some were tried and tested; PR and adverts in local press, direct marketing to groups, printing fliers and posters - distributing them through libraries and NMAS museums. Others were new – in particular enlisting help in promoting the days from new partners across the voluntary and statutory sector.

Promotional materials

Local marketing agency, Shorthose Russell was employed to work on promotional materials. The company was well-placed to deliver the brief as it had recently worked with Gressenhall on a major, European-funded re-brand and marketing campaign. Interestingly a senior consultant, had also recently undertaken research into working with the over 55 market.

The consultant managed the contract with Shorthose Russell and, after an initial creative planning meeting, supplied copy for A5 fliers, A4 posters and newspaper adverts (appendix 1). The A5 fliers were produced for direct marketing and targeted distribution. We opted for A4 posters because our distribution was to places without space for larger ones.

Promotional materials led on the following messages:

- A memorable day out
- A warm welcome
- Reduced entry of £4

The flier elaborated on these themes and gave extra details on the museum's specific attractions and information about catering. The NMAS website also provided fuller details.

Photographs were carefully chosen. They depicted gardens and nostalgic scenes such as a traditional grocers and ploughing with horses. Importantly they depicted older people enjoying themselves at the museum. We also used the choice of images to communicate the availability of both indoor and outdoor displays, the sociability of the Gressenhall experience and that both men and women would find things to interest them.

The design followed Gressenhall brand guidelines, clearly establishing it as part of the museum's own main programme.

Distribution and communication partners

The consultant researched and contacted organisations which either worked directly with, or were able to facilitate us reaching older people. Initial contact included supplying an information sheet about the days. Follow-up conversations were used to ascertain channels of communication the organisations could provide help with. A database of 75 contacts was built and includes:

Adult Social Services
Age Concern Norfolk
Age Concern Norwich
Adult Social Services
British Legion
Norfolk Carers Association
Norfolk Community Transport
Norfolk and Norwich Voluntary Services / West Norfolk Voluntary Community Action
Norfolk Primary Care Trust
Norfolk Rural Community Council

The Consultant produced copy or articles for newsletters and e-bulletins and provided detailed schedules and covering letters to enable Gressenhall's volunteer Mardlers to distribute fliers and posters.

We were thus able to get publicity out at a more grass-roots level than possible with leisure and tourism focussed distribution services. Our fliers and posters appeared in doctor surgeries, opticians, chemists, village halls and bowling greens. Our publicity reached parish councils and the newsletters of local voluntary organisations.

Direct marketing to groups

Lists of groups that had previously visited Gressenhall were used to identify over 55 groups to mail with information about the day. The consultant provided a direct mail letter, revised booking form and confirmation letter. Volunteers undertook the mail merge and mailing.

Media and advertising

A week before each day, full colour adverts were placed in the Eastern Daily Press (Norfolk) and Evening News (Norwich). Additionally, a single advert was placed for each day in Norfolk's over 55's magazine *Let's Talk*. Press releases and listings went to *Let's Talk*, EDP and the Evening News, other local press (Diss Express etc) and to local TV and Radio.

Local authority support

Norfolk County Council (NCC) and Breckland District Council supported the days with features in their publications, *Your Norfolk* and *Breckland Voice* – monthly free magazines delivered to each household. NCC's Adult Social Services publication *Reach Out* and the associated website, also carried a story. The consultant supplied copy and pictures.

7. Monitoring and Evaluation

From the start, it was important to us to obtain feedback from visitors, staff and stallholders, both to ensure that we learnt from each day to improve the next one and also to inform future planning. The consultant produced the evaluation forms and Gressenhall's volunteer Mardlers gave them out and undertook the analysis.

Day 1

Self completion questionnaire (95 returned from 623 visitors)

Verbal feedback sought from stallholders.

Feedback from staff meeting collated into short report

Photographic record commissioned

Day 2

Revised self completion questionnaire (219 returned from 1,068 visitors).

Mystery shopper report including overheard comments

Post codes collection for mosaic analysis

Transport questionnaire undertaken by Age Concern

Day 3

Revised self completion questionnaire (87 Returned from 1,062 visitors)

On-going feedback from staff and volunteers.

8. Findings

Management and promotion

- The scale of evaluation and marketing achieved was made possible by skilled support of the volunteer Mardlers. The quality of support this group provided reflected two things; firstly the abilities, experience and skills of the volunteers concerned and secondly the very great success of the Learning Manager's work with the group. Over a sustained period of six years, this work included inductions, regular training and the nurturing of team leaders to share the management of the group.
- The employment of a skilled and experienced consultant to provide dedicated support to the Learning Manager proved a highly effective use of resources. With all planning dependent on the relationship of just two people, the project was delivered with the minimum of time spent in meetings. Through a combination of emails and weekly phone calls, the two were able to build a strong shared vision and work together efficiently and effectively.
- Evaluation proved that the full range of media employed to promote the days had played their part in attracting visitors. Most effective was press coverage and least effective, the internet. Print was most effective at the start and would have benefited from a second wave of distribution.

