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*Engaging the Elderly in Museum  
Education: A Study of the Age Well  
Sessions at Glasgow Museums*

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## AUTHOR'S DECLARATION

I declare that, except where explicit reference is made to the contribution of others, that this dissertation is the result of my own work and has not been submitted for any other degree at the University of Glasgow or any other institution.

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## ABSTRACT

This study is created to explore the design and implementation of the Age Well Sessions conducted in Glasgow Museums, aiming to reveal the programme's foundational philosophies, engaging strategies, and guiding principles. It seeks to capture the frontline designers' and educators' perspectives on the programme's implementation and development in engaging older adults and how these insights constantly shape and support the programme's evolution. Furthermore, the research explores the identified challenges and opportunities of the sessions in meeting the diverse needs of elderly participants from the initiators' experience, revealing issues such as resource limitations, transportation, the challenge of reaching minority groups, and so on. Besides this, the study investigates potential future developments or adjustments of the Age Well Sessions to meet the evolving needs of its target audience. By delving into these details, the study may bring broader discussions on ageing, cultural engagement, and the role of museum education in fostering creative ageing and lifelong learning among older adults. This focus underscores the importance of inclusive and accessible museum practices which are helpful to enhance mutual enrichment between museums and the elderly community within the UK's societal context.

**Keywords:** lifelong learning, museum objects learning, object handling, museum education, creative ageing

## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), the ageing population typically refers to individuals aged 60 and over. A growing number and proportion of older individuals in the global population are reconstructing the demography of societies, and this also impacts health and social systems worldwide.<sup>1</sup> The elderly population is relatively easy for museums and related cultural institutions to overlook as an audience group. Many museums have a variety of educational activities designed for school children of different ages, but not necessarily activities available for the elderly to participate in. However, elderly audiences are crucial for museums and galleries for several reasons. They can provide valuable perspectives and experiences that may be helpful for intergenerational learning and cultural transmission (Leigh & Nemeth, 2023; LAWTON & LA PORTE, 2013; Whiteland, 2012). With more flexible time, they are likely to be frequent visitors who can support cultural institutions through attendance and participation. Furthermore, engaging older adults aligns with social inclusion goals within the updated definition of museum announced by the International Council of Museums (ICOM, 2022), which emphasises that museums and galleries can serve diverse communities.<sup>2</sup> Educational programmes tailored to older adults can also enhance people's well-being and cognitive engagement, showing the societal and cultural value of including the elderly as an important target audience.

In response to the global trend of an increasingly ageing population, the role of museums is gradually changing (Chatterjee & Camic, 2015; Molina-Luque et al., 2022). In the UK, museums, and galleries are increasingly seen as places where older adults can engage in lifelong learning and creative activities, with programmes specifically designed to meet their intellectual and emotional needs (Owen et al., 2021). This change reflects a growing awareness of how cultural institutions can contribute to older adults' well-being and highlights the potential for mutual enrichment between museums and the elderly community (Thomson et al., 2020; Beauchet et al., 2020; Todd et al., 2017).

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<sup>1</sup> World Health Organization. (2021). Ageing. World Health Organization. [https://www.who.int/health-topics/ageing#tab=tab\\_1](https://www.who.int/health-topics/ageing#tab=tab_1)

<sup>2</sup> International Council of Museums. (2022, August 24). Museum Definition. International Council of Museums. <https://icom.museum/en/resources/standards-guidelines/museum-definition/>

Museums are beginning to see older adults not just as visitors but also as valuable volunteers and donors who may help sustain and grow these institutions (Deery et al., 2011).

Based on this background, in this research, I explore the evolving relationship between museums and the ageing population in the UK, with a specific focus on the Age Well Session initiated by Glasgow Museums. This programme is selected for its experienced educational practices designed for older adults. The goal of this study is to explore the design and implementation of the Age Well Sessions across Glasgow Museums, examining the reasons, contexts, opportunities and challenges that have led to the creation and development of this programme from the perspective and experiences of those on the frontline, such as programme designers and sessions educators, as well as the development of relevant policies. By doing so, I can comprehensively grasp how the Age Well Sessions are implemented within the museum setting, focusing on practitioners' object learning strategies and models of selecting and utilising museum collections to encourage the ageing population's tactile and cognitive engagement and social inclusion. Besides this, the study gathers programme designers' and educators' feedback, and insights, as well as their thoughts and opinions on how to refine and implement these programmes sustainably. This research will help prompt broader dialogues on ageing, showcase the museum's role in creating an inclusive and adaptable environment, and promote creative ageing, lifelong learning, and cultural engagement for older adults.

The concept of creative ageing, which recognises the elderly as a vital and dynamic group, underscores the importance of this study. As people live longer, it is increasingly critical to engage older adults in activities that foster creativity and fulfilment (Cohen, 2008). Museums have great potential to support this trend because of their ability to create environments which can offer opportunities for human beings to do intellectual and emotional exploration. This potential is also reflected in the idea of "museums as social prescriptions," where cultural engagement acts as a non-clinical approach to enhance mental health and overall quality of life. Studies have shown that arts interventions in museums can lead to positive health outcomes, including reduced medication use, shorter hospital stays, and lower levels of anxiety, depression, and

stress-related hormones (Staricoff, 2004; Fraser & al Sayah, 2011). By offering accessible and culturally enriching learning opportunities, museums can not only support the well-being of the ageing population but also turn the challenges of an ageing society into opportunities for personal growth and societal development. By transforming into active centres for lifelong learning, museums can enrich the lives of the elderly and also benefit from the diverse perspectives and experiences older adults bring (Black, 2012). The case of Age Well Sessions at Glasgow Museums will exemplify how museums can respond to the goal of becoming diverse, inclusive and sustainable cultural institutions in modern society.

During my internship at the National Taiwan Museum, I was actively involved in educational programmes designed to engage seniors and encourage intergenerational collaboration. These activities included puzzle-solving activities for grandparents and grandchildren to join together on Grandparents Day, flash storytelling sessions and plays co-performed with elder actors in exhibition spaces, and hands-on craft workshops for seniors. These experiences sparked my interest in how museums can connect with the elderly community. I am eager to pursue a career in museum education, focusing on fostering opportunities for co-creation with older adults. This passion fits well with the growing demand to address the changing needs and wishes of an ageing population, which I believe is an important area for both research and development.

Museums traditionally prioritise visual experiences, as it is common to see signs, such as “Do Not Touch”, placed next to artefacts to avoid visitors getting too close or causing damage to collections. However, museums are now focusing on generating more interactive experiences that value the importance of touch. Studies show that touch plays a key role in human communication, bonding, and health, and it can help visitors connect more deeply with artefacts (Rowlands, 2008; Noble, Prytherch, Chatterjee, & Macdonald, 2008; Dudley, 2013). Object handling has also emerged as a pivotal method for knowledge dissemination, social support, and even healthcare within museum settings, highlighting the transformative potential of tactile experiences in the educational journeys of elderly visitors.

While there is growing recognition of museums’ significant role in promoting well-

being, social connectivity, and lifelong learning among older adults, the academic discourse has not yet thoroughly explored specific programmes like the Age Well Sessions at Glasgow Museums. Although the value of museum-based adult education is increasingly discussed, a detailed analysis of the design, implementation, and issues of these sessions encountered by museums remains insufficient in the literature. This study is set to address this gap by taking a close look at the Age Well Sessions, with the goal of better understanding how museums can sustainably engage with elderly audiences. The insights from this study will not only enhance the knowledge base but also be beneficial for future practices and research in museum education for older adults.

My study's primary research question is to explore how the Age Well Sessions programme is designed and implemented within Glasgow Museums, so I set the questions which focus on its foundational philosophies and engaging strategies supporting its operation and development. Besides this, a few sub-questions following up are created to enrich my understanding of the programme from multiple perspectives:

- **What principles guide the design and implementation of the Age Well Sessions, and how do these principles shape educational strategies and philosophies as the core of the programme and be practised in the museums?**  
This question is to comprehensively explore the core spirit, purpose, structure, and function of this programme that supports its long-term operation.
- **How do designers and educators within the programme perceive its effectiveness in engaging elderly participants, and how do they continue to evolve this programme to meet the diverse needs of the target audience?**  
This question is set to collect the museum team's perspectives, experiences, and insights to deeply understand the effectiveness and status of the entire programme's operation.
- **From programme designers' and educators' perspectives and experiences, what challenges and opportunities have been identified when designing and conducting these sessions?** This question is to gain an in-depth understanding of the practical difficulties these practitioners encounter on the front line that

need to be solved. Moreover, I want to explore whether any hidden opportunities in their practice could serve as valuable directions for future development and exploration.

- **What are the future developments or adjustments for the Age Well Sessions to operate and meet the needs of its audience constantly?** This question is to figure out the potential and direction of the programme's future development, to understand its long-term plan.

Through interviews and shadowing observations, I try to answer the above research questions to comprehensively understand how the entire programme operates. This case may provide some clues and experience for more relevant museum programmes in the future to offer a more meaningful experience for the ageing population.

## CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

### I. Creative Ageing

#### **The Ageing Population and Societies**

Nowadays, increasing life expectancy and declining fertility rates are significant trends in the world. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), an ageing population is typically defined as one in which the proportion of people aged 60 years and older is steadily increasing. This demographic change is not limited to developed nations but is a global phenomenon influencing a lot of countries. The World Economic Forum has predicted that by 2050, there will be around 2.1 billion people aged 60 or older worldwide—more than twice what we see today<sup>3</sup>. These demographic transformations may bring both challenges and opportunities to societies, for instance, in areas such as healthcare, pension systems, and the workforce.

Ageism, a term that refers to prejudice or discrimination based on a person's age, is a critical issue in this context. Ageism can be found in various forms, including negative stereotypes, prejudicial attitudes, and discriminatory practices. For example, older adults are often unfairly viewed as being less competent, more resistant to change, and less able to learn new skills than younger people. These stereotypes can lead to social exclusion, marginalisation, and unequal treatment in the workplace and other aspects of life (Chang et al., 2020).

To deal with the issue of ageism and embrace ageing societies, many developed countries have implemented strategic policies. For example, the US has initiatives that support older adults to live at home and in the community with more dignity and

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<sup>3</sup> Masterson, V. (2024, February 8). What is the “longevity economy” and its 6 principles? World Economic Forum. <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2024/02/longevity-economy-principles-ageing-population/>

independence.<sup>4</sup> Japan has extensive community support systems for its elderly.<sup>5</sup> The UK government issued the “Mental Health Act” in 1983 to encourage the wider development of elderly education.<sup>6</sup> Thus, the “Equality Act” is set to promote elderly education. These actions emphasise the redevelopment and utilisation of elderly human resources and the implementation of the concept of educational equality.<sup>7</sup>

However, solely relying on government policies may not be sufficient to fully address the complexities of an ageing society. Arts and cultural activities have been increasingly recognised as powerful tools in bridging generational gaps and fostering mutual understanding. Art educators have found that arts can be a suitable medium to build a bridge between different generations, facilitate reciprocal and equitable interactions, combat stereotypes of ageing and disability, and promote inclusivity (Wexler, 2016; Keifer-Boyd et al., 2018). For instance, community-based art programmes can be seen as models for fostering social relationships and empowerment among participants (Wexler & Derby, 2015). Bourgault (2023) likens the ageing process to the artistic practices of collage and assemblage, where fragments of past experiences and identities are continually reorganised to create new meanings, describing ageing not as a decline but as a period of ongoing growth, reflection, and creative expression. In this view, ageing is more like a dynamic and creative process, and arts and creative activities can help enhance older adults’ well-being.

### **Interdisciplinary Approaches to Creative Ageing**

The concept of creative ageing has been developed and discussed through multidisciplinary research that combines gerontology, psychology, and the arts (Bradfield, 2020; Reynolds, 2015; Cohen, 2006). The researcher points out that creative

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<sup>4</sup> Living (ACL), A. for C. (2024, February 6). Final Rule to Update Regulations for Older Americans Act Programs Rule strengthens the system of supports that help millions of people age in place. [Www.hhs.gov. https://www.hhs.gov/about/news/2024/02/06/final-rule-to-update-regulations-for-older-americans-act-programs-rule-strengthens-the-system-of-supports-that-help-millions-of-people-age-in-place.html](https://www.hhs.gov/about/news/2024/02/06/final-rule-to-update-regulations-for-older-americans-act-programs-rule-strengthens-the-system-of-supports-that-help-millions-of-people-age-in-place.html)

<sup>5</sup> Osamu, S. (2021, February). Measures to Address Japan’s Aging Society | February 2021 | Highlighting Japan. [Www.gov-Online.go.jp. https://www.gov-online.go.jp/eng/publicity/book/hlj/html/202102/202102\\_09\\_en.html](https://www.gov-online.go.jp/eng/publicity/book/hlj/html/202102/202102_09_en.html)

<sup>6</sup> Mental Health Act. (1983). Mental Health Act 1983. [Legislation.gov.uk; Gov.uk. https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1983/20/contents](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1983/20/contents)

<sup>7</sup> Legislation.gov.uk. (2010). Equality Act 2010. [Legislation.gov.uk; Gov.uk. https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/contents](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/contents)

activities have the potential and power to enhance the well-being of older adults by fostering emotional, cognitive, and social benefits. Creative ageing initiatives have been implemented in various forms, including community-based arts programmes, art therapy, and participatory arts projects.

In ageing societies, addressing the educational needs of seniors presents big challenges, but it also offers profound opportunities for enhancing their quality of life. Research indicates that well-designed educational programmes can foster satisfaction and personal growth for older adults, improve their physical health, and provide younger generations with valuable insights from the elderly's experiences (Staricoff, 2004; Whiteland, 2012; LAWTON & LA PORTE, 2013). A notable study published in *The Gerontologist* by Cohen et al. (2006) underscores that it is beneficial to integrate such creative activities into the elderly's lives. This research focused on a median age group of eighty and compared the seniors engaged in arts-related activities with those who were not involved in such events. Findings revealed that those participating in the arts had better physical health, fewer medical visits, reduced medication use, and higher levels of physical and social engagement. It is noteworthy that the study highlighted potential savings of \$6.3 billion in healthcare expenses, suggesting substantial economic benefits from investing in creative ageing initiatives. These findings show the need to rethink and reconstruct educational approaches to meet the unique needs of the elderly and advocate for the integration of creativity and art into their learning processes as a key component in response to ageing societies.

### **Future Research Directions**

In the field of creative ageing, Aula and Masoodian (2023) pointed out that future research should prioritise holistic and relational approaches that consider the complex interplay between social, cultural, and environmental contexts in fostering the creativity and well-being of older adults. This involves moving beyond individual-focused studies to include broader social networks and natural environments, recognising their influence on creative expression and healthy ageing. Additionally, there is a need for research that incorporates more qualitative data such as older adults' subjective and relational experiences with creative activities, as current studies sometimes overlook these personal narratives crucial for understanding the full impact of creativity on wellbeing.

Investigating the role of different environmental contexts, such as green spaces and urban environments, is also essential for designing age-friendly settings and supporting more relevant initiatives about healthy ageing in a long-term period. Researchers are also encouraged to explore diverse definitions of creativity across disciplines and acknowledge the influence of everyday creativity with traditional artistic forms. Furthermore, future studies may have to be inclusive of diverse populations and consider cultural, socio-economic, and ability differences to ensure equitable access to creative ageing initiatives. More cross-disciplinary collaboration between fields such as gerontology, psychology, arts, museums, and even environmental studies are awaited to enrich the knowledge base of this domain.

## **II. The Role of Museums in Lifelong Learning and Creative Ageing**

### **Museums as Catalysts for Lifelong Learning and Elderly Engagement**

In response to the global trend of population ageing, providing appropriate elderly care systems and comprehensive social welfare will be a top priority for countries worldwide. Museums, as public spaces, offer a wide range of types, themes, and collections that can cater to the diverse preferences and needs of various audiences. With their functions of leisure and education, museums are ideal venues for elderly audiences to learn and enjoy leisure activities.

Museum educational services are not limited to school-aged children, instead, they also play a vital role in supporting human development at every stage of life. Tracing back to the relevant history, museums have been integral to adult education and lifelong learning. Many museums established during the 18th and 19th centuries had an educational mission from the beginning, although their primary focus was often on the protection and preservation of collections.

Over time, the role of museums in education has evolved gradually. Initially, museums primarily offer services to the elite, such as wealthy people, art connoisseurs, and academics. However, throughout the 19th and 20th centuries, museums started to broaden their focus, reaching out broadly to the public. This transformation marked an

important step in the democratisation of access to museum resources and a redefinition of their educational mission.

By the early 20th century, museums in Europe and North America began to explicitly develop educational programmes targeted at adult learners. These programmes often included lectures and guided tours designed to deepen adults' understanding of the collections. This evolution reflects a growing recognition of museums' potential not just as repositories of art and history, but as active centres for a community to learn and engage in.

Museum education faces challenges and uncertainties rooted in its historical and organisational context. The educational function of museums has been contested since the opening of public museums like the Louvre in 1793, creating ongoing tensions between elite and democratic roles. This debate has led to an identity crisis for museum educators, who often face undervaluation and marginalisation because of interchangeable job titles and unclear roles (Reeve & Woollard, 2015; McCall & Gray, 2013). Thus, practical challenges such as understaffing, resource constraints, and overburdened educators limit the focus on educational activities and professional growth. The absence of a solid theoretical foundation and reliance on outdated educational models further complicate the development of effective educational practices. Organisational barriers, including hierarchical structures and internal power imbalances, inhibit progress, while the lack of professional development opportunities restricts the potential of museum educators (Kristinsdóttir, 2016).

Despite these obstacles, museum educators are positioned as important change agents who can connect museums with communities and facilitate diversity. Empowering museum educators with autonomy, respect, and a supportive organisational structure is essential. Developing explicit educational missions, adopting robust learning theories, and enhancing community engagement are also key steps for museum education practices' sustainability (Kristinsdóttir, 2016).

### **The Transformative Role of Museums and Well-being**

Traditionally, museums focused more on missions related to conservation, education,

and enjoyment, but now they are expanding their remit to include aspects of health and wellness. This trend reflects museums' growing commitment to lifelong learning that caters to the needs of diverse audiences, including older adults. By embracing this shift, museums are recognising their potential not only to educate and inspire but also to enhance the quality of life for various senior groups (Chatterjee & Camic, 2015; Molina-Luque et al., 2022). These groups include individuals over the age of 60, those isolated in care homes, and active agers in their 50s and 60s who are not yet retired. By offering programmes like creative ageing workshops, therapeutic art sessions, and social activities, museums are transforming into vital spaces that promote mental health, social interaction, and lifelong learning (Lackoi et al., 2016).

Furthermore, cultural institutions are developing specialised programmes for older adults with early to mid-stage dementia. For instance, reminiscence work and creative activities are designed to stimulate cognitive functions and foster social interaction. Such initiatives help maintain the independence and well-being of dementia patients by involving them in activities like handling objects, participating in workshops, and attending memory cafes, thereby enhancing their emotional and cognitive resilience as they age (Lackoi et al., 2016).

Moreover, the interdisciplinary collaborations between museums and the healthcare sector illustrate the potential of establishing broader and stronger partnerships. Through cross-domain research and experiments with healthcare professionals, museums use their cultural heritage to support healthcare and recovery and provide meaningful cultural engagement that bolsters the emotional and cognitive resilience of older adults (Chatterjee, 2016). This kind of collaborative approach has led to several influential projects demonstrating how museums can do for health and wellness effectively. These projects establish a foundation for further deeper exploration into diverse cases and offer some hints about both the successes and challenges for future collaborations.

### **Interdisciplinary Collaboration and Health Intervention**

A well-known study provided quantitative data supporting the positive effects on wellbeing from a heritage-based health intervention in a hospital setting (Thomson et al., 2012). In this research, general healthcare patients engaged in individual sessions lasting

30-40 minutes, during which they discussed both factual and emotional aspects of various authentic museum objects brought to their bedside. The researchers measured the participants' happiness and well-being before and after these sessions with psychometric evaluations. Thus, patients were divided into two groups, one handled the objects, and the other was shown pictures of the same objects because the research team wanted to explore if creating tactile experiences, such as touching and handling objects, can have a more positive impact for the participants than relying merely on visual sense such as looking at pictures of the objects. The result showed that the patients who interacted with authentic museum objects reported a significant increase in well-being and happiness compared to those who only viewed these objects' pictures. This finding suggests that tactile interaction with heritage objects can provide notable therapeutic benefits, enhancing emotional and cognitive engagement more effectively than merely visual exposure. However, this study mainly focused on immediate emotional responses from the participants, without a follow-up to assess the long-term impacts of such interventions on patients' wellbeing, which is a limitation. The future research team may need to expand the sample size and include a more diverse patient demographic to enhance the representativeness and robustness of the findings. It would also be beneficial to extend the duration of the intervention and incorporate a follow-up phase to explore the long-term effects of object handling on psychological well-being. Moreover, comparing the effects of interacting with different types of objects might also provide deeper and more comprehensive insights into how specific characteristics of objects influence people's emotional and cognitive responses. These considerations will help in further substantiating the role of tactile museum experiences in therapeutic settings and can guide the development of more effective museum-based interventions in healthcare.

Neuroscience research establishes cognitive reserve as a dynamic construct influenced by both genetic predispositions and life experiences, including education, occupation, and engagement in cognitively stimulating activities (Stern et al., 2020; Pettigrew & Soldan, 2019). Another interesting finding is that contributions to cognitive reserve later in life seem to have a greater impact than those in early and mid-life (Sander Lamballais et al., 2020). These neuroscience studies support that museums have the potential to play a supportive role in enhancing cognitive health and delaying or mitigating the negative

effects of ageing on older adults' brains.

Moreover, recent studies also point out the potential benefits of non-clinical, therapeutic environments to enhance well-being, emphasising a transformative role for spaces outside usual healthcare settings (Marques et al., 2021; Lobban & Murphy, 2020). Such therapeutic landscapes integrate health within everyday spaces and were proven to be critical for people's mental, physical, and social health, especially in urban settings which is increasingly associated with lifestyle-related health issues. The researcher concludes several factors contribute to the therapeutic nature, including accessibility, themes of sensoriality, social interaction, activities, and cultural appropriateness, which meet diverse communities' needs effectively (Marques et al., 2021). This finding not only bridges the gap between conventional medical treatment and daily life but also fosters a sense of community and individual empowerment and identity through improved design and integration of natural elements. Nowadays, people have started to recognise the holistic benefits of interacting with well-designed, nature-integrated environments that support rehabilitation and promote overall health equity. Based on these research findings, there is significant potential and opportunities for museums to extend their services to support human health in later life.

