

Sewerby Hall is a Grade I listed country house and museum set in 55 acres of parkland and gardens on the outskirts of the coastal town of Bridlington in East Yorkshire. Beneath Bridlington's seaside-town holiday appearance there is serious deprivation. Information gathered in 2012 from Data Observatory Analytics identified that the town had a higher than average number of low income families and single parents, and these groups therefore became a key target audience for the museum.

SUMMARY

In 2016 Sewerby Hall and Gardens joined the Bridlington Healthy Eating Partnership, comprising Bridlington Children's Centres, Christ Church Community Services, and East Riding of Yorkshire Council's Bridlington Renaissance (now Local Growth) Team.

Targeted families were referred through Bridlington Children's Centres and other agencies on to one or more courses of cooking sessions run by Christ Church Community Services (the community arm of a local church). Participants were referred for various reasons, including a need to develop their confidence, social aptitude, or parenting skills.

Each course of cooking sessions took place once a week for five weeks. Participants had the option to attend up to four different skills-based courses, and they all completed at least one course in its entirety. Most participants undertook further courses afterwards, and some have gone on to volunteer at Christ Church.

Following completion of the course(s), participants took part in a celebratory visit to Sewerby Hall and Gardens. The adults had the chance to prepare and cook food in the Edwardian kitchen, using our coal-fired range, and the children took part in fun activities (usually crafts and a story) with a food theme. The families ate what they had made together, and explored the house, grounds and zoo.

Initially, participants were vulnerable local families with chaotic lifestyles, all of whom had one or more children under five years old; but recently the project has broadened out and now works with traveller families, refugees, and adults experiencing mental health problems. The project is now titled the Healthy Lives Project and is chaired by Christ Church Community Services.

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AIMS AND GOALS

For our organisation and the partnership as a whole

- Increased outreach within the community, especially for families with children under five years old
- Increased awareness of what we offer, and increased take up of our services

For our audience

- Increased awareness of healthy eating
- Increased knowledge of basic cooking skills
- Empowerment to make healthier lifestyle choices
- Opportunities to engage with culture
- Improved overall wellbeing and quality of life

OUTCOMES

For our organisation and the partnership as a whole

- We have increased our reach within the community, especially with families with children under five, non-traditional museum users, and families from lower socio-economic backgrounds
- There has been an increased awareness and increased take up of each partner's services
- Advocacy for each partner's work has reached much further than anticipated because each organisation naturally advocates for the other partners, not only when sharing information about this project, but also in a broader work context

For our audience

- Participants gained an increased understanding of healthy eating, enabling them to cook healthier meals for themselves: 'It's opened me eyes into cooking, to do things properly, you know, instead of just using things out of packets'
- Participants enjoyed the celebratory trips to Sewerby Hall, viewing them as a special treat, where they made new memories and broadened their horizons: 'It was like a family...It was all of us. I enjoyed it. Me kids really enjoyed it'
- Participants have improved overall wellbeing, and we have heard outstanding testimonies citing improvement of social skills, confidence, wellbeing, lifestyle, and family relationships, as a direct result of taking part: 'before, I used to bottle everything up and then get depressed and feel down, and I don't anymore because I've got people I can talk to that don't judge me. I do feel so much better...me kids are happier because I'm happy'

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LESSONS LEARNT

Building a relationship with families (both potential and current participants) can be challenging, but it is crucial to the success of the project. It requires adopting a long-term approach (ranging from three months to a year, depending on individual needs), offering a non-judgmental attitude, and giving one-to-one support where necessary.

The vulnerability of participants necessitates an element of privacy, but Sewerby Hall and Gardens is a busy tourist venue and popular holiday location. It has therefore been difficult on occasion to organise the logistics of the celebratory sessions to meet the needs of both the participants and the visiting public. However, we have identified certain times of the year and specific site locations that make this easier to achieve.

The strength of partnership working is essential - no one organisation could do this in isolation. Sharing resources, access to communities and budgets enables us to deliver an effective project that benefits all partners and participants. Improved links between partners also have wider ongoing benefits for all of the organisations, creating a base from which further initiatives can develop. One of the key benefits for the Museum Service in particular is that we are now embedded within a local community framework.

TOP TIP

All the hard work is worth it! Building relationships with partners, and finding out about each organisation's skills, agendas and limits can take a lot of time and energy, but it is worth it to create an enduring symbiotic partnership whose impact reaches beyond just one specific project.

FUNDING

Since May 2018, the Healthy Lives Project has been in receipt of a European Social Fund grant through the Community Led Local Development programme. 60% is funded with 40% made up of existing staff time, volunteer time and evidencing in kind costs. Annual project costs are around £50,000.

BUDGET

Until recently (May 2018), there was no direct funding for the partnership, so the costs for the sessions were spread across the partners through imaginative use of pre-existing budgets, resources and facilities.

FURTHER INFORMATION

This case study was written by Lucy Cooke, Under 5s Learning Co-Ordinator for East Riding of Yorkshire Museum Service.



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