"Now that I am older I appreciate all this so much."
Overheard by evaluator at July 2007 Over 55 Day

On the days

- The days exceeded expectations considerably in terms of attendance.
- Mosaic analysis of visitors to the July day showed that in addition to attracting an audience of nearly entirely over 55 year olds, the days attracted a much wider social mix than was usual at the museum.
- There was a good gender balance each day: (40% men and 60% women)
- People largely planned their day out in advance, rather than making a spontaneous decision to attend. They were not put off by May's bad weather, coming prepared with umbrellas and wellies.
- There were large numbers of pre-booked groups coming by coach or minibus. This included coach trips as well as group outings. For the July day, Gressenhall had its largest number of coaches in one day.
- Despite the reduced price entry, income on the door was good because nearly all visitors paid to enter, unlike event days and school holidays at the museum, when large numbers of visitors come in free using their Museums Pass.
- Lots of people arrived early, some also left relatively early though this was often due to transport consideration.
- People appreciated being consulted and took time and care to complete feedback questionnaires.
- People didn't spend a lot of money in the shop, or with stall holders. This finding contrasts with visitors to Gressenhall's Reminiscence Days. Usually residents of care homes or day centre users, these older visitors spend a relatively high amount in the shop. (Interestingly, despite relatively low sales, stall holders enjoyed the days and most attended all three).
- Whilst the fact that the day was just for older people and the extra events and activities were valued, people identified the price and the fact that it was Gressenhall as deciding factors for their visit.

"Just loved the 1950s room – took me right back to being a child."

Visitor to July 2007 Over 55 Day

Feedback

- People registered very high levels of satisfaction, particularly in terms of value for money, enjoyment and events and activities on offer.
- A long-standing member of the visitor services team said that the comments she had heard from visitors leaving the day were the best she had ever heard.
- People very much appreciated that the day was just for them.

- There were many comments about the welcoming, friendly and helpful staff and volunteers - qualities which were highly valued. Starting the day 'meeting and greeting' people and presenting them with a voucher for a free tea or coffee and biscuit, was effective in establishing the mood for the day. People enjoying the way that staff and volunteers went out of their way to interact – as good listeners but also for their friendly chattiness.
- People loved the way the museum and farm brought back memories for them.
- For the first two days, the catering was identified as a problem area.
- 95% of visitors said they would recommend the museum to friends or family.
- With the day attracting people with an age range of roughly thirty years (say 55 to 85), entertainment comprising 'songs from the shows' solicited the comment 'some of us are younger than Mick Jagger'!

"Thank you for such a good day out."

Visitor to May 2007 Over 55 Day.

Operations

- Fewer older visitors brought picnics than family groups visiting the museum. Perhaps because of this, demands on catering were greater than for a similar, or even considerably larger, number of visitors from a mixed age range. On the first two days, there were long queues for food and ice creams (up to 45 minutes). By the third day, an additional outlet providing take out fish and chips, alongside other additional refreshments outlets kept queues to a minimum and saw a great improvement in visitor satisfaction.
- The elements of the programme delivered by Gressenhall staff and volunteers were all ones that feature regularly on the museums schools or general public programme (farming or cookery demonstrations, workhouse trails, and enactments) – there was no need to devise new material for this age group.
- Volunteers and staff were highly motivated and appreciated being asked to take part in the evaluation, which they could see being used to improve the days.
- The marquee of stalls included craft demonstrations and producers alongside local history displays and stands by Age Concern, Breckland Council and Norfolk County Council. The latter three particularly valued the opportunity to meet their target audience in such large and receptive numbers.
- Monies allocated for backfill were not spent. This was in part because other Renaissance funding had seen an increase in the capacity of the Learning Team so that, even without backfill, the Learning Manager had time to spend on the days. Instead it was allocated to four extra days for the consultant (the days gathered their own momentum and this allowed opportunities to be fully explored as they arose); production of a short report to tell people about the days; and to seed fund the programme in 2008.

9. Conclusion

Norfolk County Council's Director of Adult Social Services attended the third of the days. Impressed by the large numbers and people's evident enjoyment of the day, he has subsequently invited museum staff to play a part in re-writing Norfolk's Older People's strategy. Interestingly he has also said that "in addition to older people's services there are also other opportunities for further join up between cultural services and adult social care, mental health, learning difficulties, employment etc" – suggesting the possibility of further possible collaborations.

The project also illustrated how a committed partnership between learning and marketing staff can deliver excellent results. Additionally, bringing in a specialist consultant to work (in this case for 24 focussed days) with an existing member of staff (in a position of sufficient authority) is a creative and effective way to deliver projects.

The three days were very good for Gressenhall's public relations – not just with older audiences but with partner organisations, local authorities and the general public. They attracted a good quantity of very positive press coverage and Gressenhall became the first Norfolk museum to feature widely in communications from charities and other organisations working with older people.

Museums and attractions have tended to put most marketing and programme resource into targeting a family audience. The evidence of these days suggests that with careful planning and good marketing, working with older people can be financially viable as well as fulfilling a valuable social role.

And the days were enormous fun too. They were as popular with staff and volunteers as with audiences. With most volunteers and some staff themselves over 55, it was great for them to see the museum targeting, actively welcoming and listening to people like themselves.

The wide-reaching publicity and extensive press coverage were effective in reaching and attracting their audience. They also got the message across that Gressenhall is relevant, enjoyable and welcoming to older people. The Communications Plan is a useful record of how the days were promoted and, together with other resources developed for the project, (contact database, letters and templates for promotional materials) it provides a strong foundation for similar work in the future.

"Please can we have many more days like this – thanks to all the staff."

Visitor to July 2007 Over 55 Day.



RENAISSANCE
EAST OF ENGLAND

 Norfolk County Council

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