For example, a study (Fancourt et al., 2018) explores the impact of museum visits on dementia incidence in adults aged 50 and older. The researchers utilise data from the English Longitudinal Study of Ageing<sup>8</sup> and found that people who visited museums at least every few months experienced a lower rate of dementia over 10 years, compared to those who visited less often or never. This association remained significant even after adjusting for demographics, socioeconomic status, and health-related variables such as sensory impairment and depression. This suggests that going to museums could be an effective way to prevent dementia because it involves intellectual stimulation, mild physical exercise, positive emotions, relaxation, and social interaction.

The "Museums for Health and Wellbeing" report by Lackoi, Patsou, and Chatterjee (2016) underscores the contributions museums can make to public health. It highlights

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<sup>8</sup> Data & documentation | The English Longitudinal Study of Ageing (ELSA). (n.d.). ELSA. <https://www.elsa-project.ac.uk/data-and-documentation>

various programmes across UK museums that improve health and wellbeing through social interaction, cultural engagement, and educational activities. For example, the Whitworth Art Gallery has implemented a diverse range of activities to enhance participants' health and well-being. These initiatives include the Grow: Art, Park & Wellbeing programme, which integrates art and nature to support mental health and social inclusion. The gallery also conducts creative workshops such as the ArtMED Life Drawing workshops which provide participants with a therapeutic and educational experience through art. In addition, the gallery offers health walks like the Welly Walks and weekly Walking for the Health tours to promote people's physical activity and social interaction. Mindfulness sessions use the gallery's collections to enhance visitors' awareness and mental well-being. Moreover, the Whitworth hosts Tai Chi and Yoga sessions in the gallery spaces which foster physical health and relaxation. These activities collectively contribute to a holistic approach for museums or other cultural venues to support people's mental, physical, and social health through a variety of cultural engagement and educational opportunities (Lackoi, Patsou, & Chatterjee, 2016).

Despite these benefits, the report recognises several gaps and challenges in this field. For instance, although there are massive projects in the museums, a lack of engagement with major public health issues such as obesity and diabetes is mentioned. This indicates a missed opportunity for museums to contribute more broadly to public health efforts by incorporating themes and activities that directly address the current health issues in the UK. In addition, there is potential for growth in digital health, but this remains underdeveloped.

Many museums have not aligned their volunteering programmes with local health and wellbeing priorities. This gap shows a hint that museums may be able to play a more strategic role in their communities by ensuring that their volunteer efforts are directly contributing to local health agendas. Transitioning from time-limited, project-based initiatives to sustainable, core-funded programmes is also a great challenge. The report emphasises the need for museums to secure ongoing funding and support to ensure the longevity and stability of their health and well-being initiatives. One potential strategy mentioned is about generating income through events and merchandising, but this approach requires further careful planning, execution, and even public awareness and

support. The current issue of funding cuts may also amplify this challenge and cause capacity issues<sup>9</sup>.

Despite a growing body of research, more comprehensive studies are needed to fully understand and validate the benefits of museum activities for health and well-being. Existing cases may provide some evidence, but further investigation is necessary to verify these findings and guide more practices (Lackoi, Patsou, & Chatterjee, 2016).

### **Museum as Social Prescription: Development and Recent Cases**

The issues of loneliness and social exclusion among older adults are becoming increasingly recognised and need to be addressed. Many elderly individuals live alone, experiencing social isolation due to decreased social interaction, reduced economic resources, functional limitations, and changes in family structure and mobility (Courtin & Knapp, 2017). These factors contribute to poor mental and physical health, including depression, cardiovascular disease, cognitive decline, and increased mortality.

Given these challenges, museums, with their unique characteristics and resources, can play a significant role in serving the elderly. Traditionally, museums are seen as custodians of culture and heritage, but over recent decades, they have evolved into therapeutic environments. By using their diverse collections and creative resources, museums can engage older adults through various social prescribing interventions. This kind of trend and practice is becoming more evident in the UK.

### **UK Social Context and Policies Supporting Social Prescription and Museotherapy**

Social prescription is a term that an increasing number of people have become familiar with in recent years. According to NHS England, it refers to an approach that connects people with activities and communities to affect people's physical, mental, or social well-being<sup>10</sup>. It is suitable for individuals of all ages, and particularly helpful to those who feel lonely or isolated, and have social needs which impact their mental health. Social prescribing interventions are not limited to physical exercise, creative activities,

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<sup>9</sup> Community health faces unprecedented pressures - watchdog. (2024, July 25). BBC News. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cllyp6l5311o>

<sup>10</sup> NHS England. (2023). Social Prescribing. NHS England. <https://www.england.nhs.uk/personalisedcare/social-prescribing/>

and education on prescription, arts, dance, or music therapies are also included to improve people's psychological health. Combining with the therapeutic nature of museums, this approach can be known as museotherapy which uses cultural engagement to support the mental and social health of elderly individuals. Museums as spaces for social prescription can thus help reduce the risks associated with social isolation and loneliness, enhancing the quality of life for older adults and fostering a sense of community and belonging.

Since 2008, healthcare institutions have been offering social prescriptions to patients, encouraging participation in community-based activities such as museum visits (Ucko, 2021). Building on this momentum, the "Art-based Information Prescription" programme at Tate Britain was a pioneering action designed to explore the therapeutic benefits of art engagement for individuals encountering mental health services (Shaer et al., 2008). Participants in the programme engaged with artworks at Tate Britain not just as observers but as active interpreters and creators. The process began with viewing specific artworks that could resonate with the participants' experiences. This was facilitated by art therapists and museum staff who helped to spark discussions around the artworks, encouraging participants to express their connections to the pieces. The discussions were recorded into podcasts or videocasts, and other mental health services had access to these emotional and cognitive insights shared by participants. Thus, participants created their own artworks, which were also used to generate discussions and podcasts. This process helped participants process their experiences and create resources that could help others understand the complexities of living with mental health conditions. This case displayed the communicative power of art, which enabled participants to convey their experiences in ways that traditional informational materials could not. The artwork discussions and podcasts produced through this programme not only served as therapeutic tools for the participants but also as valuable informational resources for others, showcasing the positive impact of integrating art into mental health support and information dissemination.

Building on these developments, the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Arts, Health and Wellbeing was established in 2014, with the support of UK parliamentarians and the National Alliance for Arts, Health and Wellbeing. The purpose of this initiative

was to further harness the potential of the arts in promoting health and well-being, acknowledging the growing recognition of the arts' therapeutic benefits (Howarth, 2017).

In the UK, a notable case of social prescription is the “Museums on Prescription” project which was funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council and conducted between 2014 and 2017.<sup>11</sup> The goal of this project was to connect socially isolated older adults with museum activities in London and Kent through a series of weekly sessions including curator talks, object handling, and creative workshops (Veall et al., 2017). Partner museums involved in this project were the British Museum, Canterbury Museums and Galleries, Central Saint Martins Museum and Study Collection, Maidstone Museum & Bently Art Gallery, The Postal Museum, Tunbridge Wells Museums and Art Gallery, and UCL Museums and Collections. Participants were referred by health services, local communities, adult social care, and relevant third-sector organisations. This research employed a mixed-methods approach to evaluate the impact of these interventions. By using both quantitative and qualitative measures, the researchers found significant improvements in participants' psychological well-being, for instance, a renewed interest in learning, and a sense of belonging and community. These findings highlight the therapeutic benefits and quality-of-life enhancements provided by museum-based activities as a valuable component of social prescription (Thomson et al., 2018).

The project also concluded useful guidelines for museum staff and related communities. These guidelines emphasise the importance of accessibility and building relationships with participants and conduct measures to address physical barriers, enhance participant comfort, and understand the diverse backgrounds and older adults' unique needs (Veall et al., 2017).

Furthermore, museum activities can benefit not only elderly adults with physical or mental health needs but also the wider retired population. With advancements in medical technology and increased life expectancy, retirement no longer equates to immediate

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<sup>11</sup> Veall, D. et al (2017) Museums on Prescription: A guide to working with older people. Available at: [culturehealthresearch.wordpress.com/museums-on-prescription](http://culturehealthresearch.wordpress.com/museums-on-prescription)

decline. Museums can enrich retirees' lives, assist them in being socially connected, and maintain their mental activity. These all support their overall well-being. Given the diversity among the elderly population, museums of various types and sizes can design and implement various activities that cater to different backgrounds and profiles, providing valuable data for the sustainable development of this field (Thomson et al., 2018; Lobban & Murphy, 2020).

### **Relevant Case Studies in Social Prescription and Museotherapy**

The most frequently provided activity for older adults in museums is related to reminiscence. (Smiraglia, 2016). A notable case is the House of Memories programme developed by National Museums Liverpool. This pioneering dementia awareness initiative aims to not only support individuals with dementia but also their caregivers. The programme offers comprehensive training, access to resources, and museum-based activities that utilise museum collections to evoke memories and stimulate cognitive engagement<sup>12</sup>. Key components include interactive training sessions for both professional and family caregivers, the use of portable Memory Suitcases filled with sensory objects, and the My House of Memories app which provides digital access to a collection of images, sounds, and narratives from different eras<sup>13</sup>. The programme has already trained over 12,500 caregivers<sup>14</sup> and has been adopted internationally, with localised versions in Minnesota of the US ("House of Memories": Making Museums Dementia-Inclusive, 2022). Evaluations of this programme reveal that participants experienced a substantial increase in dementia awareness and knowledge and, at the same time, felt reduced stigma associated with the condition. This showcases enhanced person-centred care approaches among caregivers, which help improve their ability to communicate with dementia people effectively and foster better relationships between dementia people and caregivers. Thus, caregivers also reported that their increased optimism, confidence, and overall well-being were enhanced by the social interactions within the programme (Ganga & Wilson, 2020; Whelan, 2014). This initiative

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<sup>12</sup> House of Memories. (n.d.). National Museums Liverpool. <https://www.liverpoolmuseums.org.uk/house-of-memories>

<sup>13</sup> My House of Memories App. (n.d.). National Museums Liverpool. <https://www.liverpoolmuseums.org.uk/house-of-memories/my-house-of-memories-app>

<sup>14</sup> Dementia awareness training for health and social care professionals. (n.d.). National Museums Liverpool. <https://www.liverpoolmuseums.org.uk/house-of-memories/dementia-awareness-training>

exemplifies the valuable role that museums can play in healthcare and offers a transferable framework that other cultural institutions can adopt to support dementia care in the future.

Another noticeable case is the “Memory Lane: Prescription for Reminiscence” project by Oxford University Museums in 2015. This programme was part of a social prescribing effort aimed at improving the well-being of older adults through reminiscence sessions. It was established at the Museum of Oxford and is a collaboration between the Oxford Institute of Population Ageing and the Oxford University Museums Partnership. These sessions involved structured discussions facilitated by a Reminiscence Officer, who was in charge of using objects and presentations to evoke memories, and the themes they used including “History of the Radcliffe Infirmary,” “Oxford Events,” “Holidays in Days Gone By,” “Oxford Industry,” and “Christmas Past.” These themes were chosen based on participants’ interests, which ensured a user-led approach. The sessions were recorded and collected as the museum’s exhibitions and archives. To diversify the programme, sessions were sometimes held at partner organisations, and annual summer parties at different locations were also provided additional social interaction opportunities. Thus, “Memory Lane Movers and Shakers” within this programme offered a series of sessions involving gentle movements and dance routines with varying levels of mobility that can be performed for older adults while they sit. Each session is linked to the preceding Memory Lane reminiscence session’s themes, using props and music to enhance people’s experience. Participants reported positive outcomes, highlighting that it is important to create social connections and the therapeutic nature of sharing memories in a supportive environment (Hamblin, 2016). This initiative showcased the potential of museums to serve as spaces for both cultural engagement and community well-being.

While the programmes mentioned above mainly focus on stimulating memory and enhancing dementia care, museums can also engage older adults through a broader range of themes and activities. The diverse formats of programmes are exemplified by the “Encountering the Unexpected” project initiated by the Research Centre for Museums and Galleries (RCMG) at the University of Leicester. Unlike memory-focused initiatives mentioned above, this project explores how museums can foster active engagement and

older adults' well-being through interaction with natural heritage collections (Lackoi et al., 2016). Involved museums in this case included Crich Tramway Village and Museum, The Cottage Museum, Woodall Spa, and Kettering Museum, and the project invited 100 older adults in several experiments, including one-off activities and extended workshops across several weeks. These experiments were designed for older adults to engage actively with museum collections and the natural world, rather than being passive recipients of information. The themes covered a wide range of topics, from bees and trees to the sea, using natural materials like wool and plants. Experts and curators were involved to help participants explore these themes more deeply. This project involved a quite diverse group of older adults, not just those with medical conditions or a prior interest in natural history. Participants ranged in age from their fifties to late eighties and came from various backgrounds, including engineers, factory workers, teachers, and advertising professionals. They represented a wide range of mobility and health conditions but had some common interests in nature, cultural activities, and global issues. Many participants were actively involved in their communities, enjoyed activities such as music, photography, and arts and crafts, and had different levels of prior experience with museums and natural heritage collections (Dodd, 2018). The project found that engaging participants with natural heritage collections in innovative and unexpected ways can spark people's interest, curiosity, and creativity (Dodd & Research Centre For Museums And Galleries, 2014). These experiences were also helpful in redefining what it means to live and age well, emphasising the importance of living in the moment, staying connected, and finding meaning and purpose in life. The diversity of participants' experiences challenged conventional stereotypes about ageing and encouraged new ways for museums to engage with older audiences.

Additionally, such museum programmes can be extended to reach a broader audience with diverse characteristics and mental needs. For instance, in 2019, Aldershot Military Museum, Hampshire Cultural Trust, and Combat Stress collaborated to conduct a pioneering project, focusing on veterans suffering from PTSD. This initiative integrated military museum collections with art therapy to help veterans' mental well-being, recognising the therapeutic potential of familiar military artefacts (Lobban & Murphy, 2020). These sessions, both in-person and online, aimed to utilise the veterans' military backgrounds to foster a sense of belonging and mitigate the isolating effects of PTSD

associated with military service. The approach of the project involved viewing the collection, artmaking, focus group discussions, and the sharing of military experiences, facilitated by the veterans' deep connection with the museum objects. This connection provided a powerful conduit for therapeutic exploration, helping to bridge the gap between their military pasts and their current experiences, thereby enhancing social inclusion and psychological well-being. The use of museum collections in this case illustrates a transformative role for museums, not just as repositories of history and collections but as active partnerships in supporting various communities' health and well-being.

### **III. Object-Based Learning**

#### **Engaging People with Physical Objects**

Object-based learning is an educational approach focusing on using physical objects as primary sources of delivering information, and it is widely employed in museums, libraries, and heritage sites to enhance participants' physical and mental well-being. This method emphasises tangible and sensory engagement with objects to stimulate curiosity, deepen understanding, and foster a stronger connection with the subject matter (MacDonald et al., 2020). Scott G. Paris introduced the term "object-centred" or "object-based learning" in 2002, highlighting its role in constructing meaning through interactions between objects and viewers. This approach encourages critical thinking and communication and allows learners to decode objects and understand diverse perspectives (Paris, 2002).

The practice of object-handling in museums has evolved from a strictly hands-off approach to one that recognises the value of tactile engagement with artefacts as a powerful educational tool. Historically, museums were repositories where precious items were preserved and displayed, so it was often forbidden for visitors to touch objects. This approach was grounded in preservation concerns and a philosophical stance that emphasised visual observation as the primary mode of appreciation and learning. However, over the past few decades, encouraging more interactive and participatory experiences within museums has become a trend and is widely accepted.

This change has been influenced by educational theories that advocate for multisensory learning, acknowledging that tactile engagement can deepen understanding and enhance memory retention (Lin & Lu, 2024).

In traditional museum settings, curators often determine the meaning of exhibits through content organisation and display (Hooper-Greenhill, 2020). However, participatory learning environments enable objects to spark participants' ongoing interest and motivation for learning. Object-based learning in museums allows for direct interaction with artefacts, artworks, specimens, and archives, integrating visual, tactile, and contextual elements (MacDonald et al., 2020; Chatterjee & Hannan, 2016). This method is further supported by discovery learning and constructivism, which emphasise active, experiential learning where individuals can construct their understanding through direct interaction (Hooper-Greenhill, 2007).

Studies have shown that neuroscientific research in somatosensation can enhance the selection of tactile objects in museums, which can have a significant impact on emotional well-being through touch experience (Critchley, 2020). For example, Chatterjee and Noble (2009) explored the impact of handling museum objects on patient well-being at University College London Hospitals. During the sessions, patients interacted with artefacts, and it led participants' life satisfaction and health status to increase. Patients reported that the objects provided sensory experiences, triggered personal memories, and offered emotional comfort.

Another study evaluated a museum object-handling intervention for older adults in healthcare settings (Thomson & Chatterjee, 2014). The facilitator-led sessions included handling and discussing museum objects, which resulted in a positive impact and increased wellness as well, particularly in acute and elderly care settings. This study also demonstrated the therapeutic benefits of object-handling, including enhanced confidence, social interaction, and learning motivation for participants.

A recent study examined an arts-based reminiscence outreach programme using museum artefacts in retirement communities (Smiraglia, 2024). The "Tangible Memories: Photography Object Handling Session" allowed participants to handle

historic photography objects, share personal photographs, and take instant photos. Participants valued the hands-on interaction and novelty, preferring it over traditional lectures, and appreciated the social interaction and opportunity to share memories.

However, this study also pointed out some challenges, including physical issues (vision, hearing, and dexterity problems) and logistical factors (room temperature and timing). To enhance future programmes, the researcher recommended creating active, object-based learning experiences and selecting objects with suitable weight, texture, and size for accessibility. Clear communication about the programme format and activities in promotional materials is essential, and supportive staff involvement is crucial for assisting participants, particularly those with physical or cognitive challenges. Aligning programme timing with participants' energy levels, using auditory aids, and providing visual aids and permissions for breaks were also suggested (Smiraglia, 2024).

For future research, a multimodal approach combining observations, surveys, and interviews is suggested to capture a comprehensive picture of programme impact. The study emphasised the need for further studies into diverse institutions, programme topics, and audiences, as well as more causal studies on these programmes' effects, ideally through randomised controlled trials.

### **Personal Objects in Engaging Older Adults**

For older adults, the value and impact of personal objects cannot be ignored, as these items can be seen as mirrors of their past experiences and identities. These objects can evoke memories, symbolise relationships, and provide continuity and self-identity, especially during people's life transitions (Leigh & Nemeth, 2023). They can be used in activities such as bookmaking, painting, drawing, and creative writing to facilitate creative expression and memory recollection.

For instance, a project was about letting participants create handmade memory books with family photographs which related to the important places or life events in their memory. Another project was conducted to encourage participants to select significant objects and use them to inspire creative writing, drawing, and photography. For example, a participant drew and wrote about a dresser made by her grandfather. Besides this, a

collaborative painting project encouraged older adults to create artwork. In the process of creating, they reflected on life journeys which were inspired by those meaningful objects. Afterwards, their works were exhibited in a community art gallery. These projects mentioned above all well highlight the therapeutic and educational benefits of using personal objects to enhance identity, foster intergenerational connections, and promote older adults' well-being. As this field keeps evolving, ongoing research and collaboration will be essential to overcoming challenges and maximising the impact of these creative initiatives.

### **Research Challenges and Gaps in Promoting Cognitive Health and Wellbeing Through Museum Activities**

A Consensus report by the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (2015) highlights that the understanding of cognitive health promotion for older adults remains incomplete. Although lifelong learning and cognitive engagement are linked to some positive outcomes, some gaps still exist in the research. Specifically, more investigation is needed into the types of activities which cause influences to what extent, the required duration and intensity of these activities, and other factors that might influence the long-term cognitive performance of older adults. This reveals a broad and complex field where many variables affect cognitive health over time.

Although there is now a substantial body of research and scientific evidence demonstrating that museums, as part of social prescriptions, can utilise their collections to provide various activities beneficial to the physical and mental well-being of the elderly, it remains challenging for museums to find a long-term measurement or evaluation method to assess the effectiveness of these activities. Moreover, a lot of current research comparatively focuses on short-term intervention effects, and there is a lack of studies exploring the potential long-term impact of repeated museum activities on participants (Johnson et al., 2015; Stanfield, 2016; Davenport et al., 2024). In addition, the methods conducted in studies and cases differ, making it difficult to conduct clear and robust comparisons between different activity cases. Therefore, the academic community is continually gathering various cases, strengthening empirical experience, and testing different measurement approaches in the hope of establishing effective and replicable assessment methodologies in the future. This may enable

museums and related organisations to have a comprehensive method for evaluating and tracking the effectiveness of activities for the elderly, thereby facilitating the broader dissemination of creative ageing practices to benefit the long-term physical and mental health of the elderly population.

Museums can also face similar limitations. Though the neuroscience studies and past cases provide evidence that museum activities have positive effects, there is a need for more detailed research to explore the specific impacts of museum-based interventions, including their scale and contributing factors, to better align and enhance museum programmes from the outset (Ucko, 2021). Thus, Ucko (2021) notes that most existing findings are correlational rather than causal. The lack of control groups in these studies may exaggerate the perceived benefits, which may lead to a placebo effect to some extent. This issue calls for more rigorously designed studies to assess the complex and multi-level impact of these interventions.

Recent literature and methodologies for museum programme evaluations include the Evaluation Toolkit for Museums (Foster, 2020) and the Museum Wellbeing Measure for Older Adults (Thomson & Chatterjee, 2015). Foster (2020) suggests that museums can use front-end evaluation during programme planning to understand older adults' needs and expectations. Formative evaluation can be employed throughout the programme to refine activities based on participant feedback, and if summative evaluation can be utilised at the end, it may be possible to well capture the overall impact.

The UCL Museum Wellbeing Measures Toolkit is a comprehensive set of scales designed to assess the psychological well-being of participants involved in museum and gallery activities. This toolkit is developed by researchers from University College London (UCL) Museums & Public Engagement and funded by the Arts & Humanities Research Council, and it supports a flexible 'pick and mix' approach, which is suitable for evaluating the impact of both one-off activities and ongoing programmes. The toolkit consists of short and full versions of the Generic Wellbeing Questionnaire and Wellbeing Measures Umbrellas tailored to different age groups (Thomson & Chatterjee, 2015). The development process included extensive testing with various participants, such as those with dementia, and iterative improvement based on feedback from

museums across the UK, to ensure its validity and reliability. The toolkit builds on frameworks such as the Positive Affect Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS) and Visual Analogue Scales (VAS) to measure changes in mood and emotion, offering a robust framework for assessing various dimensions of well-being. Despite its strengths, the toolkit faces challenges such as how to ensure consistent understanding and track, and how to use it among diverse participants and contexts at museums or galleries.

Measuring well-being raises several difficulties because of its complex and subjective nature. One big challenge is the lack of a universally accepted definition of wellbeing, leading to difficulties in standardising measurement tools across different studies and contexts. The variability in conceptualising wellbeing, whether as positive emotions, life satisfaction, or psychological functioning, complicates the whole evaluation process and the synthesis of research findings (Baxter & Burnell, 2022). Moreover, the cultural context plays a crucial role in shaping people's perceptions of well-being, which can differ significantly across societies. This cultural variability necessitates the adaptation of measurement tools to be sensitive to different cultural norms and values. Another gap lies in the integration of social and environmental factors, which are often overlooked in individual-focused well-being models. Baxter and Burnell (2022) emphasise the importance of transparency in definitions and methodologies to strengthen the evidence base for well-being interventions, ensuring that findings and recommendations are concluded from reliable data.

Based on this complexity in measuring wellbeing, Burnell and Woodhouse (2022) conduct a realist-informed review to investigate the growing field of heritage interventions for mental health and well-being. They review several articles and cases and highlight the preliminary yet promising evidence suggesting that heritage-related activities influence mental health outcomes positively. However, they notice a lack of tailored strategies acknowledging diverse engagement types, participant needs, and the multidisciplinary nature of existing research, which crosses the fields of arts, humanities, and sciences. They use a realist approach, regarding each project or intervention as theories incarnate, and considering participant types and engagement levels to better explore the context-specific effectiveness of the interventions which are usually hidden in broad generalisations.

Through their review, the researchers construct a candidate programme theory to understand how heritage interventions can specifically benefit individuals with mental health issues, emphasising the need for clarity about what works, for whom, and under what circumstances. They highlight the importance of further research to refine and validate these proposed theories, considering each case's unique context and identifying the different mechanisms that facilitate change. By doing so, more targeted and effective heritage-based mental health interventions can be developed to support both physical and mental health outcomes for people.

Building on the foundational insights from existing academic research, the case study of the Age Well Sessions at Glasgow Museums aims to provide helpful empirical data to enhance our understanding of how different contexts and levels of engagement function within heritage interventions. By examining Glasgow Museums' approach to designing and implementing activities for older adults, this study will offer a detailed analysis of how museums can develop culturally sensitive and inclusive programmes, and how they work. This exploration can serve as a valuable reference for future research, helping to progressively refine theoretical frameworks for effectively engaging older adults in cultural settings. Such insights will be crucial for creating programmes that are both beneficial and adaptable to the evolving needs of an ageing society.

## CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

To explore the Age Well Sessions at Glasgow Museums, this research adopted a qualitative methodology and used an inductive approach to uncover new insights into how museums can engage the elderly and thoroughly create an age-friendly environment. This methodology was designed to capture the nuanced complexities of the programme's design and implementation and gathered data from the firsthand perspectives of the programme's designers and educators conducting the sessions. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews supplemented by non-participant shadowing observations. These methods facilitated a deep, exploratory examination of the sessions, allowing for the collection of rich, detailed data from which patterns, themes, and influential insights emerged organically (Flick, 2018). The inductive approach was employed to make sure that the subsequent analysis was grounded in empirical evidence, and could reflect the authentic experiences and challenges encountered within the Age Well Sessions.

### I. The Age Well Sessions

The Age Well Sessions continually practised at several museums in Glasgow offer free sessions for groups of older adults and care homes. These visits allow participants to explore museum displays at a leisurely pace with a learning team member. They include handling real museum objects and providing opportunities for social interaction. The sessions are adaptable to diverse groups' needs and aim to be inclusive by ensuring the museum staff are trained in dementia awareness.<sup>15</sup>

In this study, purposive sampling was employed based on the research objectives. Purposive sampling allows researchers to select cases that can be particularly informative or illustrative of the phenomena under investigation (Neuman and Robson, 2018). Based on this consideration, the Age Well Sessions were chosen to explore how museums can include the elderly, promoting social interaction and well-being through tailored activities (Ganga & Wilson, 2020; Thomson & Chatterjee, 2014).

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<sup>15</sup> Ageing Well Programme - Groups. (n.d.). Glasgow Life. <https://www.glasgowlife.org.uk/museums/glasgow-life-museums-ageing-well-programme/ageing-well-programme-groups>

According to the report, the UK's Ageing Population: Challenges and Opportunities for Museums and Galleries, produced by the University of Oxford, the British Museum, and the Age Friendly Museum's Network, this approach is also carried out across the UK, where cultural institutions are increasingly focused on the wellbeing and engagement of older adults<sup>16</sup>. The Manchester Jewish Museum, for instance, has developed intergenerational volunteer programmes that bridge the gap between young and old, fostering skills exchange and mutual understanding. National Museums Liverpool's House of Memories programme is another pioneering initiative mentioned in the literature, providing dementia-awareness training to caregivers and using museum collections to support people living with dementia<sup>17</sup>. Similarly, the Stroke Association's collaboration with the Horniman Museum and Gardens offers therapeutic activities for stroke survivors<sup>18</sup>, highlighting the role of museums in supporting recovery and enhancing the quality of life.

The Age Well Sessions at Glasgow Museums is a suitable case to reflect a wider acknowledgement within the UK of how cultural institutions can effectively respond to the societal challenges posed by an ageing population (Beauchet et al., 2020; Todd et al., 2017). Museums and galleries across the country are increasingly adapting their offerings to meet the needs and preferences of an older demographic, recognising this as an opportunity to engage them in creative ageing and lifelong learning initiatives (Thomson et al., 2020). The Age Well Sessions stands as a feasible and ongoing example of this approach, which offers a lot of tailored activities to foster social engagement, cognitive stimulation, and the overall well-being of local elderly people (Ganga & Wilson, 2020; Whelan, 2014). This initiative embodies Glasgow Museums' dedication to creating inclusive, adaptable, and enriching experiences for all visitors, highlighting their significance in a society that values accessibility and meaningful participation for individuals of all ages.

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<sup>16</sup> Hamblin, K., & Harper, S. (n.d.). The UK's Ageing Population: Challenges and opportunities for museums and galleries. <https://www.ageing.ox.ac.uk/download/173>

<sup>17</sup> House of Memories. (n.d.). National Museums Liverpool. <https://www.liverpoolmuseums.org.uk/house-of-memories>

<sup>18</sup> Lewisham Horniman Stroke Group | Stroke Association. (n.d.). [www.stroke.org.uk](http://www.stroke.org.uk). Retrieved March 29, 2024, from <https://www.stroke.org.uk/finding-support/clubs-and-groups/lewisham-horniman-stroke-group>

## **II. Participants**

The study conducted interviews with three designers and educational staff involved in the Age Well Sessions within Glasgow Museums in May and June.

**Interviewee A** is based at Kelvin Hall and is the original designer of the entire programme. Kelvin Hall, located in the West End of Glasgow, provided a quiet and spacious environment, with fewer school group visits, making it suitable for conducting sessions specifically for the elderly (Interviewee A, personal communication, May 22, 2024). This museum was chosen in this study for its accessibility features, including wheelchair and pram access to all public areas, accessible toilets, and sensory bags for those with sensory needs (Smiraglia, 2024). Additionally, Kelvin Hall offered a dedicated quiet room and a fixed-loop hearing assistance system for visitors with hearing impairments. The venue also housed a diverse collection from the Glasgow Life Museum, allowing participants to handle real museum objects and engage in social interactions. Moreover, Kelvin Hall benefited from a partnership with Glasgow Life, the University of Glasgow, and the National Library of Scotland, enhancing the range of activities and resources available to visitors, such as sessions featuring old films from the National Library of Scotland.

**Interviewee B** is based at the Open Museum, also known as the Glasgow Museums Resource Centre (GMRC). The Open Museum has been around for about 30 years and was one of the first dedicated outreach services in Europe (Interviewee B, personal communication, June 5, 2024). It managed diverse portable handling kits and conducted sessions for older adults in care homes throughout Glasgow. This outreach service was crucial for individuals who were isolated or had limited accessibility to museums in the city centre. The Open Museum played a key role in extending the reach of the Age Well Sessions, providing social inclusion and interaction to a broader audience, which made it an essential target for data collection in this study.

**Interviewee C** is from the Riverside Museum, the first purpose-built museum established by Glasgow Life in the 21st century. The Riverside Museum housed a vast collection of transportation artefacts and recreated street scenes, offering an immersive experience for visitors. These elements had the potential to stimulate memories and

engagement among older adults (Leigh & Nemeth, 2023).

Besides this, I conducted a site visit to Kelvin Hall to examine the venue and observe three Age Well Sessions designed for people newly diagnosed with dementia and their carers. Using non-participant observation, I recorded these firsthand observations in text form without directly interacting with the participants. Photos were taken of the session venue and the artefacts and props used during the activities, ensuring no images of participants were captured. Consent for interviews and observations was obtained from the museum, interviewees, and participants, adhering to Radboud University's ethics assessment requirements, which included an explanation of the data collection methods and purposes. The data collection period lasted one month.

### **III. Design and Data Collection**

To answer the intended research questions, semi-structured interviews were chosen for their balance between guided inquiry and spontaneous knowledge generation. This format allowed for a deep exploration of participants' experiences, attitudes, and perceptions while retaining the flexibility to explore emergent themes and insights (Rubin & Rubin, 2012; Brinkmann, 2023). The semi-structured format is characterised by using a list of questions or prompts designed to explore the research topics in depth. However, unlike structured interviews, it does not confine the conversation to a predetermined set of questions. This fluidity makes it a good tool for uncovering the nuanced, subjective realities of participants, enabling researchers to “follow the lead” of interviewees as new paths of inquiry emerge (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). One of the strengths of semi-structured interviews is their capacity to foster an open dialogue where participants feel more comfortable sharing their experiences and perspectives. This interactive setting encourages a deeper level of reflection and elaboration, which is important for revealing the underlying meanings and motivations behind individuals' thoughts and behaviours. The semi-structured interview's flexibility is an advantage that can be helpful in this study, as it allows the researcher to adapt to the flow of conversation, ensuring that the most relevant and insightful information can be captured.

The data collection for this study encompasses two phases, each designed to offer unique insights into the Age Well Sessions and contribute to a holistic understanding of the

programme.

- **Phase One: Semi-Structured In-Depth Interviews**

The first phase was to conduct semi-structured, in-depth interviews with three programme designers and educators involved in the Age Well Sessions. This included a purposive sample of individuals who have a direct role in the planning, development, and delivery of the programme. The goal was to gain insights into the programme's design principles, implementation strategies, challenges faced during its execution, and anticipated future developments or adjustments from these initiators' perspectives and experiences. These interviews will be instrumental in understanding the educational philosophies, strategies, and operational dynamics that guide the sessions.

**Interview Questions**

In designing the interview questions for the study, I adopted Michael Quinn Patton's categorisation of interview questions as a foundational framework (Patton, 1990). This approach ensured a comprehensive exploration of the designers' and museum educators' experiences, perceptions, and reflections on the programme. By integrating Patton's diverse categories — ranging from Behavioural and Opinion to Feeling, Knowledge, Sensory, and Background/Demographic questions — I would like to capture a holistic understanding of the Age Well Sessions. This methodological choice helped explore the actual behaviours and actions of the educators, their professional and personal opinions on the programme's impact, their emotional responses to their work, their knowledge about creative ageing and museum education, and the sensory experiences central to the programme's design. Additionally, understanding their background provided context to their insights and experiences. By employing Patton's framework, the interview design was structured to elicit rich, nuanced data that encompasses the multifaceted dimensions of conducting museum sessions aimed at engaging elderly participants, thereby offering a thorough analysis of the programme's efficacy, challenges, and successes. This approach not only aligned with the inductive, qualitative nature of my study but also supported collecting meaningful insights

from the data.

Moreover, I organised three different sets of interview questions tailored to the specific roles and responsibilities of the interviewees involved with the Age Well Sessions. This approach was necessary to ensure that all the questions were relevant and could elicit rich and detailed responses from each participant as much as possible. The sets of questions were customised comparatively for the interviewees from Kelvin Hall, Open Museum/Glasgow Museums Resource Centre, and Riverside Museum. Each set focused on the unique contributions and experiences of their roles, allowing the interviewees to share their insights and perspectives based on their specific responsibilities and expertise. This tailored design enabled me to gather comprehensive data that may reflect the diverse aspects of the programme, from its design and implementation to its practical challenges and successes, thus providing a holistic understanding of the Age Well Sessions.

**Table. 1** Questions for the Programme Designer at Kelvin Hall (Interviewee A):

Types of question	Questions
Background/Demographic Questions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Could you share a bit about your background in museum education or programme design?</li> <li>● How long have you been involved with the Age Well Sessions, and how did you come to work in this programme?</li> <li>● How has your career path influenced your approach to designing the Age Well Sessions?</li> <li>● Have you had any specific training or professional development related to working with elderly populations or museum education? Can you describe this training?</li> </ul>
Behavioural Questions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Can you walk me through the steps you took to</li> </ul>

	<p>design the Age Well Sessions, starting from concept ideation to the final planning stages?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● How do you decide which museum and its artefacts or themes to include in the Age Well Sessions? What is the selection process?</li> <li>● To adapt the sessions for participants with diverse needs, such as those with dementia, how do you consider and modify the programme's design to ensure inclusivity?</li> <li>● Were there any challenges you faced in the programme design and how did you address it?</li> </ul>
Knowledge Questions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● What research or theories influenced the design of the Age Well Sessions?</li> <li>● Based on your experience, what do you think are the key factors or operational principles in engaging elderly people through museum programmes?</li> </ul>
Opinion Questions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Can you talk about the objectives and effectiveness of this programme as a programme designer (initiator)?</li> <li>● In your opinion, what elements are crucial for the success of programmes like Age Well Sessions?</li> <li>● What do you think works well in the Age Well Sessions to keep elderly participants interested and involved?</li> <li>● Based on your experiences with the Age Well Sessions so far, what are your aspirations or plans for the development of the programme in the future? Are there any specific changes or expansions you hope to do?</li> </ul>

Feeling Questions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can you share a moment during the sessions that was particularly rewarding or meaningful for you as a programme designer (initiator)?</li> <li>• How do you feel when you see participants engaging with the programme?</li> </ul>
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**Table. 2** Questions for the Open Museum/Glasgow Museums Resource Centre (Interviewee B) which is involved in this programme:

Types of question	Questions
Background/Demographic Questions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Could you briefly describe your educational and professional background, and what brought you to the Open Museum?</li> <li>• How long have you been involved with the Open Museum's outreach services, particularly focusing on elderly groups?</li> <li>• Have you had any specific training related to working with elderly populations? Can you share the training experience?</li> </ul>
Behavioural Questions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can you describe a typical object-handling session that you conduct for elderly groups from start to finish?</li> <li>• How do you adapt the session's activities or interactions based on the participants' responses or needs in real-time?</li> <li>• Is there any session where you felt the participants were particularly engaged? What do you think made this happen?</li> </ul>

<p>Knowledge Questions</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What training or resources are helpful to you in preparing to do object-handling sessions for elderly adults?</li> <li>• What educational principles or elements are most important or should be carefully considered when delivering sessions targeted at elderly audiences?</li> <li>• Can you share your experience when interacting with elderly participants who may have specific needs within the session? (ex. people with Dementia)</li> <li>• Have you ever had to overcome a challenge during a session or any time related to your work? What happened and how did you handle it?</li> </ul>
<p>Sensory Questions</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are there specific objects or kits that can evoke strong reactions or engagement from the participants?</li> <li>• How do you facilitate participants' engagement based on their different characteristics or situations during the activities?</li> </ul>
<p>Opinion Questions</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can you talk about the goals and impacts of the object-handling sessions for elderly participants?</li> <li>• From your perspective, how do these activities meet the needs of elderly participants and what could be improved?</li> <li>• When conducting activities with the elderly, about the environment, is there any aspect/factor that should be considered?</li> </ul>

Feeling Questions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have you had any moments during the sessions that were particularly rewarding or meaningful for you when interacting with the elderly?</li> <li>• Can you share your feelings about your work?</li> </ul>
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**Table. 3** Questions for the Riverside Museum (Interviewee C) which is involved in this programme:

Types of question	Questions
Background/Demographic Questions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can you briefly describe your educational and professional background, and what brought you to the Riverside Museum?</li> <li>• How long have you been involved with the Age Well Sessions at Riverside Museum, particularly with elderly groups?</li> <li>• Have you had any specific training related to working with elderly populations? Can you share the training experience?</li> </ul>
Behavioural Questions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How do you decide what artefacts or themes to include in the Age Well Sessions? What is the selection process?</li> <li>• Can you describe a typical session that you conduct for elderly groups from start to finish?</li> <li>• How do you adapt the session's activities or interactions based on the participant's responses or needs in real-time?</li> <li>• To adapt the sessions for participants with diverse needs, such as those with dementia, how do you consider and modify the programme's design to ensure inclusivity?</li> </ul>

Knowledge Questions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Based on your experience, what do you think are the key factors or operational elements in engaging elderly people through museum programmes?</li> <li>• Have you ever had to overcome a challenge during a session or any time related to your work? What happened and how did you handle it?</li> </ul>
Sensory Questions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are there specific objects or themes that can evoke strong reactions or engagement from the participants?</li> <li>• How do you facilitate participants' engagement based on their different characteristics or situations during the activities?</li> </ul>
Opinion Questions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can you talk about the goals and impacts of the sessions for elderly participants as a programme curator?</li> <li>• From your perspective, how do these activities meet the needs of elderly adults and what could be improved?</li> <li>• When conducting activities with the elderly, about the environment, is there any aspect/factor that should be considered?</li> </ul>
Feeling Questions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have you had any moments during the sessions that were particularly rewarding or meaningful for you when conducting sessions for the elderly?</li> <li>• Can you share your feelings about your work?</li> </ul>

- **Phase Two: Non-Participant Shadowing Observations**

I attended three Age Well Sessions at Kelvin Hall as a non-participant observer

to get a closer look at how museum educators interact with participants. By doing this, I could understand how the sessions were run, the interactive methods they used, and how the participants reacted in real time.

During these sessions, I took notes on how the educators presented their material, how they used museum artefacts, their interactive techniques, how engaged the participants were, and the overall vibe of the sessions. I did not directly interact with the participants in order not to influence their experience. I also visited the three selective museums to take note of how the spaces were set up to support the sessions.

As I watched, I paid close attention to the interactions between the educators and participants, and the different ways the educators tried to engage the group, and I took photos of certain objects, props, and the layout of the space. These observations helped me better understand the activities and scenarios that were discussed in interviews and allowed me to ask more informed questions and deepen the conversation.

#### **IV. Ethical considerations**

During my research, I adhered to a thorough ethical process to ensure the protection and respect of all participants involved. This study, approved by the Ethics Assessment Committee Humanities at Radboud University, involved semi-structured interviews with programme designers and educators to explore the design and implementation strategies of the Age Well Sessions.

To ensure ethical integrity, I followed several key procedures:

1. **Informed Consent:** All participants were fully informed about the study's aims, procedures, and their rights. Consent forms (as detailed in documents such as "Consent Form" and "Information Document and Consent Form for Museums") were provided, outlining the purpose of the study, data handling, and the voluntary nature of participation. Participants had the right to withdraw at any

time without any consequences.

2. **Data Protection:** Personal data, including names, contact information, and roles, were anonymised and securely stored in compliance with GDPR guidelines and Radboud University's data protection policies. Audio recordings from interviews were transcribed and anonymised, ensuring that identifiable information was protected. All data was stored on password-protected and encrypted devices, and only necessary personal data was retained for communication purposes, which was deleted after the research needs were fulfilled.
3. **Minimising Risk:** To minimise risks, the study avoided collecting sensitive personal data and ensured that all interviews were conducted in a respectful and non-intrusive manner. The research did not involve vulnerable populations, but the privacy and confidentiality of the participants were rigorously maintained.
4. **Ethical Approval and Compliance:** This study received formal approval from Radboud University's Ethics Assessment Committee Humanities, which included a review of the research proposal, consent forms, and data management plan to ensure compliance with ethical standards. This approval is documented in the correspondence and approval letters.

By implementing these ethical considerations, I ensured that this research was conducted with respect for participants' rights and well-being, thereby contributing valuable insights into the engagement of the elderly in museum education while following ethical standards carefully.

## **V. Data Analysis**

To enhance the effectiveness of the interviews, I provided interviewees with the outlines of interview questions in advance, allowing them sufficient time to organise their thoughts and experiences before sharing them. The entire interview process was recorded in audio format, and a verbatim transcript was produced. The transcript accurately reflected the interview content without any editing or modifications to ensure

data integrity during subsequent analysis. After completing the transcript, further data organisation and analysis were conducted.

I conducted a content analysis to synthesise the rich qualitative data into coherent findings that respond to my research questions, which aimed to explore the design, implementation, and guiding principles of this programme, alongside the perspectives of programme designers and educators. Using NVivo, I established seven initial coding categories to capture the relevant information for content analysis: Challenges, Design Principles, Educational Strategies, Future Developments, Opportunities, Perceived Effectiveness, and Staff Training Framework. Here are the steps I practised in this sector:

### **Data Preparation**

The first step involved transcribing all recorded interviews and organising my observational notes and all the second-hand documents provided by the interviewees to ensure transcription's accuracy and maintain data integrity. In addition, I anonymised the data by replacing names with unidentifiable third person to protect participants' identities and privacy.

### **Familiarisation with the Data**

After transcribing all recorded interviews and importing the data into NVivo, I conducted a comprehensive review of the transcriptions, observational notes, and supplementary documents provided by the interviewees. This process involved multiple readings to thoroughly understand the material and identify preliminary patterns, recurring themes, and significant quotes for subsequent content analysis. I started with a thorough read-through of all transcriptions and notes to gain an overall sense of the content. During this initial reading, I annotated and memoed my immediate thoughts, reactions, and questions, capturing relevant insights for deeper analysis. I focused on recurring elements and concepts across different data sources to explore similarities and differences in the interviewees' experiences and perspectives. I marked quotes illustrating the interviewees' feelings, challenges, and core considerations in planning and practicing the sessions, as well as their feedback and comments on the sessions. These quotes grounded the findings in the participant's own words and added richness to the narrative. I categorised similar ideas and patterns from the raw data into seven initial

groups, shaping the initial coding framework and providing a structured approach to the detailed coding process. To ensure a comprehensive understanding, I cross-referenced the transcriptions with all observational notes and second-hand documents, validating the information and exploring a multi-faceted view of the programme's design and implementation. This cross-referencing helped explore various perspectives and practices from different interviewees, museums, and data resources, further outlining the overall structure of the programme. Through these steps, I immersed myself deeply in the data, setting a foundation for the detailed analysis that followed, ensuring that the subsequent coding and content analysis was grounded in a thorough and nuanced understanding of all the qualitative data.

### **Coding Categories:**

- A. Challenges: Codes related to the difficulties faced in implementing the programme.
- B. Design Principles: Codes related to the guiding principles of the programme.
- C. Educational Strategies: Codes related to the methods and strategies used in the sessions.
- D. Future Developments: Codes related to anticipated changes or improvements.
- E. Opportunities: Codes related to potential improvements or areas for expansion.
- F. Perceived Effectiveness: Codes related to how the effectiveness of the sessions is perceived.
- G. Staff Training Framework: Codes related to how the museum staff and relevant workers and partnerships have to consider and conduct when delivering sessions or services to the older adults.

### **Develop the Content Categories**

To develop the content categories, I first aggregated the codes into potential categories, ensuring that these categories represented significant patterns across the data set about the research questions. Each category needed to have a coherent narrative, capturing the essence of the participants' experiences and perspectives. I carefully ensured that the categories were well-supported by data from the interviews, cross-referencing quotes and observations to validate each category's relevance and accuracy.

### **Review the Categories**

I reviewed each category and its coding for consistency, re-checking the coded data extracts to ensure they properly reflected the study's objectives. I refined and added one more category (G. Staff Training Framework) midway because this category was also well-supported by the data and connected to the programme's design and sustainable implementation, ensuring that the final categories were sufficient to provide clear and rich findings to answer the research questions.

### **Writing the Analysis**

I wrote the analysis by connecting each category to both the wider literature and my specific research questions. To do this, I included direct quotes from the interviews and detailed examples from my observation notes to clearly show what each category represents, making sure the findings were based on real data. I organised the analysis to highlight how these categories reflect the experiences and viewpoints of the museum team, keeping the discussion closely tied to the data I collected. By referencing relevant literature, I interpreted the findings and explored whether the identified categories and the content I gathered aligned with existing research and the goals of my study or not.

### **Reflection**

I took some time to think about to what extent my analysis could answer my research questions and what aspect my findings might bring more discussions related to museum education, creative ageing, and the role of museums in engaging older adults. I also considered the different factors that could have influenced my data and findings, such as the varied experiences of participants and the differences between museum settings. I also thought about the limitations of my analysis, such as I did not explore all the involved museums and the fact that I relied on qualitative data, which could lead to some subjective biases. Finally, I suggested possible directions for future research, particularly in exploring more creative ageing programmes and how these could be applied in different cultural contexts.

## CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

### I. Policy Context for Creative Ageing in the UK

In the UK, the concept of “creative ageing” has emerged as an important component of public policy, emphasising the integration of arts and cultural activities into the lives of older adults to enhance creative ageing and social connection in response to demographic changes (Thomson et al., 2020; Beauchet et al., 2020; Chatterjee et al., 2017; Todd et al., 2017; Hamblin, 2016). Social prescribing has become an increasingly recognised and implemented approach within healthcare, enabling healthcare professionals to refer patients to non-clinical services that support their health and well-being. The National Health Service (NHS), the publicly funded healthcare system of the UK, implements the “NHS Long Term Plan” to expand social prescribing across the nation. This initiative connects individuals to community services such as museum activities, effectively bridging the healthcare system with cultural venues (Gheera & Eaton, 2021).

A key aspect of the UK's creative ageing policy is the recognition of the arts as a crucial element in health and social care strategies. This is reflected in various initiatives and funding programmes, such as those supported by the Arts and Humanities Research Council<sup>19</sup> and the National Alliance for Museums, Health and Wellbeing<sup>21</sup>, which highlight the potential of cultural engagement to improve mental health, reduce loneliness, and enhance the overall quality of life for older adults (Hamblin & Harper, 2016; Veall et al., 2017). For example, the UK's Healthy Ageing Challenge, part of the Industrial Strategy Challenge Fund, focuses on developing innovative and inclusive cultural opportunities for the ageing population<sup>22</sup>. This programme supports new products, services, and experiences to help older adults remain active, productive, and socially connected, ensuring that cultural activities are accessible and meaningful for all older adults (Dowlen and Gray, 2022). The projects supported by the Healthy Ageing

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<sup>19</sup> UCL. (2017, February 12). Museums On Prescription. UCL CULTURE.

<https://www.ucl.ac.uk/culture/projects/museums-on-prescription>

<sup>20</sup> Investment in culture and nature to boost the nation's health. (2022). Wwww.ukri.org.

<https://www.ukri.org/news/investment-in-culture-and-nature-to-boost-the-nations-health/>

<sup>21</sup> Case Studies. (2015, September 30). National Alliance for Museums, Health & Wellbeing.

<https://museumsandwellbeingalliance.wordpress.com/case-studies/>

<sup>22</sup> Healthy Ageing Challenge Community of Practice - Innovate UK Business Connect. (n.d.).

<https://iuk.ktn-uk.org/programme/healthy-ageing-community/>

Challenge encompass various categories, including creating healthy active places, designing for age-friendly homes, living well with cognitive impairment, maintaining health at work, managing complaints of ageing, social support connections, and sustaining physical activity.<sup>23</sup> These efforts demonstrate the UK's comprehensive approach to creating age-friendly environments across multiple domains.

Furthermore, the Baring Foundation has played a crucial role in advocating for the inclusion of arts in care settings and influencing policymakers in the UK.<sup>24</sup> Over the past decade, it has invested over £6 million in various projects across the nation, including a wide range of cultural activities such as dance, music, visual arts, and theatre, all designed to engage older adults in creative ways. These efforts have contributed to a growing recognition of the arts' role in promoting mental health and enhancing the overall quality of life for older adults.

Building on this policy direction and background, museums and galleries have been at the forefront of implementing creative ageing initiatives. Academic research seeks to understand how museums and galleries can support older adults and the impact of museum programmes on individuals' mental health. For instance, the "Museums on Prescription" project showed how social prescribing can connect older adults at risk of social isolation with museum-based activities. Funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council, this project involved partnerships with several museums and evaluated the impact of cultural engagement on participants. The findings highlighted several positive outcomes, including increased self-confidence, positive mood, reduced anxiety and depression, enhanced social connections and communication skills, increased motivation, and the acquisition of new skills and interests (Chatterjee et al., 2017; Veall et al., 2017).

Based on this context, Glasgow Life, a charity that delivers cultural, sporting, and

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<sup>23</sup> Projects - Innovate UK Business Connect. (2022, October 27). [https://iuk.ktn-uk.org/projects/?\\_sft\\_programme=healthy-ageing-challenge-community-of-practice](https://iuk.ktn-uk.org/projects/?_sft_programme=healthy-ageing-challenge-community-of-practice)

<sup>24</sup> Gordon, R. (2019). Older and wiser? Creative ageing in the UK 2010-19. The Baring Foundation. <https://baringfoundation.org.uk/resource/older-and-wiser-creative-ageing-in-the-uk-2010-19/>

learning activities across Glasgow, aims to enhance the lives of its residents<sup>25</sup>. For older adults, Glasgow Life offers a variety of learning opportunities tailored to older adults. People can improve skills in areas such as reading, writing, numeracy, and digital literacy. It also promotes health and well-being by offering relaxation classes, healthy cooking sessions, and dementia training across the city. Intergenerational activities are another focus, bringing different age groups together to foster mutual understanding and social cohesion, including activities such as mentoring and creative arts projects that benefit both younger and older participants.

Within Glasgow Life, museums and cultural programmes also play a key role in engaging older adults. It collaborates with local museums to offer sessions that use artefacts and exhibits to stimulate social interaction. These museums prioritise the elderly population, aiming to create a comprehensive age-friendly environment across cultural venues. This prioritisation has led to the development of initiatives such as the Age Well Sessions, which were born under this supportive environment to make museum resources accessible to everyone.

## **II. Key Principles Guiding the Sessions' Design and Implementation**

### **Introduction of Age Well Sessions**

The Age Well Sessions at Glasgow Museums are designed to engage older adults through a variety of inclusive components. These sessions are offered across multiple venues (see Figure 1 below), including Kelvin Hall, Riverside Museum, Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum, The Burrell Collection, Glasgow Museums Resource Centre (GMRC, also known as the Open Museum), and The People's Palace. Each museum, based on its unique environment, collections, and display approaches, offers different sessions for older adults. This collaborative network enriches the overall content and implementation of the Age Well Sessions. These sessions are free and tailored to be dementia-friendly to ensure accessibility and comfort for all participants. Glasgow Museums began prioritising older adults about 16 years ago in response to the city's

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<sup>25</sup> Glasgow Life. (2019). About Glasgow Life. Glasgow Life; Glasgow Life. <https://www.glasgowlife.org.uk/about-us>

ageing population (Interviewee A, personal communication, May 22, 2024), leading to partnerships with organisations such as Age Scotland, Alzheimer Scotland, and the Life Changes Trust to address the specific needs of this demographic.



**Figure 1.** The flyer of the Age Well Sessions.

Operating under the broader umbrella of Glasgow Life, which also includes libraries, sports facilities, and city events, Glasgow Museums focus on benefiting the people of Glasgow through cultural programmes that enhance the mental, physical, and economic well-being of the city's residents. The Age Well Sessions are deeply rooted in a strategic framework that prioritises the well-being of older adults by making cultural institutions accessible and relevant to them. This initiative ensures that all residents, as taxpayers, have ownership of and benefit from these cultural resources.

The Age Well Sessions showcase a high degree of variability to reflect the diverse needs of older adults. The programme's flexibility is evident in the different names and formats it adopts, such as "Coffee and Culture," to engage its audience effectively at different venues. This approach ensures that sessions are welcoming and inclusive, encouraging broader participation by considering the varied self-perceptions of age among

participants. Some may not see themselves as elderly but still seek activities that foster social interaction and mental well-being. This variability helps in making the sessions more accessible and appealing to a wider range of older adults.

**Table. 4** Typical “Coffee and Culture” 90-minutes Session Structure at Kelvin Hall:

<b>Component</b>	<b>Description</b>
Welcome and Refreshments (social time)	Participants are welcomed with tea, coffee, and snacks in a relaxed atmosphere, allowing time for social interaction and settling in. The time required for this phase will be flexibly adjusted according to the participant’s status.
Introduction	The learning assistant introduces the theme of the day and provides an overview of the activities planned.
Themed Presentation	The learning assistant presents a series of images or objects related to the session's theme, encouraging participants to share memories and stories. The learning assistant sometimes uses a projector to show bigger photos (depending on whether the theme requires it).
Interactive Discussion	Participants engage in discussions about the presented images or objects, facilitated by the learning assistant to ensure everyone has the opportunity to contribute.
Object Handling	Participants handle and explore a selection of museum artefacts with gloves. This part is to foster tactile and sensory engagement.
Closing and Feedback (be conducted on the last session of the whole series of sessions)	The session concludes with a feedback discussion where participants share their thoughts and experiences, and suggestions for future sessions are gathered.

The physical environment is set like the Figures 2 and 3 below:



**Figures 2, 3.** The learning room of Kelvin Hall. Before the session started, the museum team prepared some snacks on the table for participants.

### **Core Components Embedded in the Programme**

A significant aspect of the programme's design and implementation is that the museum team organise specialised training for care workers and group leaders who work with older adults. These trainings build a bridge between the museums and the target audiences, such as care homes and caring centres, ensuring that more groups of the ageing population can obtain clear information about what Glasgow Museums offer, and making information transparent and well-promoted. The training equips care workers and group leaders with skills and knowledge on how to use museum collections creatively, plan and run effective sessions even outside the museums, and utilise resources smoothly, such as borrowing museum kits. As noted by an interviewee, the core philosophy of the Open Museum when conducting sessions outside the museum is "to help you to help yourself" (Interviewee B, personal communication, June 5, 2024). This approach allows care homes with sufficient staffing to borrow and use the museum's handling kits independently, thereby reaching and benefiting more isolated older adults who may live outside Glasgow city.

The sessions emphasise multi-sensory engagement. When selecting objects for handling kits and organising themed sessions, the museum teams incorporate touch, sound, and sometimes smell to stimulate participants' memories and foster a deeper connection between them and the museum objects (MacDonald et al., 2020; Dudley, 2013; Rowlands, 2008; Pye, 2008). For example, handling kits offered by the Open Museum

include items such as textured fabrics, historical artefacts, and objects with distinct scents, a whisky bottle with a preserved aroma. Visual elements are carefully chosen to trigger memories and discussions. For instance, the Open Museum creates replicas of smoked fish which the Scottish people are familiar with. Sessions like “Through the Lens: 1955 Glasgow Photographic Survey” at Kelvin Hall use old photographs of street views, architecture, and public spaces in the city (Figure 4) to provoke participants’ personal stories and collective memories. Some handling kits also feature auditory components, such as old music recordings or DVDs, which can be played to enhance the sensory experience.



**Figure 4.** The learning assistant used the projector to show some photos bigger of the session “Through the Lens: 1955 Glasgow Photographic Survey” before they headed to the storage to do the handling activity at Kelvin Hall. These photos are of the old street view, architecture and the park that Glaswegians are familiar with.

At Riverside Museum, the team utilises its extensive collection of large-scale transportation artefacts and displays that recreate historical street scenes, shops, and stations to offer an immersive experience (Figure 5). These exhibits can evoke memories of living in Glasgow. Through guided tours and introductions by museum staff, these one-time sessions aim to engage elderly visitors who might not frequently visit museums, providing a visually stimulating experience that may encourage people to visit more frequently (Interviewee C, personal communication, 21 June 2024).

The sessions designed for older adults at Riverside Museum focus on engagement, flexibility, and personal connection. These sessions are typically set in popular themes such as music and photography, which resonate with the participants' memories and experiences. For instance, a session might include handling gramophones (Figure 6) and

discussing the music people used to dance to, or exploring various old cameras from the Victorian period and 1950s cameras (Figure 7), which can trigger personal memories.

An exemplary session highlighted the museum's adaptive approach when a group expressed interest in having photos of themselves; the learning assistant brought out an old Polaroid camera, encouraging participants to take and keep instant photos, enriching participants' visit experience (Interviewee C, personal communication, 21 June 2024).



**Figure 5.** Riverside Museum. There are a lot of transportation collections at Riverside Museum. The museum team recreates the old view of streets and Glasgow city, which often causes to strong visual impression for visitors.



**Figure 6.** An old Kodak Brownie Six-20 D is in the props box for visitors to touch and use at Riverside Museum. This kind of camera was produced in the 1950s.



**Figure 7.** The gramophone was used to conduct the session about music in the learning space of Riverside Museum.

Flexibility is key in organising and conducting sessions for older adults (Interviewee A, personal communication, May 22, 2024; Interviewee C, personal communication, June 21, 2024). The museum teams adapt sessions according to participants' interests and needs, focusing on the process rather than the final product or a result of gaining specific knowledge. Sessions typically last 90 minutes at a slower pace, allowing ample time for people to engage with museum objects and trigger chats without feeling rushed. Physical spaces are considered to be easily navigable, with routes planned to avoid long distances and obstacles to ensure comfort for those using wheelchairs or walking aids. Group sizes are kept small, usually between 5 to 12 participants, including carers, to foster an intimate and engaging environment where everyone can hear and participate in discussions. The team remains flexible to handle last-minute cancellations or late

arrivals, seamlessly integrating participants and adjusting the session flow accordingly. For example, on May 28th, during a session at Kelvin Hall, although 14 people signed up, only 8 attended, with some cancelling just before the session started. The session began late due to the late arrival of two participants. The learning assistant quickly adapted by creating a relaxed and fluid atmosphere, allowing the session to proceed at a slower pace and encouraging informal interactions over tea and coffee. They were able to seamlessly integrate latecomers into the session without disruption. Similarly, on June 9th, during another session, 7 participants attended out of those registered. The session started late because participants were enjoying socialising and preparing refreshments together, and the museum team also engaged in it. On June 25th, the final session for a particular group, only two people attended due to others' last-minute cancellations. The learning assistant began the session by chatting about toy stories while waiting for other participants. When it became obvious that no one else would join, the learning assistant adapted by moving the session to the storage area for a toy exploration, ensuring that the two visitors still had a valuable and engaging experience. Throughout the session, the learning assistant used storytelling skills to maintain interest and interaction, emphasising the importance of flexibility in delivering a smooth session.

The museum team also adapts themes and content based on participants' interests and needs. This ensures that sessions are engaging and relevant. For instance, during museum store visits, participants often get drawn to different objects, and session leaders adjust the focus accordingly, rather than sticking strictly to a predetermined plan. This approach allows participants to lead the session, fostering a more engaging and personalised experience and allowing for organic and meaningful interactions (Nina Sobol Levent et al., 2014; Tirsa de Kluis et al., 2023; Dudley, 2013). Before each session, the team gathers information about participants' specific interests or backgrounds to tailor the content appropriately. If a participant is unable to enter a specific space due to discomfort, the team brings objects to them instead, ensuring sessions are accessible and enjoyable for all participants.

Social interaction is a core element in the session design and implementation to combat loneliness and isolation among older adults (Tymoszuk et al., 2019; Chatterjee et al., 2017; Solway et al., 2015). Offering tea and coffee breaks in a relaxed and informal

setting is essential for participants to interact and connect with each other. During these breaks, participants are encouraged to share personal stories and experiences, creating a warm and friendly atmosphere. The museum staff facilitates these interactions by initiating discussions and ensuring everyone has the opportunity to contribute. Feedback from the Coffee and Culture sessions at Kelvin Hall highlights how these interactions foster a sense of community and shared experience.

One participant remarked, “It feels really good when you remember something,” emphasising the joy of shared memories sparked by the objects. Another noted, “Good to meet others in similar circumstances,” indicating the comfort and companionship found in these discussions (Feedback from participants at Kelvin Hall’s Coffee and Culture 2023/24). The social aspect of the sessions is also highlighted with one participant expressing that they particularly enjoyed the opportunity for “conversation and company,” which was both “fun and beneficial” (Feedback from participants at Kelvin Hall’s Coffee and Culture 2023/24). The inclusion of various themes, like archaeology and historical photographs, provides diverse topics that resonate with older adults, making the sessions not only informative but also socially enriching.

Behind the design and implementation of these sessions, collaboration between the museums and local community partners, charities, and organisations such as Alzheimer Scotland is crucial in supporting the programme's practice and enhancing its effectiveness. The museum team consults extensively with these organisations to ensure sessions meet participants' needs. For instance, Alzheimer Scotland provides continuous feedback and advice on various aspects, including practicalities like staircases and signs and the creation and distribution of marketing materials. The museum staff regularly meets with community partners to discuss and adapt offerings based on insights and specific needs, ensuring sessions remain relevant and impactful. The collaboration also includes the training provided by Alzheimer Scotland, where the museum staff can learn how to interact with dementia friends, to ensure both the museum staff and the physical environment are all well-equipped to support participants with dementia. The training is not limited to the learning team, and it is rolled out to counter staff, marketing team, curators, and managers, which was described as a “ long long journey ” by the programme designer (Interviewee A, personal communication, May 22, 2024). This

comprehensive training is to ensure that everyone involved in making strategic decisions and creating resources is aware of and can address the needs of people with dementia. The museum team has to ensure that this training and awareness are not one-time events but part of an ongoing commitment, as a core philosophy of the programme. With staffing changes, continuous staff training and periodic refreshers provided by Alzheimer Scotland help maintain a dementia-friendly environment. When visitors get into these venues, they can see the museum staff displaying dementia-friendly badges and signs which means the museum team was trained and aware of their needs.

The programme's effectiveness relies heavily on its high level of responsiveness to feedback and flexibility in adapting to participants' preferences and needs. According to the programme designer, feedback is gathered informally, often through verbal comments and post-it notes, allowing participants to share their thoughts comfortably, without the pressure of formal evaluation processes. For example, during a session at Kelvin Hall, an Alzheimer Scotland staff member asked participants for their feedback and recorded their responses on an evaluation sheet. This method ensures that even those who might have difficulty writing can still have their voices heard. In addition, the museum team has to observe participants' reactions toward different topics as well to make real-time adjustments and improve future sessions. If a particular theme or object sparks significant interest, the session may shift focus to explore that area more deeply, ensuring a more engaging and relevant experience for the participants. This immediate and ongoing feedback loop helps the team make real-time adjustments to enhance the relevance and enjoyment of the sessions.

The outreach service handled by the Open Museum (Glasgow Museum Resources Centre, GMRC) extends the programme to elderly individuals unable to visit in person and enables the vast collection of Glasgow museums' artefacts stored in the warehouses to be put to greater use. The Open Museum creates and distributes loan boxes or handling kits, developed in collaboration with community groups to ensure relevance and engagement for the target audience (Figure 8, 9). For example, the Open Museum worked with a group of men from the Scottish Men's Sheds Association and a group of women carers to create several Scotland-themed boxes (Figure 9) which incorporated objects that the participants felt represented Scotland.



**Figure 8.** The space to store handling kits is in the Open Museum, and this is also the office for box loans.



**Figure 9.** There are about 80 kits with diverse themes at the Open Museum for people to borrow and use for sessions. For instance, items related to a night out, folklore, parks of Glasgow, and objects selected to represent Scotland.

These kits are used in interactive and engaging sessions in care homes or caring centres, involving tactile activities accessible to participants with various physical and cognitive abilities. For example, a session might involve making clay moulds of fossils, allowing participants to engage in hands-on activities that stimulate both the mind and the senses. Furthermore, the Open Museum also provides training for staff at care homes and other community centres to ensure they can effectively use these kits. This training includes how to handle the objects safely, how to transport and store them, and how to conduct interactive sessions using the kits. The aim is to enable these organisations to run their own sessions independently, promoting the sustainability of the programme.

In sum, the Age Well Sessions is a comprehensive, inclusive initiative designed to engage older adults through a variety of thoughtful components. It operates across multiple venues, emphasises multi-sensory engagement, and remains flexible to participants' needs and interests. Social interaction is a core element, in combating loneliness and fostering community (Dowlen and Gray, 2022; Gordon, 2019). Extensive collaboration with local partners and continuous feedback ensures the programme's effectiveness and relevance. The outreach service further extends the programme's benefits to those unable to visit the museums, promoting broader access to cultural resources and enhancing the well-being of older adults.

### **III. Educational Strategies: methods used for engaging older adults during sessions**

Based on the detailed information extracted from the observation notes and interviews, the following summarises the core components embedded in the sessions for engaging older adults. Regarding the engagement strategies, four main elements are considered by the museum team when conducting a session, including multi-sensory engagement, object-based learning, interactive discussions, flexible content and keep trying.

#### **1. Multi-sensory Engagement**

The sessions incorporate touch, vision, sound, and sometimes smell to stimulate and foster people's connection with selective objects. About the touch, for example, the handling kits offered by the Open Museum include a variety of tactile objects. During a session involving toy exploration at Kelvin Hall, participants were given gloves to wear, allowing them to touch and handle objects such as a stereoscope from the Victorian period (Figure 10), lantern projectors (Figure 11, 12), magic lantern slides (Figure 13), Zoetrope (Figure 14), and other antique toys (Figure 15) during the session of Toy Collection. Thus, in the session "Through the Lens: 1955 Glasgow Photographic Survey", participants were brought to the storage to touch and hold the old photos with gloves (Figure 16, 17). These hands-on experiences are important for enriching participants' experiences and engaging them through physical interaction with the

objects.



**Figure 10.** A Stereoscope from the Victoria Period

The learning assistant is showing how to set up the stereoscope for participants to see images displayed in an old three-dimensional way.



**Figure 11.** Lantern Projectors from the Victoria Period at the storage of Kelvin Hall



**Figure 12.** A clearer image of the Lantern Projector. Photo from Museums Victoria<sup>26</sup>.

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<sup>26</sup> <https://collections.museumsvictoria.com.au/items/1258659>



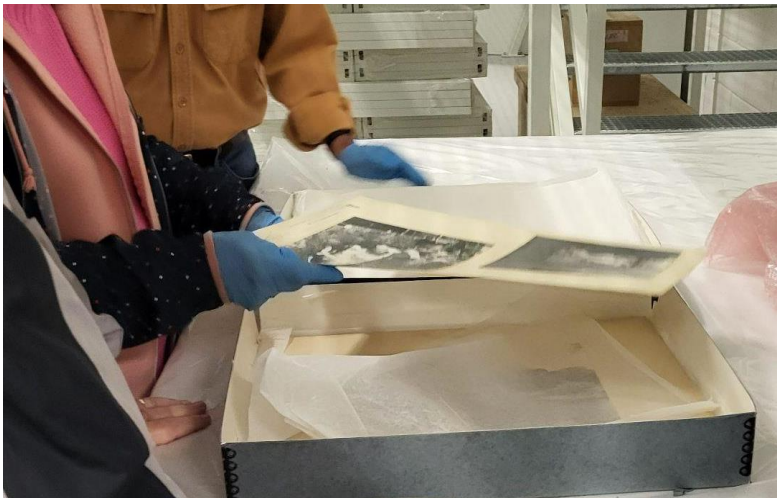
**Figure 13.** Magic Lantern Slides from the Victoria Period



**Figure 14.** Zoetrope. The learning assistant is setting up the Zoetropes for people to see pictures' movement under the light.



**Figure 15.** Other antique toys of the collection such as puppetries and scale model vehicles of the brand, Dinky Toys.



**Figure 16.** Participants wore gloves to touch and explore the collection of old photos of Glasgow.



**Figure 17.** The setup in the storage of Kelvin Hall for participants to handle old photos.

Another example from the interview is that participants worked with an archaeology-themed kit and had a clay session. They made clay moulds of fossils, which they could take home and paint later. This activity not only provided a tactile experience but also allowed participants to create something tangible, reinforcing their memory of the session.

Regarding the sound, for instance, some handling kits include CDs and DVDs of Scottish comedians and music that participants can play during the session (Figure 18). Another example is one of the sessions held in Kelvin Hall, which brings participants to the National Library of Scotland to watch old films, as the library is just next to Kelvin Hall. These auditory elements help evoke memories and encourage discussions about the past and life in Scotland.



**Figure 18.** In the box of The Seventies, all items are related to the period of the 1970s, and there is a CD about Hits of the Seventies and a DVD of Glam Rock 2 about rock songs.

In addition, the museum staff utilised their voice to make the sessions more interesting as well. One of my observations noted that during the session, the learning assistant used vivid storytelling techniques often incorporating audical effects and expressive gestures to make the stories more engaging. This method helps capture the participants' attention and makes the session more lively and interactive.

As for the smell, objects with distinct scents are included in the handling kits to evoke nostalgic memories. For example, a whisky bottle with an aroma is used to trigger memories related to Scottish culture and personal experiences with whisky.

About the visual elements, for instance, old photographs of Glasgow's street views, iconic architecture, diverse personal memorabilia in the Mascot box, and various peripheral products in the Films box are used to spark conversations and collective memories. These images are not only visually engaging but also serve as prompts for storytelling and discussion.

Besides this, during storage tours, participants are shown various objects and artefacts. For example, participants were taken to see collections of old coffee machines, leather soccer balls (Figure 19), and sports equipment, all of which triggered lively discussions and sharing of personal stories. These visual stimuli help create a dynamic and engaging environment for the participants.



**Figure 19.** An old coffee machine and an old leather soccer are stored in Kelvin Hall. They caught participants' attention and triggered memories during a session when people walked by.

## **2. Object-Based Learning**

Object-based learning is a central strategy to engage older adults and spark conversations and reminiscences. The team selects objects that resonate with participants' collective memories, such as old photographs, childhood toys, and historical artefacts, to provoke personal stories and discussions. For instance, the Scottish-themed boxes were created in collaboration with community groups. These boxes collect items such as a model of smoked fish, a whisky bottle, and other culturally significant artefacts (Figure 20). These objects are selected for their ability to initiate discussions about participants' experiences and cultural heritage.



**Figure 20.** Some items were selected to represent Scotland in the box of Scotland. For instance, there is a replica of the Arbroath smokie (a type of smoked haddock) on the left side, and a replica of the Sgian Dubh, which is a small single-edged knife that Scots have in socks when they wear Scottish national dresses.

Another example is the toy collection. During a session on June 25th, participants engaged with a variety of toys from different historical periods. Items included a stereoscope from the Victorian period, lantern projectors, a zoetrope, and other older toys. Participants were given gloves to handle these objects, allowing them to feel the textures and weight, and stimulating memories associated with these toys. This hands-on interaction was complemented by storytelling from the learning assistant, who provided historical context and personal anecdotes to enrich the experience.

The selective object is always a good start for a conversation or reminiscence. An example that impressed me a lot is the Mystery Objects within the kits (Figure 21). These objects are introduced without labels, encouraging participants to guess their use and share related memories. The interviewee used a pair of sugar nippers which is one of the mystery objects to show me how to engage participants during a session. The participants are tasked with guessing their purpose and the learning assistant provides clues and guides them through the exploration process. The learning assistant starts by asking people “What do you think?”, “Do you have any idea about it?”, and then sometimes gives more hints according to participants’ questions and reactions like “Yes it is a kind of tool.”, “Maybe not in a kitchen, but you’d have it at the dinner table.”, “Think about if you hold it in the right way.”, and guide participants to find the truth step by step. The learning assistant can adjust the methods that suit the audience the best,

for instance, either guessing the mysterious items with participants without reading the object's label beforehand or leading the guessing process with Q&A sessions. This method not only stimulates cognitive activity but also encourages social interaction as participants discuss their guesses and memories.



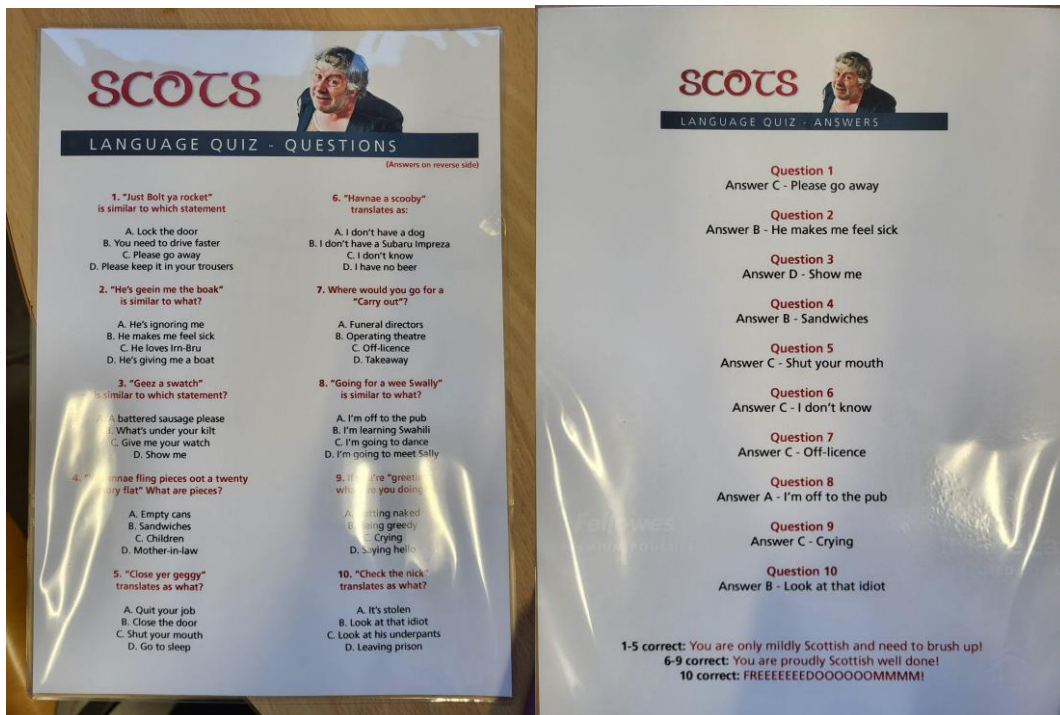
**Figure 21.** A mysterious object within a kit box is often used to let participants discuss and guess what it is. This old tool is around 100 years old, and people used it to pinch and cut cone-shaped sugar in the past. The interviewee used this to show me how to conduct an interactive session with older adults.

### 3. Interactive Discussions

The sessions are interactive, as learning assistants are good at employing strategies to encourage participants to share their experiences and memories related to the objects presented, trying to make the sessions engaging and meaningful for older adults.

One of the primary engagement strategies used by learning assistants is asking open-ended questions. These questions are designed to initiate and sustain discussions, encouraging participants to lead the conversation and interact with others. For example, during a session at Kelvin Hall, the learning assistant used photographs of Glasgow in 1995 to prompt participants to share their memories of specific locations and events depicted in the images. The learning assistant asked like “What is this architecture?”, “Where is this shop?”, “What are those people doing in the park?” to encourage discussion, and sometimes offered a few clues for people to guess. This approach led to rich interaction, with participants reminiscing about their childhood and the moments

from their past. Besides this, in a Scottish-themed box, there are some sheets listing many Scottish slang designed for Q&A sessions for the elderly to have fun (Figures 22, 23). Proved by the museum team's experience, this interactive Q&A format not only engaged participants but also led to lively discussions and laughter, as many participants recalled humorous anecdotes related to the slang terms.



**Figures 22, 23.** Some questions about Scottish slang are included in a box. Learning assistants can use these to conduct an interactive Q&A session.

#### 4. Flexible Content and Keep Trying

The content of the sessions is flexible and adaptable. From the examples of Kelvin Hall mentioned above, if participants show particular interest in certain objects or themes, the session can shift focus to explore those areas with flexibility. An example from the Riverside Museum involves a session initially centred on old cameras. The learning assistant noticed that the participants, who were all friends, expressed a desire to have photos of each other in their rooms. The session dynamically shifted to using a Polaroid camera to take selfies, which was not initially planned but ended up being a highlight for the group.

Sometimes, participants often show unexpected interest in specific objects or paintings. For example, during a session, the museum team introduced a large abstract painting by

a local Glaswegian artist, Victoria Morton. This painting, characterised by its bright colours and abstract forms, was initially thought to be too abstract to be discussed by participants with dementia. But contrary to the expectations, the painting worked well and triggered lively discussions. Participants started to see different things in the painting, such as little houses, faces, or flowers. This unexpected interest highlighted the painting's ability to stimulate imagination and conversation, proving that abstract art can be engaging for older adults despite initial reservations. This experience also shows that trying different objects or paintings is an effective way to develop new themes for the programme.

#### **IV. Challenges and Future Developments**

To conduct the Age Well programme, the team faces several challenges in its design and implementation. These challenges range from logistical issues to staffing constraints, all of which impact the programme's ability to deliver its services effectively and persistently. Extracted the content from the three interviews, these challenges were found to be resource limitation and budget, staff training and retention, adapting to elderly audiences, physical and logistical issues, transport, sessions' consistency across different venues, reaching diverse audiences, evaluation and impact measurement, programme capacity and demand, and online transition. Some difficulties are gradually solved thanks to ongoing efforts and multi-party collaboration, but some challenges persist, and the team is still searching for suitable solutions and answers to ensure the programme's sustainability.

##### **1. Resources Limitation and Budget**

First, the programme faces resource limitations that hinder its ability to expand and accommodate more participants. There are still a lot of groups of older adults on the waiting list at Kelvin Hall, waiting to use these museum resources. The Open Museum team has experienced substantial reductions in staffing, with approximately 30% of the museum staff, including essential roles in conservation, design, and curation, being cut due to the council's reallocation of the salary payment budget. One of the interviewees highlighted that this reduction has severely limited their capacity to manage sessions and fulfil requests, forcing them to decline some opportunities they would otherwise

embrace (Interviewee A, personal communication, May 22, 2024). Two of the interviewees mentioned that they want to say YES to every request if possible, but the remaining staff are under considerable pressure, so the team has to set up the priority according to people's needs and the waiting list (Interviewee A, personal communication, May 22, 2024; Interviewee B, personal communication, June 5, 2024). Take the Open Museum as an example, the team had about nine staff members before, but this number has been reduced to four people who are not all full-time, making it challenging to sustain the same level of service and engagement. They are now tasked with managing about 10 kits a day but can only operate the loan service two days a week instead of three, to free up more time for conducting outreach sessions outside the museum to respond to the audience's great demands.

Financial budget is also a constant issue. An interviewee explained that the programme operates on a very tight budget, often with no funds allocated for marketing or materials. This limitation forces the team to rely on basic supplies and in-house efforts to promote the programme. The programme's budget is low, covering only essential items such as basic tea, coffee, and biscuits for participants. This budget issue means that sometimes the team cannot replenish resources or invest in new materials, which is crucial for maintaining and growing the programme. However, one of the interviewees also mentioned that having a limited budget requires finding creative solutions, which can sometimes still achieve the desired outcomes and even inspire team members to come up with innovative ideas. Whenever there is an opportunity to get funding, they also spare no effort in doing so.

The lack of staffing resources also impacts the programme's ability to engage a broader audience. For example, the need for additional staff is evident in the team's struggle to manage the logistics of sessions, including transportation. The reduction in staff has led to a situation where requests for sessions sometimes have to be turned down or postponed, limiting the programme's broader reach. As the interviewee pointed out, the biggest challenge for the outreach service now is staffing, as the team needs eight or nine staff members to function at their desired level, but they are operating with far fewer.

Serious concerns have emerged within the museum sector regarding Glasgow City Council's proposed cuts to its museums and collections service (*Glasgow City Council Urged to Reconsider Museum Cuts - Museums Association, 2023*). The council aims to achieve savings of approximately £712,000 by reducing conservation and technician resources, as well as learning and engagement activities within the museum service. Furthermore, an additional £566,000 in revenue funding will be conserved due to the closure of the People's Palace and Winter Gardens for refurbishment. These proposed cuts entail the elimination of 37 positions within the museums and collections service, encompassing roles such as curators, conservators, outreach assistants, and so on. These reductions are especially concerning because these staff members did crucial work during the pandemic to help reopen the Burrell Collection (one of the involved museums within the Age Well Sessions). An Equality Impact Assessment indicates that “external support may be periodically required” to reduce the effects of reduced conservation and technician resources, and further evaluations are needed to assess the impact on learning and engagement activities. The Museums Association has called on the council to reconsider these cuts in 2023, highlighting the negative implications for local communities and the international standing of Glasgow Museums. Despite these challenges, Glasgow Life, which oversees 10 museum and gallery sites across the city, remains to continue its services with diminished resources, with a long-term goal of recovery and rebuilding.

The financial limitations experienced by Glasgow Life are indicative of a broader trend of budgetary pressures on Scotland's cultural sector. Museums Galleries Scotland, in its submission to the Inquiry into Budget Scrutiny 2024-25, characterised the current situation as a “perfect storm” of prolonged budget pressures, diminished income generation, and increasing operating costs. The cost of living crisis has further worsened these issues, complicating efforts to attract visitors and sustain the quality of museum services. Over half of the surveyed museums reported experiencing budget cuts or revenue losses, with some institutions facing reductions exceeding 50%. Besides this, rising operational costs and the depletion of financial reserves have rendered many museums financially vulnerable (*Museums Galleries Scotland Submission to Inquiry into Budget Scrutiny 2024:25: Funding or Culture, n.d.*).

Glasgow Life's Business Plan for 2023-25 details the organisation's financial planning challenges, including the necessity to achieve £7.1 million in budget savings (*Business Plan 2023-25*, n.d.). The plan highlights the importance of maximising the impact of available resources, supporting the city's visitor economy, and maintaining essential services amidst financial constraints. The strategic priorities outlined in the plan focus on enhancing service quality, promoting health and well-being, and generating income to sustain charitable activities.

In response to these budgetary pressures, proposals have been made to impose charges on non-city residents for access to Glasgow's museums<sup>27</sup>. This proposal has caused debate, with proponents arguing that it would provide much-needed revenue, while opponents contend that it would compromise the principle of free access to cultural institutions and exacerbate social inequality<sup>28</sup>.

## **2. Staff Training and Retention**

Ensuring that all staff is well-trained and maintaining a dementia-friendly environment are critical components of the programme. Comprehensive training is essential to equip staff with the skills and knowledge necessary to support older adults effectively, particularly those with dementia.

The interviewee mentioned that the journey to becoming dementia-friendly involved a very long and challenging process of training and continuous effort across all levels of staff in a museum (Interviewee A, personal communication, May 22, 2024). Initially, dementia friends training was provided by Alzheimer Scotland for the learning team, who then invited groups to test the museum spaces and offer feedback based on their lived experiences. This feedback was crucial in identifying necessary changes within the museum environment. Eventually, training was extended beyond the learning team to include more staff including marketing members, curators, and also managers. This

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<sup>27</sup> Wilson, C. (2023, September 7). Glasgow council exploring museum fees for tourists. *The Herald*; *The Herald*. <https://www.heraldscotland.com/news/23771901.glasgow-council-exploring-museum-fees-tourists/>

<sup>28</sup> Morrison, H. (2023, September 7). Proposals to charge non-city dwellers for Glasgow museums splits opinion. *The National*; *The National*. <https://www.thenational.scot/news/23775647.proposals-charge-non-city-dwellers-glasgow-museums-splits-opinion/>

highlighted the challenge of gaining management's support, as their decisions significantly impact the museum's inclusivity and accessibility. Continuous training and refreshers are essential to maintain this dementia-friendly environment, especially when staff changes and new people join the team.

The training covers various aspects, such as using museum objects to engage older adults, planning visits, and conducting reminiscence and object-handling sessions. Practical tips are also provided for creating a supportive environment, such as ensuring good lighting, reducing background noise, and providing portable seating (Veall et al., 2017; Glasgow Museums hints and tips for working with people living with dementia in a museum or outreach setting, 2022).

Moreover, ongoing training is also essential for the Open Museum team, especially given the staffing reductions. This adjustment underscores the need for continuous training to ensure the existing team can manage dual responsibilities effectively, including handling kit design and management and conducting outreach sessions.

### **3. Adapting to Elderly Audiences**

Transitioning from delivering structured school-group workshops to more fluid and flexible programmes for older adults has posed significant challenges for the museum staff. One of the interviewees mentioned that many staff members were used to teaching school children with set parts of the curriculum and specific learning objectives. The structured approach contrasts sharply with the more flexible and social nature of the sessions designed for older adults. Initially, some staff struggled with the informal settings of these sessions, which often involved sitting around, having a cup of coffee, and embedding social time as a key part of the activity. For example, a session might start with a general theme, but learning assistants are prepared to pivot based on what the participants find most engaging, whether it's a particular painting or a piece of historical object. An interviewee highlighted that many staff members found it challenging to see the value in these social interactions, questioning why participants couldn't just go somewhere else to have coffee and chat. The museum team had to work hard to demonstrate the importance of these social elements, showing that making participants feel comfortable and creating a relaxed environment was crucial for

effective engagement.

Moreover, the shift required staff to develop new skills and approaches to engage older adults effectively, including learning how to use museum objects to spark conversations and make participants feel at ease in the museum environment. The museum team also edited a guideline about how to deliver a dementia-friendly session for staff to follow (Glasgow Museums hints and tips for working with people living with dementia in a museum or outreach setting, 2022). An interviewee noted that once staff saw the positive impact of these interactions on participants' engagement with the objects after constant practice, they began to understand and appreciate the importance of the flexible and social nature of these sessions. Overall, the transition to more fluid and flexible programming has been a challenging but significant learning curve for the museum staff.

#### **4. Physical and Logistical Issues**

Numerous physical and logistical challenges impact the delivery of sessions for older adults. Managing large groups, ensuring access to spaces, and coordinating movements within large venues are significant issues. For instance, handling large groups in care homes, which can have up to 30 participants, is a challenge. Larger groups should be fragmented into multiple conversations to maintain a cohesive and engaging session.

Accessibility within the museum venues is another critical issue. Planning sessions to accommodate physical limitations, such as mobility issues and visual or hearing impairments, is essential. Sessions often include considerations like the availability of folding stools for participants who need to rest and selecting easily navigable spaces. The team also considers the sensory environment, such as avoiding dark areas that might confuse or disorient participants.

Thus, coordinating movements within large and popular venues with lots of collections like Riverside or Kelvingrove can be challenging. These venues require careful planning to ensure that participants can move through the spaces comfortably and without confusion. An interviewee mentioned that the team allocates extra time in their schedule to account for the slower pace needed when guiding groups of older adults. This includes time for tea and coffee breaks, restroom visits, and allowing participants to place jackets

and prepare for movement. Such logistical considerations are crucial for maintaining a smooth flow and ensuring that all participants can engage in the sessions. These physical and logistical challenges of providing a supportive environment require a lot of planning and flexibility. As a result of it, the interviewee described it as “a very long process to improve all of these” (Interviewee A, personal communication, May 22, 2024).

## **5. Transportation Issue**

Transportation remains one of the greatest challenges for the programme’s implementation, particularly regarding bringing older adults to the museum venues. An interviewee highlighted this issue, noting that many older adult groups simply do not have the vehicles to travel to the museum locations. Despite various efforts, the team still does not have a definitive solution to this problem.

To mitigate this obstacle, the programme often relies on funding to cover transportation costs. Whenever there is available funding, they apply for it and use the grants primarily for transportation. This includes organising taxis and buses to bring groups to the museums. The transportation problem significantly impacts the programme's reach and accessibility. An interviewee pointed out that this issue not only affects older adults but also some school groups, highlighting the broader implications of transportation barriers. For many older adults, the lack of transportation options means they are unable to participate in the sessions, limiting the programme’s ability to engage with isolated and vulnerable individuals in the community.

To solve this problem, the programme relies heavily on some volunteer drivers to transport elderly guests from their homes to the museum sessions. These drivers are crucial for the programme's operation, as they provide the necessary support and companionship for the participants because the same drivers remain with the group over time. However, these efforts are not always sufficient to meet the demand, and the high cost of transportation continues to be the biggest obstacle, as an interviewee said “We don’t really have the answer.”

## **6. Consistency Across Different Venues**

Ensuring consistency across different venues is a challenge. This involves maintaining

a uniform quality of experience and engagement for participants, regardless of the museum venue they attend. Before the pandemic, there was considerable variation in the experiences offered at different venues. To address this, the team established a working group to create standardised session formats and procedures, ensuring that all participants received a similar quality of engagement and content. This effort was to maintain a consistent standard across all venues involved in the programme.

## **7. Reaching Diverse Audiences**

Reaching diverse audiences, particularly harder-to-reach groups such as Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) communities and individuals with specific health conditions, is a crucial goal for the Age Well programme, but also a big challenge. An interviewee highlighted several issues in this endeavour, including cultural differences and language barriers that complicate the team's outreach efforts, especially around concepts like dementia. One of the challenges in engaging BME groups is the cultural differences that influence how these communities perceive and handle health issues, including dementia. In many BME communities, there may not be a direct translation for the term "dementia," or the condition may be perceived differently, and the families often handle it internally by themselves rather than seeking external support services. This cultural barrier complicates outreach efforts, making it difficult for the museum to connect with these groups and communicate the benefits of the programme. But this also reveals an opportunity to expand the programme to more potential target audiences, as the team now aims to engage these BME groups by making museum collections accessible to them. An interviewee highlighted that it is important to understand the preferences and needs of the BME community through consultation and trial, ensuring that the museum's offerings are inclusive and relevant to them. In the current stage, the museum team is working with relevant community groups to establish trust and relationships with BME communities. This approach is about raising awareness that the museum's collections belong to everyone and encouraging the BME community to utilise these resources. By allowing the content to be guided by these groups, they hope to create a more inclusive environment to reach more people in need in the future.

## **8. Evaluation and Impact Measurement**

Evaluating and measuring the impact of the programmes on participants' well-being is a

challenging but essential task, as all interviewees acknowledged. The team finds it particularly difficult to capture the long-term impacts of informal programmes. For instance, an interviewee mentioned that while they usually receive immediate verbal feedback, formal evaluation methods have not been consistently applied in recent years. This is partly due to the impracticality of written evaluations for some participants, as some people may struggle with literacy or physical ability to write. Previously, a significant evaluation report was conducted for the Contact the Elderly programme (which can be regarded as the Age Well Sessions' original version), showing its positive impacts, such as reducing loneliness and increasing community engagement through several one-to-one interviews. However, this report was done a long time ago, and the team emphasised the need for an updated evaluation to reflect current conditions and continue evidencing their impact. For example, the anecdotal evidence of a participant eagerly waiting for "museum day" illustrates the profound but sometimes hard-to-measure impact of these programmes on participants' routines and well-being.

At the present stage, in the last session at Kelvin Hall, the team evaluates to gather feedback on participants' experiences and opinions on the programme. Participants are asked to share their feelings verbally, accommodating those who might find written evaluations challenging. During the session on 25th June, a staff member from Alzheimer Scotland recorded the verbal responses on a one-page evaluation sheet with six questions. Five questions were for the older adults, including the reason for attending, experience description, feeling after taking part in the session, feeling positively or negatively about the overall experience, and asking them if they will recommend the sessions to others along with sharing reasons. The last question was prepared for carers to collect their comments on the impact of the sessions on them or on the person they were with. The evaluation session was conducted in a relaxed and conversational manner, allowing participants to chat with each other and with the staff about their experiences. This approach helped to capture a wide range of insights and people's feelings which may reflect the impact on their well-being to some extent. During the evaluation, the museum team also shared information about other museum activities that participants might be interested in, such as drop-in sessions at the Burrell Collection, encouraging ongoing engagement with museum programmes, as a kind of "legacy" to remain the relationship with participants in a sustainable way (Veall et al., 2017). This

is what the team often do to collect feedback, ensuring the evaluation does not cause discomfort or forceful intervention on participants. However, an interviewee mentioned that the team still aims to implement more structured evaluation methods, which is quite challenging.

### **9. Programme Capacity and Demand**

The high demand for the sessions has led to significant capacity challenges, resulting in waiting lists and the need to prioritise participants based on their needs. The limited availability of staff and resources requires the team to be selective, often prioritising groups who would otherwise be unable to access the museum's services. Setting a waiting list and priority allows the team to accommodate the most vulnerable groups while striving to expand their capacity to serve more participants in the future.

### **10. Online Transition**

Transitioning to online sessions during the pandemic lockdowns posed a challenge for the team. Initially, the team struggled with the rapid shift to digital platforms, but it allowed them to continue offering sessions such as the “Coffee and Culture Dementia Café” online. This adaptation highlighted the need for flexibility and resilience, with the team creating a dedicated web page to collect and arrange all resources for older adults. The transition to online sessions demonstrated the team's commitment to inclusivity and adaptability, ensuring that their services remained accessible during the lockdown.

## **V. Limitation**

While the interviews and observations provide valuable insights about the Age Well Sessions, several potential limitations should be considered in this study. First, the sample size is limited, as they are primarily drawn from a specific set of museums and participants who regularly engage in the sessions. This limited scope may not fully represent the broader population of elderly individuals or other museums with similar programmes.

Second, the study relies heavily on qualitative data, including interviews and observation notes, which are rich in detail and context but may contain some subjective

perspectives from both the interviewees and me, as an observer who watched the sessions and wrote the notes. This reliance may cause bias, as participants may provide feedback based on particularly strong positive or negative experiences during an interview setting or when they are aware of being observed. This could influence the overall perception of the programme's implementation and effectiveness to some extent.

Third, measuring and describing people's well-being is inherently challenging due to its abstract nature and the influence of numerous variables, making it difficult to distinguish whether positive outcomes are directly caused by the sessions or influenced by other external factors. Therefore, it cannot be arbitrarily concluded that this case is the best example in the field of "museum as social prescription." Instead, I can only present, describe, and summarise the implementation of the sessions as accurately as possible based on the collected data. It represents a format of practice and a valuable experience, but as a researcher, I must also be aware that the case itself cannot be indiscriminately and entirely applied to other contexts, and this format is neither a only answer nor an unchanging one. Furthermore, the dynamic nature of the programme means that sessions and their impacts can change over time, introducing variability that is difficult to account for in a static study.

Another limitation is the incomplete coverage of all participating museums within the programme, as interviews and observations were not conducted at venues such as the People's Palace, which is currently under renovation, the Burrell Collection, and Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum due to the working base of the key founders and practitioners within this programme and the length and scale of the study. This gap means the findings may not fully capture the diversity and range of the programme's implementation and impact across all locations. By acknowledging these limitations, the study tries to present a balanced view of the findings and also encourages further research to overcome these limitations and address the gaps.

## CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

### **Capturing the Unseen: Evaluating the Impact of Museum Programmes on Elderly Well-Being Through Qualitative Methods**

Interviews and shadowing observations reveal that the programme has engaged elderly participants and improved their well-being to some extent. However, these effectiveness are often not easily captured, elaborated, or tracked. The amount of pleasure, companionship, and other positive feelings that a participant receives from the sessions, whether more or less, long-term or short-term, is often immeasurable. Most such feedback and influence are hidden in the experiences accumulated by the frontline practitioners who have been observing and interacting with older adults for a long period. Therefore, it is insightful to explore and understand the implementation and effect of a programme from the perspectives of the sessions' practitioners through qualitative methods.

The museum team has also made efforts to find ways to collect participants' feedback and capture the nuanced impact on reducing loneliness and fostering a sense of community as evidence that can be presented in textual and written format. For instance, the team conducted one-to-one interviews with some participants and edited an official report in 2013, which included many positive comments toward the sessions (Watson, 2013). A participant noted, "It feels really good when you remember something". Participants often express their appreciation for the social interaction and informal learning provided by the sessions, highlighting the programme's impact on mental well-being. However, conducting such large-scale and formal evaluations, such as a series of one-on-one interviews, is very challenging for practical execution at the museum. This requires professional personnel, financial resources, long-term detailed planning, and multi-faceted coordination (Interviewee A, personal communication, May 22, 2024). This also explains why the latest evaluation report provided by the interviewees was edited in 2013, about ten years ago<sup>29</sup>.

Additionally, the interviewees pointed out that measuring well-being can be challenging because it is an abstract concept influenced by multiple variables (Interviewee A,

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<sup>29</sup> Watson, A. (2013). I'm over 90 but up for more experiences: Glasgow Museums, Contact the Elderly Programme. Glasgow Museums Internal Report. Unpublished.

personal communication, May 22, 2024; Interviewee B, personal communication, June 5, 2024). Sometimes it is difficult to determine whether participants' positive feelings are entirely caused by the session itself or if they are influenced by events they experienced that day or recently. Such variables are hard to quantify and capture during the evaluation process. Moreover, it is important for the museum not to cause discomfort or intrude on participants' experiences when employing scientific methods to evaluate the programme's effectiveness. Practitioners have to face numerous considerations, such as how to gather feedback without overwhelming participants and how to ensure that evaluations do not disrupt the participants' enjoyment (Interviewee A, personal communication, May 22, 2024; Interviewee C, personal communication, June 21, 2024).

In practice, the feedback and suggestions collected by the museum are often immediate and informal. Participants frequently share their thoughts verbally and through casual conversations, and this format of comments provides valuable data that may not be easily quantifiable but is significant.

For example, Kelvin Hall has innovatively packaged the evaluation process by encouraging participants to write postcards. This method involves asking simple questions such as "What are your hopes for this program?" and "Did we meet your hopes?" Participants can jot down brief responses, and then the museum can collect them. Thus, the session's theme and the exhibits' images are made into commemorative postcards that participants can take home. This approach also helps participants recall their experiences whenever they see the postcards in the future.

### **Rethinking Evaluation in Informal Learning**

The exploration of informal learning in museum education, in this case, has revealed two interesting findings: the emphasis on the process rather than the final product or the acquisition of specific knowledge or result, and it took time for museum staff to recognise the value of social interaction and adapt to the flexible nature of sessions for older adults. These findings highlight the inherent complexity of informal learning, which differs significantly from formal, structured educational activities designed for school groups.

This complexity illustrates why it is challenging for museum staff to collect data, evaluate,

and measure the impacts of these sessions. Such challenges arise not only when collecting persuasive evidence for promotional materials or partnerships but also when reflecting on and re-examining the programme design and implementation. The flexible and interactive nature of informal learning is difficult to quantify using traditional evaluation methods, which often focus on accountability and quantitative data.

Recent research also raises concerns about the effectiveness of conventional measurement and evaluation models in informal learning. Traditional impact-focused evaluation methods, which may prioritise accountability and measurable outcomes, make it hard to capture the true value and impact of informal learning experiences (Clapham, 2023).

One interviewee mentioned, “We are looking at doing a project next year and getting some students in to try and do a proper evaluation... we need to evidence that we’re having an impact, I think that’s always really hard to do because that impacts those saying could be something that happens later that day when they go back to a care home or it could be in a few months they choose to visit a museum again... But that’s very hard for us to measure or to even know” (Interviewee A, personal communication, May 22, 2024).

The question then arises: what constitutes a “proper evaluation” for such informal learning? Traditional evaluation methods, such as those focusing on visitor and session numbers or standardised learning outcomes, may be inappropriate to reflect the richness of informal learning that occurs in these programmes tailored to older adults (de St Croix, 2020). For example, the interviewee pointed out that they often catch some hints about participants’ feelings and feedback during inadvertent verbal chats, and the museum team usually realised the positive impact of the sessions on the participants afterwards. As the interviewee said “It’s just because they’ve been on a visit, they feel confident and feel like they could come back quite often... and they’re like, oh, could I bring someone back with me?” (Interviewee A, personal communication, May 22, 2024). This kind of nuanced and qualitative aspect of informal learning, such as personal growth, self-confidence, engagement, and mental statuses like happiness, a sense of community and belonging, is difficult to collect by the evaluation methods which tend to prioritise easily quantifiable data or may include risk of being used for political purposes (Eckhard & Jankauskas, 2020).

The performative evaluation models that dominate current practices not only inadequately assess the impact of informal learning but also risk rendering educators and institutions docile by emphasising compliance and accountability over genuine educational development (Clapham, 2023). Traditional evaluation systems may function as a type of disciplinary matrix, forcing museum educators to become “docile bodies” that adhere to established norms and practices. These systems may compel museum staff to follow societal and conventional expectations, potentially undermining museums’ true impact and value in supporting human health and well-being through informal learning.

To address this challenge, alternative evaluation methods should be considered and rethought. Democratic, dialogic, and developmental approaches may be better suited to the nature of informal learning (Clapham, 2023; Dondi et al., 2021; Joslin, 2021; Pitts, 2018). For instance, reflective diaries, self-reflections, gaze eye tracking, peer reviews, and qualitative interviews may provide deeper insights into the informal learning processes. One creative way discussed during the interviews involved using postcards to gather feedback at Kelvin Hall, which is found less intrusive and more comfortable for participants than formal surveys, thus encouraging more honest and spontaneous responses (Interviewee A, personal communication, May 22, 2024). These methods may allow for a more nuanced understanding of how individuals engage with museum exhibits and programmes, emphasising the importance of the learning journey itself rather than just the results or countable data, such as how many participants come or how many sessions the museum conducts.

### **Rethinking the Role in Museums and Museum Educators**

Museums, as cultural and educational institutions, play a key role in supporting the well-being of older adults through flexible and self-directed informal learning. Unlike formal education, informal learning is unstructured and spontaneous, complementing formal education by providing real-world experiences and fostering lifelong learning habits (Jackson, 2022). Given the demographic shift of an ageing population, understanding how museums can support lifelong learning and contribute to older adults’ well-being becomes crucial.

From the previous discussion, it is obvious that traditional evaluation methods are often too limited to reflect the informal, self-directed nature of museum learning. Therefore, rethinking “how museums’ impact is measured” and “why it should be assessed” may be necessary. If museums are to be seen as supportive partners of the healthcare system in promoting human well-being through informal learning, it is essential to rethink how people define the role of museums and to what extent they expect museums to function as social prescriptions. Also, it is important to reexamine the reasons behind these expectations within each context. Are impact-focused evaluations forcing museums to quantify and specifically describe their achievements and impacts, turning these visualised “performances” into their “selling points” to gain more focus and resources, such as relevant policymakers’ support and external funding? In this situation, are people turning the functions and values of museums in the realm of informal learning into “marketised commodities,” thereby distorting the original intention and value of supporting healthcare systems, human health, and well-being?

At the same time, the evolving role of museum educators should also be reconsidered. As museums adapt to the changing needs of society, the responsibilities of museum educators have expanded significantly. They are now not only in charge of creating educational activities for on-site visitors but also have to engage with the broader community, collaborating with various cross-domain partnerships outward. This shift may also influence the traditional operational model and power structure of museums and prompt a reevaluation of decision-making processes, traditionally dominated by administrators, curators, and exhibit designers (Quay et al., 2022). If the roles of museum educators become more nuanced and complex, should their experiences and insights be more heavily included in organizational decision-making? This reflection may help address resource limitations and ensure the sustainable future of museum programmes.

Interviews and observations reveal that the impacts of these sessions, both significant and minor, are often embedded in the experiences, observations, and memories of frontline museum staff. These internalised experiences should not be disregarded simply because they are difficult to capture, track over the long term, or quantify. Deeply thinking of how to employ more diverse methods to capture the “data” stored within

these individuals is important. By doing so, it is more possible to gain a complete and in-depth understanding of museum programmes' implementation, ultimately finding sustainable ways for their development and operation.

## CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

This study explored the design, implementation, and impact of the Age Well Sessions programme within Glasgow Museums from the museum team's perspectives and experiences, trying to depict the guiding principles, and core philosophy, and to figure out challenges, opportunities, and future developments.

The methodology employed in this study involved semi-structured interviews with programme designers and educators, supplemented by non-participant shadowing observations of the sessions. This approach allowed for a detailed examination of the programme from multiple perspectives, capturing the rich, qualitative data necessary to understand the nuanced aspects of the Age Well Sessions' design and practice. The interviews provided insights into the guiding principles, challenges, and opportunities from the viewpoints of those directly involved in the programme, while the observations offered a firsthand look at the interactions and engagement strategies employed during the sessions. By analysing the programme through these qualitative methods, the research provided a comprehensive understanding of how museum-based initiatives can support elderly participants and offer them a meaningful experience.

The Age Well Sessions are grounded in core principles prioritising older adults' accessibility to museum resources, and participant-centred learning. These sessions are designed to be flexible and responsive to the interests and needs of the participants, creating a supportive environment where older adults can engage in meaningful educational activities. The engagement strategies include interactive discussions, the use of meaningful objects to trigger memories or conversations, and the adaptation of session content based on participant feedback. These principles ensure that the sessions are tailored to meet the diverse needs and interests of elderly participants, fostering an environment conducive to informal learning and social interaction, which are very different from the learning activities for school groups.

Designers and educators within the programme perceive its effectiveness in engaging elderly participants positively. The sessions are seen to offer participants joy and comfort, providing social interaction, and promoting mental well-being. These benefits, although very challenging to quantify and capture in textual format, are evident through

participant feedback and the observations of the museum staff. The informal nature of feedback, such as verbal comments and postcards, has proven valuable in capturing the immediate and nuanced impacts of the sessions. Educators and designers perceive the programme as effective in engaging elderly participants and meeting their needs and wishes. Their perspectives, usually shaped by direct interactions and oral sharing during casual chats, influence the continuous development and refinement of the sessions, ensuring that they remain relevant, impactful, and participants-centred.

The programme faces several challenges, including resource limitations, budget constraints, and staffing issues. These challenges impact the ability to expand the programme and meet the high demand from elderly groups. In addition, measuring the abstract concept of well-being poses a big challenge, as general evaluation methods often fail to capture the details of such informal learning experiences. Key challenges include resource and budget constraints, staffing issues, and the difficulty of measuring well-being, especially in mental aspects. Despite these challenges, opportunities lie in developing innovative evaluation and promotional methods, securing cross-domain partnerships' support, and expanding digital engagement to reach a broader audience.

Opportunities for the programme's sustainability include developing more robust and creative evaluation methods to better understand the nuanced impact of the sessions, such as reflective diaries, postcard feedback, and qualitative interviews. Moreover, addressing resource constraints through innovative funding solutions and partnerships could help expand the programme's reach and sustainability. Looking ahead, the programme aims to adapt to the evolving needs of the elderly audience and be participants-centred constantly, incorporating feedback to keep refining and creating session content. Future developments include reaching the Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) communities which are unfamiliar with the concept of creative ageing and museums' offer as social prescription, expanding digital engagement services to reach more isolated older adults, and exploring new themes and objects to keep the sessions dynamic and engaging.

The study also reveals the challenges and complexities of evaluating the effectiveness of informal learning programmes for older adults and measuring impacts on people's

well-being in a museum setting, particularly from the perspectives of museum staff in the frontline. While these programmes benefit participants' moods as they have shared positive feedback with museum staff either from final evaluation surveys or casual chats, capturing, recording, and quantifying such benefits remains difficult due to their abstract nature and the influence of multiple variables. Traditional evaluation methods are not sufficient to well reflect the nuanced impacts of these sessions, necessitating alternative approaches such as qualitative interviews and postcard feedback as Kelvin Hall does. The museum team has to keep thinking of innovative and balanced methods to encourage participants to share and leave comments without discomfort and disrupting participants' experiences as proven data to improve and promote the sessions. In addition, this practice also leads people to reflect on a reassessment of resource allocation systems in cultural sectors and the public's societal expectations of museums, advocating for a broader recognition of their role in supporting lifelong learning and well-being. Through reflection, museums may find a feasible solution to overcome the challenges they are encountering and ensure their sustainable support and development of the relevant programmes supporting the ageing society.

The case of Age Well Sessions in Glasgow Museums exemplifies the potential of museums as venues for social interaction and lifelong learning, contributing to the ageing population's well-being. Despite facing resource restrictions thanks to the government's budget cut and evaluation challenges, the programme's flexible and inclusive approach has showcased effectiveness to some extent in engaging older adults from the museum team's long-term experience and observation. By continuing to adapt and innovate, the Age Well Sessions can serve as a model for similar initiatives, displaying how cultural institutions can support ageing populations through their diverse resources and collections.

To sum up, this study highlights the importance of continued investment in and support for creative ageing programmes, exemplifying that they can thrive and expand in innovative ways to support an ageing society. As museums continue to innovate and adapt, they have the potential to support the quality of life for older adults, enhancing social interaction, mental well-being, and lifelong learning.

Future research may have to focus on developing comprehensive and nuanced approaches which can embrace the complexity and dynamic nature of such informal learning programmes by reconsidering the systematic environment and rethinking the fundamental purpose of the current evaluations' logic and design in the field of museum education. Moreover, exploring how to capture long-term effects and broader applications across different cultural settings may further enhance our understanding of the role of museums in promoting well-being and lifelong learning among older adults. Future studies are also suggested to encompass all other museums and partnerships involved in this programme to collect data and examine their implementation. By incorporating a broader range of museums into the research, future studies can provide a more comprehensive picture of how the entire Glasgow Life Museums network operates and develops its services for the elderly, thereby optimising the overall case study.

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## APPENDIX A: Interview Transcripts

### APPENDIX A-1: Interviewee A at Kelvin Hall

(this is just part of the whole transcript which is 57 pages in total)

(A=interviewee A)

00:00:03

I: Yeah so I think we first can start from your background.

00:00:10

A: Yeah, that's no problem. That's no problem. OK, what's my background? So I started my background of right back when a student I did history of art at Glasgow University and a Masters in history of that and then I went to Newcastle University and I did a Masters in Museum and Heritage Studies.

00:00:29

A: And then looked for any job in any museum and and I ended up my first. My first role was as an assistant curator of Arts at the Ferens Art Gallery, which was part of whole museums. So another local authority museum. And I kind of worked there for the first. My first kind of 18 months, two years.

00:00:49

A: And doing kind of curatorial work, so working kind of cataloguing putting on exhibitions researching our. Tests. We had a really kind of vast art collection, like beautiful art.

00:00:59

A: And then from there I kind of when I wanted to come back up to Scotland and you kind of want to come back here and I also kind of realised the part of job I really like was a bit kind of working with the public. So I kind of wanted to move more into kind of education work. So that was in 2003 and I had done some voluntary work. So I've done work as a student.

00:01:19

A: I did a placement in San Diego Museum and I'd worked at the education team there, so I kind of knew kind of that's what I wanted to do. I think so. I got the job up here in 2003 as learning and access curator. The person museums at that point, we were a brand new department so it was everyone was new IT.

00:01:35

A: Was great. There were loads of us. About half the people left now, but yes, there were a lot, a lot of us. And so that was my first kind of proper paid like and learning position. And I've actually been in that position now for 21 years, but the jobs check. So the job has I've moved from museum to museum because obviously glasgow museums has ten different venues...

00:01:59

A: Across the city. So I started at the gallery of modern art and I worked in a lot of their social justice programmes and started our older adult work there, worked there for 9 years and then I've done work at the People's Palace and at the Burrell Collection for like about four or five years. And then I was at Glasgow Museums Resource Centre, which is the other store for about 6 years. And then I came to Kelvin Hall about two years ago.

00:02:20

A: So we're kind of pair of tactics. We worked for the Learning Access team because it's spread across all the venues. We get moved between venues depending on what projects are happening. So even though based in Kelvin Hall, my remit for older adults is across all the venues.

00:02:35

I: That's cool.

A: That's good. It's good. That's as learning and access creators we...

00:02:41

A: So we kind of coordinate and programme all our learning programmes, so that goes from schools and nurseries, family programmes like summer holidays and weekends interactions for families. We do an autism friendly.

00:02:43

A: More than that. Programme we do work with community groups and Community exhibitions and then we do a lot of work with older adults and people have dementia, so it's kind of all different ages. It's a whole massive range of what we do and that's part of our role. And then each learning access curator, who's based in a different building, has a different kind of... what we call a portfolio area, so that is your area of expertise. The area that you're responsible.

00:03:19

A: For and mine is older adults so that that started 15, 16 years ago we Glasgow Museums were starting to look at older adults being a priority audience for like an ageing population. And it was kind of identified as a real need in the city and we started to think, well, what do we offer older adults and that's where my work came in. I suppose. I started having to lead that work,

00:03:46

A: And meet other organisations like age Scotland and Alzheimer's Scotland and those other organisations to find out what was going on for other adults. So that was that kind of started about 16 years ago and it's.

00:03:58

A: Probably, apart from our school's programme, which has always been ongoing. Our older adult programmes, our longest running, the kind of largest programme that we run at Glasgow Museums. Now it's grown out of miles. Yeah, and it could grow even bigger as well. I think if we have the resources, it could definitely grow bigger. But yeah, so it's just kind of.

00:04:19

A: Yeah, I think, yeah, I can tell you about everything to you.

00:04:24

A: How I suppose how we started it. Yeah. So for Glasgow, so we're part of Glasgow life.

00:04:30

A: I can leave this view, this kind of tells you like what we are Glasgow life takes in Glasgow Libraries, Glasgow Sports, Glasgow events and Glasgow Museums were all one part of this kind of big umbrella organisation across the Council.

00:04:43

A: And we're a charity and we're set up to benefit the people of Glasgow and we deliver cultural and sporting programmes and events and help improve mental, fiscal and economic well-being of the city. So that's kind of our strategic aim.

00:04:56

A: And then this kind of outlines how we do that. Now what we're doing with older adults really sits under this kind of improving mental and physical well-being of local communities and. And then I suppose advancing culture and sport in the city as well. So these are two strategic priorities that we're we're constantly working under. So we can't just.

00:05:16

A: Go and start working with any community group or any area it has to fit in with what Glasgow life is trying to achieve. I guess it's the kind of the strategy behind what we're trying to do. Same with sports, same with libraries. We're all working for these same strategic priorities that older adults.

00:05:33

A: Really advancing culture is, you know, making sure people realise their culture and their does that it belongs to them. It's accessible to them and we're trying to make it accessible to them and they they pay their council tax which means that they're the residents of Glasgow, and it's a, it's a, it's a local collection, so it does belong to them. It's just making sure that they, they can use it and.

00:05:53

A: And access these idea of well-being, improving people's well-being, everything at the moment is about well-being and this it's such an overarching title, but really anything that we do where we're trying to get people to engage with other people and be out in the community, engage with culture and that doorstep is about that well-being, it's improving people's sense of well-being.

00:06:14

A: So this these are the two kind of strategic priorities that...over...

00:06:17

A: That kind of overarching everything that we try to do, we also have within Glasgow Museums 3 priority audience groups. So this is they are older adults, young young adults. So you can have 16 to 24.

00:06:33

A: And then BME audiences as well. So black magnetic ethnic groups. So there are three main audience groups that were all trying to work with. So that's not just the learning team. So we're actively, you know, engaging with these groups. But it's everyone. So it's our, it's our marketing department. It's our curators, is not just the people who put together exhibitions, they have to be thinking of these priority groups and thinking of how can we get these groups into our museum? And they've been identified because they're the groups that traditionally aren't engaging or we feel just they're. Yeah, they're not regular users necessarily as our service. So there there are three kind of priorities, which is great for me.

00:07:09

A: Because I have to oversee the older adult work so it fits really nicely under strategic priorities. That means there's always going to be resources, there's always gonna be support for that work. And because older adults are prior to the audience will always carry on doing that. There was going to be that commitment to doing it and when we kind of came out of lock down, obviously we were closed for quite a while. We came back and we had to restart all our programmes because older adults are priority audience person scenes. It was the first programme that we restarted and also older adults were had been as those most isolated.

00:07:41

A: You know, during that time as well. So it was all resources, everything getting us to restart the older adults after lockdown.

00:07:51

A: Which was great and it was really well received. Actually we work with a lot that places like care homes they've been through so much and they had to catch up through so many hoops with.

00:08:03

A: Kind of safety, I suppose, and coming back out and visitors go into care homes, but they actually were, like, literally like biting our hands off to come out. They're like, yes, yes, we'll come out. We can't wait to get out and come out to museums and just get out again. So yeah, they weren't really like, please. They were, like when bringing us going (keep asking museums) When can we go? When can we borrow box? When we borrow your objects, when can we come and see museum and say we're really keen so.

00:08:23

A: That's great. That's great. So because it's a priority and and that's something like to be an age friendly museum isn't just about your learning team engaging. It has to be at all different levels. It has to be your front of house staff, give it an age friendly or a dementia friendly. Welcome to your building, the way things are designed, where your design.

00:08:43

A: Team or the way objects are laid out in an exhibition or everything has to be age friendly. Because if it's just the education team doing it, then it's not kind of embedded in.

00:08:55

A: In your museum service and your museum service is really saying that all the priority audience. Then the buildings have to be age friendly and your programmes have to be age friendly and your facilities have to be age friendly. It can't just be your learning programme, it has to be embedded into everything and it's taken us quite a while to get to that stage and I think when I first started this about 16 years ago it was seen as oh, that's nice. That's what the learning team are doing and it's taking quite a while to actually for everyone to start thinking about it in kind of projects over three puts a project proposal in for a new exhibition or a changing.

00:09:29

A: Display they have to say How is it? How it's age friendly? We have kind of a more formal process where they have to say what strategic priority are you hitting? What strategic or you know priority audiences is your project for so that it's getting everyone to think about it and when we rolled out training things like we do kind of dementia friends.

00:09:50

A: Trainings Alzheimer's Scotland have come along and done. Dementia, friends training and first of all, they did it for the learning team and then they were saying, you know, we will bring a group of people in with dementia...

00:10:00

A: and walk around your building and they did an audit for us and they will tell us. I mean that's best that you hear it kind of from the people directly who it's affected by that kind of lived experience. And they told us what they think needs to be changed and what is an obstacle or what isn't and then we rolled our training out to front of house, staff, and then all our other staff.

00:10:20

A: The marketing staff and curators and managers as well. So that was quite a challenge in itself. Is trying to get management to also because if they if they're not trained up and dementia friendly and the way they're thinking they're making resources, they're making no decisions about resources and strategic decisions. So yeah, it took a while, but we finally got everyone trained and everyone to have that awareness, which it's it's been really good. But it was a challenge. It took a long time.

00:10:50

A: That's nice. And it has to keep going as well. Like we have new staff for changes in staff all the time, so the training can't just be something that someone does 10 years ago and it doesn't happen again. It has to be refreshed and constantly renewed as well, and to get you get. So when you do dementia friends training you get like a Dementia friends badge.

00:11:10

A: Which all the staff have done that where so anyone who comes into the building is aware of that they kind of they've got that awareness and they've had that training. And then when a lot of your staff have had that training, you can become a dementia friendly venue, so a lot of our venues then because someone's affordance taking it now display like a sticker in the window when you go into the building.

00:11:30

A: Just to tell you, they're kind of aware of the needs and challenges and the staff trained. So that's kind of the background...

00:11:42

A: Yeah. So that's kind of like, I suppose the background, the strategic background of getting our staff trained on the programme.

00:11:52

A: So what? So what we did, so this all started when I was at the gallery of modern art about 16 years ago, and we were told about we need to start working with older adults with or where do we start? We looked at all the programmes we offer and we offer a huge adult programme across lots of museums. We have tours and volunteer tours behind the scenes.

00:12:11

A: Talks. Curators talks. You can book to bring a group. There's there's lots of offers that it's just generally for an adult offer and some workshops that are, you know, adult craft kind of workshops. There's a big adult programme, but nothing specifically for older adults. So the first thing we ever did was invite two care homes into the garden. Modern art. And we just had used them...I think we had like venue, budget we tax...

00:12:38

A: Need two care to residents from two care homes into the gang mode, not just for the afternoon and just said we just want you to walk around as you were as a normal visitor. Walk around our building and then we'll sit and have coffee with you and chat. So it was very informal, but it was our first kind of consultation we ever did really. And what was really nice about that is that it wasn't just the learning.

00:12:58

A: Been sitting and chatting like the curators and the people who put the current exhibitions on and the museum manager all sat on the table and just chatted with them.

00:13:07

A: These lovely residents from the care home who did they were hilarious. They they didn't. They didn't help back in telling us what they thought and when they don't like something they told us and they talked to us about text size and labels and orientation around the building and not having enough seating and just things that we just sat in an informal.

00:13:28

A: Getting and teas and coffees and kind of got that initial feedback and I suppose that was the start of us thinking well actually.

(//omission//)

01:08:46

A: The speed at which we talk, I'm talking really fast. Sorry at the moment, but someone who has dementia quite often, it can take quite a while for them to understand what you're asking. Yeah. So we always have...

01:08:48

A: So...well, we we teach our staff that if you ask the question, like quite often you need to also count 7 seconds before you might get a response. So actually, even though it might feel a bit like there's a long pause because you're like waiting like that and it's almost like that person's taking your question and processing it, understanding it, formulating an answer and then giving it back. And that process which we all do without thinking, really slows down with older adults. And so therefore you need to slow down pace of how you do the session as well.

01:09:32

A: And how fast to talk and giving time people time. You know, if you ask them what they think of an object or to describe what they're holding in their hands, give them time they give them that extra time to every the pace of everything does really slow down, but it means they get more out of it as well.To be flexible.

01:09:56

I: Have you ever, like, experienced the situations like someone just...yeah, like emotion just out of control emotions and deal with...(this kind of situation).

01:10:09

A: We have some we have sometimes about and I think the Open Museum have probably experienced this more when they've gone up to care homes and...

01:10:17

A: And and that's the reason because we we are a stranger at the end of the day, we're just come from a museum with a load of objects or they've come in here. So we don't know them as we don't know their backgrounds. We don't know now say anything about them and what could be a trigger. So I think if if you're working on something you think it could be a trigger, you could warn people beforehand. But we always make sure the carers are there as well. So if something does happen (which means emotion out of control), this happens with our work and teenagers as well, and mental health groups. If something is a trigger for someone, and sometimes it's something you really wouldn't expect.

01:10:47

A: That then there's someone there to support them who knows them, or who can take them out the room. You just try to avoid that and thinking things like we have a transport collection and there are some groups. We've had a group that we've worked with, kind of kind of veteran people from a group called combat. That's like who veterans from the army.

01:11:10

A: And they walked into our transport and one of them walked into our transport collection room and the smell, the smells of diesel. It smells of fuel because of the collections that are in there and they they say, like, I can't stay in here. I can't stay in here because it's too much of A trigger. That smell. Now that's something you would never have predicted like...

01:11:31

A: But once you've gone through that, you've experienced that. You then can warn other people.

01:11:35

A: Or is this...is this this and that that's the idea when we always have stuff for the developing sessions or choose an object is to think about all the senses. So is there a smell associated with this? And sometimes it's great because we've got like old soaps and stuff and you reminisce, we've got old aftershaves.

01:11:51

A: And this this sense is really good for getting people to engage and talk and to memory certain situations or certain memories, but other times just saying it can trigger something that could be really upsetting or people might be quite sad looking backwards and thinking about their childhoods or...

01:12:09

A: But it's also like if someone does want to talk about something that you just let it, you just keep going with it and you let them chat and you let them talk and we try to have a few more staff in Sessions and we have age well volunteers that help us run sessions and a lot. Is that because people want to talk or they want to tell you their story or a memory or reminisce or or when my husband was alive.

01:12:29

A: You like to do this and they start telling you, and actually that's very hard if you're the only person to living session of one person, you really want to listen to their story and kind of value that. But actually there's another 11 people saying and so it's quite good to have on tears. It's you can have one to one chats with people. I think that kind of ratio is really important.

01:12:48

A: And yeah, as I say, it's like a learning thing. Something is a trigger. You can kind of warn people. Or maybe if you think it's too upsetting, then not not use it with that group.

01:12:59

A: It's a learning curve. It is like as I was saying, sometimes it's the things you can't you can't predict. Yeah, but then sometimes the group leaders learn stuff about the participants as well,

that they didn't know because we bring out a group, we bring out an object and they start talking about their, you know, like ohh, I used to be a graphic designer. I used to be a dentist. And I know what this is and they're like, oh, I didn't know that about him and you.

01:13:21

A: Know an object is create that conversation. Create that knowledge for them as well.

01:13:26

A: So they can work in both ways I suppose, yeah, I guess...

(//omission//)

## **APPENDIX A-2: Interviewee B at Open Museum**

**(this is part of the whole transcript which is over 65 pages.)**

(B=interviewee B)

00:10:50

B: Generally, so we have that now. So that's nice. It's a little bit of history there. We have that. So, so every. So every object will, every object here has a story. The whiskey bottle we've got, it's about the whiskey bottle that about about whiskey and general Iron Brew, the haggis, you know, so.

00:11:10

B: So when you're doing the session at the care home, you can we what we say to people is it's up to you. It's up to them how they want to run the session. They can do it as like if you're with your group. Yeah. And I don't imagine I was doing the session. I wouldn't look at the notes at all and would do it as a kind of discovery. So they'll go. Ohh, what's this?

00:11:29

B: And and you don't know either. Yeah, as the as the main person you don't know. And you so then you all learn together and then what you do is you say ohh, OK, let's look it up and see if we were right and we do it that way. So you kind of do it as a mystery object thing.

00:11:44

B: Or you can do it as like I'm the teacher. I'm gonna learn everything about this box before, and then we're gonna do the session. So. So you have all the information and then they don't, and then you manage the the session that way. So there's different ways of doing it depending on the group you're with...

00:12:04

B: And how you want to do it. You know as well. So and and then the other thing that we have in most, so we usually have photographs in here comics or magazines and things like that as well and lots of images as well. So in here we'll have...

00:12:18

B: Have like fringe, I think about the fringe Harry Potter train.

00:12:23

B: Scotland it's got. That's the hat.

00:12:25

I: Ohh OK. So the Scotland fans wear these hats?

B: Yeah. So Scottish roots were wearing a called a. See you, Jimmy hat. And there's a there's a stag with the antlers. Yeah, they shed them every year. There's. So there's tobacco leaf cause cause Scotland was built on tobacco. You know, tobacco, cotton.

00:12:45

I: Yeah.

00:12:46

B: And we talk about the slave trade and things like that as well. And here as well. So that's why we we've got this and there's the Timex things and all that as well. And then quite often you'll have, we'll have a quiz in the box as well.

00:12:58

B: So I'm gonna this is a really good quiz to do with you. I'm not gonna do the whole thing right, but I'm gonna do a couple of questions. Right. Since you're not a native to Scotland, right, this is about...

00:13:10

B: Slang Scottish slang you know, slang, you know some.

00:13:12

I: OK. That yeah. That will be so hard.

00:13:17

B: So I'll do a couple cause just for fun. OK. Do you know any Scottish slang or Glasgow slang or?

00:13:25

I: We heard some words or...

00:13:27

B: There's not some some words that you will use.

00:13:30

B: Right. So OK, if I said to you the saying. Just bolt your rocket. Just bolt your rocket.

00:13:38

B: Just pull your rocket. Does it mean lock the door you need to drive faster. Please go away or... Please keep it away.

00:13:48

I: Wow for me that's so hard.

00:13:51

B: Yeah, yeah. So these are, these are the guys, these are the Scottish sayings. I mean, it means go away. Just bolt, go away. You know? So. So we got ones like having a Scooby.

(//omission//)

00:15:05

B: And we make sure everyone's in close here like this because these are museum objects, so we have to look after them. If I was managing it, I would pass around one object at a time. We tell everybody beforehand. We say, look, if you if if someone says Ohh can I see that and they're standing somewhere else you say we'll come over here.

00:15:22

B: We'll never take the object away from the table. Yeah, because if we drop it here, it could break, especially if it's like this, or something. If we drop that from here, it's gonna smash. If we drop it from here, it's got a chance. (Kevin is drawing to show Chiayu.)

00:15:34

B: It's got a chance.

00:15:35

B: So we never have any...no food, no drink, no drawing, no painting, no pens, nothing around the kit at all, just ourselves. So if I was handing off, it was quite a few people, I would say OK, you would look at the object for about 10 seconds, give it a little feel. You can open it up and (check) yeah, what's that? You know, OK.

00:15:56

B: And then you would pass it to the next person. Now the way to do it is you you either if if you were the next person, I would either do one or two things. I would either you would put your hand out and I would give it to you like this or I would place it in front of you like this. That's the only way you would you do it because sometimes you see people and if you try and take the object.

00:16:16

B: We we never, we never let anybody take it because you don't know who's in control. So it's always given the objects always given. So it's placed or given, put in the hand. So if you want your hand to the object now.

00:16:30

B: And maybe you can have a think about what you think that might be actually cause that's down as if you see here most kids have got this in at least one object there with no label and it's just a mystery object. Yeah, you can try. It's a bit. It's a bit of fun to try and see.

00:16:45

I: Yeah.

00:16:48

B: I'm testing you today. You didn't think I was going to test you, did you?

00:16:53

I: Ohh that's nice.

00:16:57

B: Getting opened up. So what do you think those?

00:16:57

I: OK.

00:16:59

B: you might have been used for.

00:17:03

I: Is it for?

00:17:04

B: Does this remind you of anything?

00:17:07

I: Something...Some kind of tool for gardening or?

00:17:13

B: It is a tool that not for gardening, so you'll see that's that you're doing it, you're doing it the perfect way. Good. Good museum brain. So you're doing it the right way. You're asking questions and you're asking the right questions, and you've said one word. That's right. It's a tool. And when you're trying to discover what an object is.

00:17:15

I: OK.

00:17:31

B: Most people just say isn't this isn't that isn't this, and you're doing it the right way, which is to say, is it some sort of tool? Yes. So you you. It's like a process of elimination with an object when you want to find out what it is. Yeah. You have to find out what it isn't first. So almost like ohh. It's not that. It's not that. It's not that. So if it's not all these things.

00:17:52

B: Then it can you start to narrow it down a little bit. So yes, it's a tool, but not for garden.

00:17:57

I: Hmm...

00:17:59

B: OK. The other question you have to ask yourself is, are you holding it the right way?

00:18:07

B: So there's two out of two, you've got two, right so far then. So now you're holding it the way it should hold because think of a pair of think of it like for example, like a pair of scissors. It's got a spring on it. It's got spring. So. So this this does something.

### **APPENDIX A-3: Interviewee C at Riverside Museum**

**(this is part of the whole transcript which is 45 pages in total.)**

(C=interviewee C)

00:02:52

C: After the pandemic because obviously...It might not be obvious, but everything was all the programmes were cut and I'm looking back after the pandemic. We had to be really careful about how we introduced them to keep people safe and also because our resources were really low compared to what we had before staffing and.

00:03:12

C: Budget and things like that.

00:03:18

C: And one of our priority audiences was older, vulnerable adults and dementia and Alzheimer's, so there was a working group that was put together and it was learning assistance and learning and access curators. So I'm a learning an access curator. I used to be a learning assistant.

00:03:35

C: So we worked, we had an age where working group and it was all about bringing it back. What was really important.

00:03:43

C: And and making it consistent across all the different museums, which it wasn't something we always had before people were getting this, like, different experience wherever they went so we sort of tried to make it a bit more uniform and do refresher training and just make sure everybody was sort of in agreement. This is the best way to do things and why we were doing things a certain way. Mm-hmm. So that would have been...

00:04:11

C: 2022 then that that was kind of RE branded, if you like... So so like curator means that you like have to design the section for the older participants or.

00:04:31

C: So to learning assistance the the job titles are quite misleading, so learning assistance really know their different audiences and they learn about the collection and they they will write workshops and and deliver them and evaluate them. Learning and access creators. It's more of a strategic role where you're you're looking at the whole programme and all the different audiences, but we're also involved in.

00:05:03

C: So the displays that you see... Yeah, you have like a subject curator who will do a display about motorbikes, but the layer and access creator will be involved just to make sure that the story is relevant to different audiences that they can engage with that that it's.

00:05:20

C: You know, it's not words that no one's gonna understand or things that only an experts interested in things like that. So we're sort of involved in lots of different.

00:05:29

C: Different things, but on this age well session it was learning assistance, learning access cutters all kind of putting best practise together. Learning assistance wrote the...

00:05:41

C: There's a sort of template that you would then adapt slightly depending on what objects you were using or what building you were in, so learn since it's pulled all that together and then we sort of typed it up and shared it with the rest of the team.

00:05:55

C: So it's very... much team team effort.

00:06:01

I: So I'm curious about what kind of object you choose to use in this museum for the edgewell sections?

00:06:11

C: So in the past at river stage, we used to offer... like a choice of maybe three different themed

sessions and the group would pick so something that was always really popular was music and we've got quite a lot of music technology like gramophones and...

00:06:30

C: We've got a record shop and things.

00:06:31

C: Like that, we've got stories about going dancing, going to the dancing in the town and the music that you would be dancing to another really popular theme was photography. Yeah, and I think.

00:06:45

C: One of the reasons for that was we had... Look, a really brilliant photography kit with lots of different old cameras that people could actually touch and feel, and some of them would be like really old glass plate cameras from Victorian times and maybe they'll be like little box brownies from the 50s, but then they would just be like a 1980s camera that they maybe had. And it was like all the laughter memories of these cameras.

00:07:11

C: And then we'd sort of take the lead from the participants, so...

00:07:16

C: We maybe one of my colleagues had planned this session using these old cameras and then the women in the session had had said they don't really. They're all friends and they don't really have photos of it. They would like photos of each other in their rooms and.. Things like that. So they end...

00:07:34

C: She ended up bringing out an old Polaroid camera that still had film in it, and they were all taking selfies, so we'll start with a theme and then it. It will kind of be fluid as to... What people are interested in and how they actually just like, take nice photos with their friends to put in their room. And that wasn't something we thought of, but they gave us that idea and we did it. So we always trying to be as flexible as we can sort of in the moment. And another theme that was really popular.

(//omission//)

00:27:44

C: It's brilliant in lots of ways because it brings back memories, but it can also be quite confused because people think they've gone outside and they're actually out on the road and things that you've got to be careful not to frighten people. So yeah..

00:27:58

C: And there's other there's changes where like when you come in the front door on a sunny day, it's really bright. You go the streets really very dark and there's bubbles on the ground. So it's about...

00:28:11

C: Like you know, saying to people, we're about to go the the ground's gonna change. It might get dark. You might hear noises or, you know, saying this looks like an Old Street. We're still inside the museum because people do get really quite confused. So.

00:28:29

C: It's just been aware of that and and communicating constantly.

00:28:35

C: So yeah, just some things like that work really well, but other times it can actually be a wee bit make people a bit anxious.

00:28:44

C: Well, so yeah, lots to think about, but it's kind of like that with every group we take round, you know, you know, you're always aware of business and noises and you get to know your own building of a good little place.

00:28:56

C: To go and things like that. Sort of trial and error sometimes.

00:29:02

I: So I guess like during the session, the team should have more like flexibility because I guess the elder participant they are like... They need the informal environment, right? Sometimes they need more time and maybe...

00:29:23

C: Yeah. Yeah. So I think as well, we keep this group size numbers down and it's really important because you just would lose people in like either you wouldn't lose them, they wouldn't go missing, but I mean...

00:29:39

C: You need more of a chance to go, right? What's going on with them? Are they interested or they want to know? Or are they OK?

00:29:45

C: Or, you know, maybe those people get really upset. They don't know where they are or think they've lost something?

00:29:54

C: So you have to have that space and kind of calm and be ready.

00:29:59

C: You have lots of plans and you've got to be sort of ready to throw them all out and just at the end of the day, one of my colleagues have said it's just about actually being kind.

00:30:08

C: And you're just people relating to each other and and you're...

00:30:15

C: You want to give this positive experience, so Mm-hmm. You might have lots of things you want to tell them about tram and, but actually it doesn't matter if they don't find out any of that. But if if they felt safe and you know or...

00:30:28

C: They maybe learned about some something else you didn't know. Nobody asked you, but yeah, you've got to be flexible.

## APPENDIX B: Observation Notes

### Observation Notes at Kelvin Hall

Date	Session's time	Theme	Impressions (write freely and in detail, there is no specific word limit)
28th May (Tue)	2 - 3:30pm	Through the Lens:1955 Glasgow Photographic Survey	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- A session can accommodate 20 people. 14 people signed up for that day but only 8 people attended. According to the lady from Alzheimer's Scotland, some people canceled it before the session started. Couples, mom &amp; daughter, families.</li> <li>- This session is trying to gather people from the west end, they have just been diagnosed with dementia recently. Alzheimer's Scotland gets people's diagnosis information from GP and they contact those people and ask if they are interested in joining the museum's session.</li> <li>- Museum: 1 learning assistant (facilitator) Laura, 1 assistant (programme designer) Alicia</li> <li>- 1 member from Alzheimer's Scotland</li> <li>- Beginning: The session started a bit late, 2 participants came about 40 mins late. People gathered together and had tea/coffee and snacks and chat with each other in a chill and relaxing atmosphere.</li> <li>- The session is flexible, and fluid, and does not strictly follow the schedule and Laura's ppt. (informal learning setting) The pace of the session is slow.</li> <li>- Laura mentioned some stories which may be Glasgow people's collective memories. Sometimes she shared her experience or memory first, and then participants responded and shared theirs gradually. They were chatting, just like friends. Laura sometimes asked questions following up on the participants' sharing to facilitate interaction.</li> <li>- Sometimes the elderly participants' experiences or stories may offer some information that we (younger people) don't know.</li> <li>- Pic 3 (architecture): Laura asked if anyone knew where it is to encourage people to search from their memories in Glasgow city.</li> <li>- Pic 4 (a park that residents are familiar with): They also talked about children's gestures and faces in that photo, trying to think of some interesting captions for the kids. They also</li> </ul>

			<p>talked about the games that they usually did in the park when they were little.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Pic 5 (Kelvingrove museum crystal lights): Residents in Glasgow are very familiar with Kelvingrove so they talked a lot about Kelvingrove, and were surprised that museum staff usually made the light lower down to do the routined cleaning work and changed light bulbs.</li> <li>- Pic 6 (an old picture of the Queen Street Station): most of participants could recognise the station quickly. They chatted about what the station looked like and how the outline, landscape and appearance changed.</li> <li>- Pic 7 (Street view at East Partick station): Everyone were very interested in this picture because Partick is also a well-known and important area of Glasgow. Firstly, Laura asked them to guess where it is, and no one found the right anwer (they said they felt very familiar but just couldn't find the right one). So Laura gave them a few hints, pointed out some iconic architecture such as the river Clyde, the bridge for train, Kelvin Hall, and Glasgow Uni to help participants recognise the location.</li> <li>- Pic 8 (street view on Argyle street, a lot of people were shopping there): Participants also had a lot of discussion and responses for this picture. They talked about what changed on the street, which shop switched to be something else now. This photo facilitated a lot of discussion and interaction.</li> <li>- The last 30 mins (object-handling &amp; touch in person session): we walked to the storage to observe the life museum's collections. For the elderly, museum team had to consider the walking line to ensure the easier accessibility, they did't have to walk for too long.</li> </ul>
9th June (Sun )	2 - 4pm	Through the Lens: 1955 Glasgow Photographic Survey	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 7 people joined this session. In the last session, they went to People's Palace together and enjoyed a lot. They became friends because of this programme, so during the session, they interacted with each other actively. A lady made cakes and brought them to share with everyone. The other lady brought a box of chocolates to share. The session started late because everyone just enjoyed chatting and preparing tea and coffee together.</li> </ul>

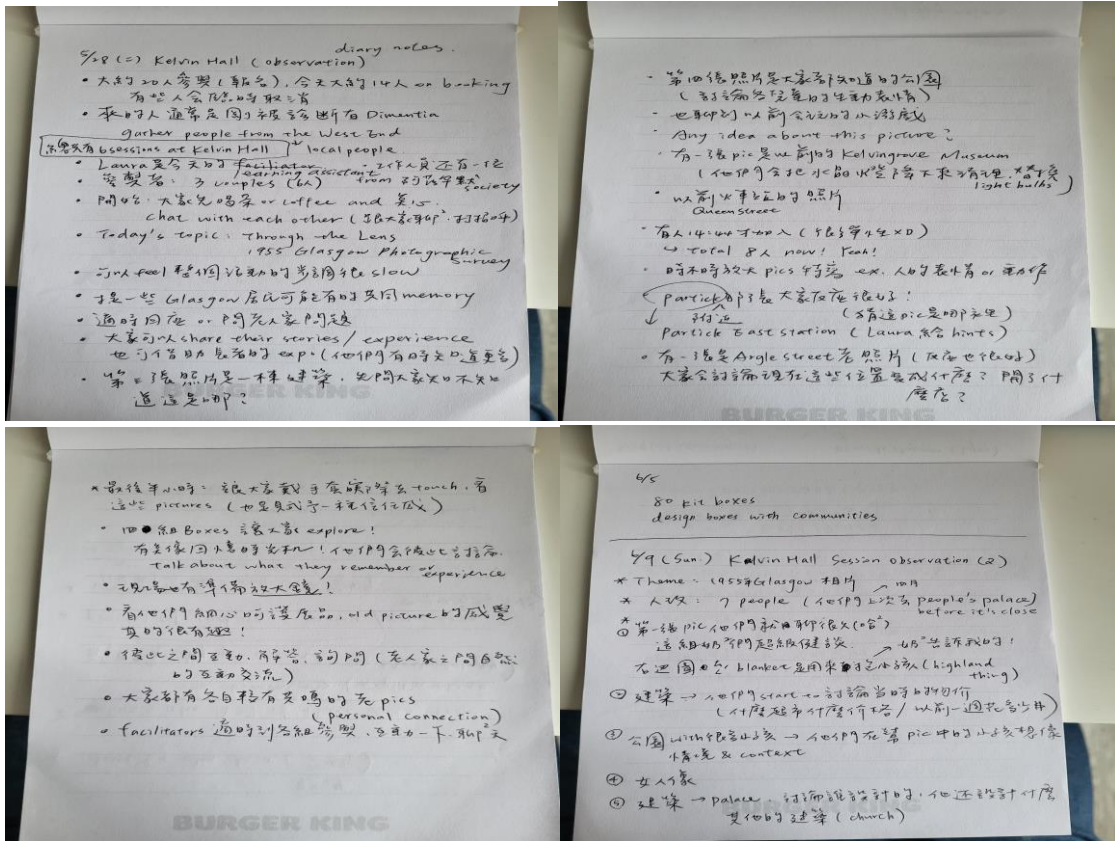
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Pic 1 (street view): they talked about this photo for a long time. Participants were engaged and interactive. A lady also introduced the patterned blanket on the ride part of the photo to me, and it was a very Scottish thing that most older people can recognise.</li> <li>- Pic 2 (architecture): Participants talked about the living cost and prices of stuff during that period, and shared their memories with each other.</li> <li>- Pic 3 (the park and several children are playing): participants were imaging the context, captions and conversation for the children in the photo</li> <li>- Pic 5 (architecture- a palace): they were talking about who designed this palace, and what else architecture did the architect designed.</li> <li>- The room's lighting was adjusted to be darker for people to see the projector clearly.</li> <li>- Pic 7 (the crystal lights in Kelvingrove): they mentioned that in the past, people may go to Kelvingrove specifically to see the crystal lights.</li> <li>- Then Laura brought everyone to the storage to see diverse collections. On the way, people chatted actively when seeing objects on the shelves and used phones to take pictures. For instance, the old coffee machine, the chair with a specific name that Glasgow people are familiar with. Laura said she also used this kind of chair for doing sessions. Thus, washing stuff and soap were also actively discussed by people, which showed that these objects were related to participants' collective memories to some extent.</li> <li>- Old leather soccer ball and sports equipment were also trigger participants' interests.</li> <li>- A lady was so interested in the 1970's tea set because she has it in her house, and she shared that this kind of tea set was with high quality (they were all made in one piece).</li> <li>- On the way in the storage, participants shared their past experiences and stories with each other and also shared them with me.</li> <li>- I got a pair of gloves this time! They all gathered around 2 tables, touched and observed the old photos in 2 boxes together, and were engaged in talking and sharing opinions and</li> </ul>
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			<p>comments. This was a very interactive group.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- A lady asked when the people's palace would finish its renovation. Laura replied that around 3-4 years, and the lady said 'Ohh so it's supposed to be about 5 years, usually takes longer'.</li> <li>- During the object-handling session, people could sit or stand. Two energetic ladies like to pop in here and there, kept changing their standing position to talk to others. During the last part of this session, Laura started to lead the objects observation, and people were attracted by her description for the photos.</li> <li>- A lady specifically enjoyed holding and placing old photos, she wore gloves and moved the pictures carefully.</li> <li>- In this kind of informal learning setting, the atmosphere and pace of the session are chill and flexible. No need to talk about all the ppt slides pre-prepared by the museum team and this part (with projector) can be adjusted with flexibility. The slides showing the old pictures are used as a medium to trigger people's conversation and interest in the topic. Especially the landscape of Glasgow can comparatively easily trigger people's collective memories.</li> <li>- On the way within the museum, there's always someone remind everyone if there's a slope or small hole on the floor to prevent someone from falling down or being affected, which is very considerate.</li> <li>- There's an unsmart alarm on the exit door of the storage, so people had to get out in groups, and this part made most people laugh.</li> <li>- A lady brought a box of handmade lemon cakes to share in the session, and another lady also brought a box of chocolate to share with these friends. I can feel that they enjoy and treasure this once-a-month meeting. They had friendship with each other and with higher initiative (to help prepare drinks and snacks).</li> <li>- After back to the learning room, they kept going on the slides and chatting more. They talked about how they usually dressed up when shopping in the past, and nowadays, it seems like people don't often dress up like in the past.</li> <li>- <b>ps. Though these two sessions were on the</b></li> </ul>
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			<b>same topic, Laura changed the workflow with flexibility.</b>
25th June (Tue )	2 - 4pm	Toys Collection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- This is the last session of this group. Kelvin Hall team organises 6 sessions of the Age Well programme for each group of the elderly. There are 6 sessions for 12 weeks, and then the museum will welcome new groups on the waiting list.</li> <li>- The session is always chill and flexible. People who came first just started to chat earlier, and they could easily talk everything.</li> <li>- Participants and learning assistants put their name cards in front of them on the table, which was easier for people to remember and call others.</li> <li>- Laura (learning assistant/initiator) started to chat about toy stories when we waited for other participants. Also, she quickly introduced the topic and the brief plan for today's session. She also mentioned that they would do a simple evaluation on the last part to get some feedback from the participants.</li> <li>- Today only a couple came to join. I saw them before at the session at the end of May, and they could recognise me as well. Some people canceled at the last minute. (The museum team has to adjust themselves quickly because this kind of situation is quite common and frequently happens.)</li> <li>- They chatted about what toys were their favourite in the past, and how to play with them. This is an interesting conversation to let participants engage.</li> <li>- I feel that Laura is a fantastic actress and storyteller, she's good at acting and adding vivid gestures when she's sharing stories or experience, and participants enjoy and engage in it.</li> <li>- 40 mins after the first part of chat/chill conversation, because no one else came to join the session, we headed to the storage to start the toy exploration.</li> <li>- When we got into the storage, each person got a pair of glove to wear and got ready to touch the objects.</li> </ul> <p>Toy Collection:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <b>Steroscope</b> (a device for viewing a</li> </ol>

			<p>stereoscopic pair of separate images, depicting left-eye and right-eye views of the same scene, as a single three-dimensional image): this is from the Victoria period, showing the 3D technology during that time.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2. <b>Lantern Projectors</b> (an early type of image projector that used pictures—paintings, prints, or photographs): Alicia said people love to see these projectors because they were very expensive in the past, and only rich people had them, very rare to see, so people wanted to see them in person.</li> <li>3. <b>Kind of zoetrope</b> (can see pictures’ movement under the light): Laura talked about how it worked and showed to everyone. At this point, here are a few chairs prepared for participants to have a seat and enjoy.</li> <li>4. <b>A wooden puppetry</b></li> <li>5. <b>A creepy doll</b> whose head could be portable: Laura introduced that people repainted doll’s skin in the past so we saw their faces are still delicate and painted in details.</li> <li>6. <b>Kind of medal Lego</b> in the past which could be built up.</li> <li>7. <b>Small car models</b></li> <li>8. <b>Dinky toys</b></li> <li>9. <b>Small cosmetic tool models</b></li> </ol> <p>Final feedback time</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- A staff of the Alzheimer's Scotland asked participants’ feedback and feelings and wrote them down on the evaluation sheet for them. Participants shared their feedback verbally, and they chatted with each other pleasantly.</li> <li>- Alicia and Laura (museum team) also shared some other museum activities which they can take part in in the future if they’re interested in. For example, the drop-in sessions in the Burrell Collection.</li> </ul>
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Some photos of my handwriting notes:



diary notes.  
 5/8 (Sun) Kelvin Hall (observation)  
 • 大約 20 人參與 (報名), 今天又有 14 人 on booking  
 有些會係臨時參加者  
 • 其中人通常係因為被邀請出席有 Dimantina  
 gather people from the West End  
 有些係 local people  
 • Laura 是今天的 facilitator, 工作人員還有一位  
 是 facilitator, 3 couples (6A) from 約克大學 society  
 • 開始: 大家先喝茶 or coffee and 點心  
 chat with each other (跟大家聊, 打招呼)  
 • Today's topic: Through the Lens  
 1955 Glasgow Photographic Survey  
 • 可以 feel 整個圖畫的步調是 slow  
 • 是一些 Glasgow 居住可能有的共同 memory  
 • 通時向佬 or 阿佬人家問問題  
 • 大家可 share their stories / experience  
 也可有自己最喜愛的 exp. (佢們有時又不知道是)  
 • 4 第一張照片是一棟建築, 先問大家 X 知不  
 知道這是哪?

• 第四張照片是大家知道的小徑  
 (討論完後是 0 的半力表情)  
 • 也聊到以前會玩的小遊戲  
 • Any idea about this picture?  
 • 有一張 pic 是以前 Kelvin Grove Museum  
 (佢們會把水缸水盤弄下來, 有光, 有聲, light bulbs)  
 • 以前火車站的照片  
 Queen Street  
 • 有人 4:44 才加入 (很多年 X 0)  
 total 8 人 now! Yeah!  
 • 唔唔唔放大 pics 好容易, 人的表性 or 動作  
 Partick 係大家住的地方!  
 附近 (有這 pic 是明地)  
 Partick East Station (Laura 係 hints)  
 • 有一張是 Angle Street 老照片 (及佢也係時)  
 大家會討論現在這些位置是成什麼? Partick 什  
 麼店?

• 最後半小時: 跟大家說手在睇解去 touch, 看  
 這些 pictures (也是見到一些位位成)  
 • 四組 Boxes 大家 explore!  
 有些係同水邊時成規! 佢們會彼此互相  
 Talk about what they remember experience  
 • 互相都有得俾俾放大圖畫!  
 • 看佢們用心可護展品, old picture 的成變  
 真的很有趣!  
 • 看彼此之間互相, 有爭論, 有問 (老人家之間自然  
 的互动交流)  
 • 大家都有各自有喜愛的老 pics  
 (personal connection)  
 • Facilitators 適的到各組參與, 3 半力一下, 8 半力

6/5  
 80 fit boxes  
 design boxes with communities  
 4/9 (Sun) Kelvin Hall Session observation (2)  
 \* Theme: 1955 Glasgow 相片, 10 月  
 \* 人數: 7 people (佢們上次去 people's palace  
 before it's close)  
 \* 第一張 pic 佢們就聊得很久 (哈哈)  
 這組的專門是起起便談, 的 "苦" 作我的!  
 右邊圖 0 0 0 blanket 是用來對付小涼 (highland  
 thing)  
 ① 建築 → 佢們 start 討論當時的物件  
 (什麼程序什麼價格 / 以前一週共有出井)  
 ② 公園 with 佢們時 → 佢們在幫 pic 中的小涼環境  
 情況及 context  
 ③ 女人家  
 ④ 建築 → palace, 討論說設計時, 佢們設計什麼  
 其他的建築 (church)

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06/11/2024