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National Museums Liverpool



Reflecting national priorities in healthcare

Dementia is high on the national policy agenda: an estimated 670,000 people in England are living with the condition, a figure that is expected to double in the next 30 years. Building understanding and improving the care of those affected is a priority for the Department of Health. Increasingly, commissioners are seeking innovative approaches outside traditional healthcare settings.

Museums may not seem the most obvious environment for an initiative to improve the care of people with dementia—but preserving memories from one generation to the next is their bread and butter. National Museums Liverpool's (NML) House of Memories programme uses collections housed in the city's museums to enable people with dementia to explore familiar objects, artefacts and stories from their past, helping them to revisit long-term memories. In doing so, it aims to improve their quality of life.

Funded by the Department of Health, House of Memories doesn't work directly with dementia patients but provides training and education for their carers. Through interactive events, the programme aims to increase understanding of how it feels to live with dementia, helping carers engage with those they care for with compassion and empathy. The programme's outcomes are helping to realise government commitments to major improvements in dementia care, awareness and research set out in the National Dementia Strategy and Prime Minister's Challenge on Dementia.

Key commissioning facts

Provider: National Museums Liverpool, which developed the project

Commissioner: Department of Health, commissioning on a year-by-year basis

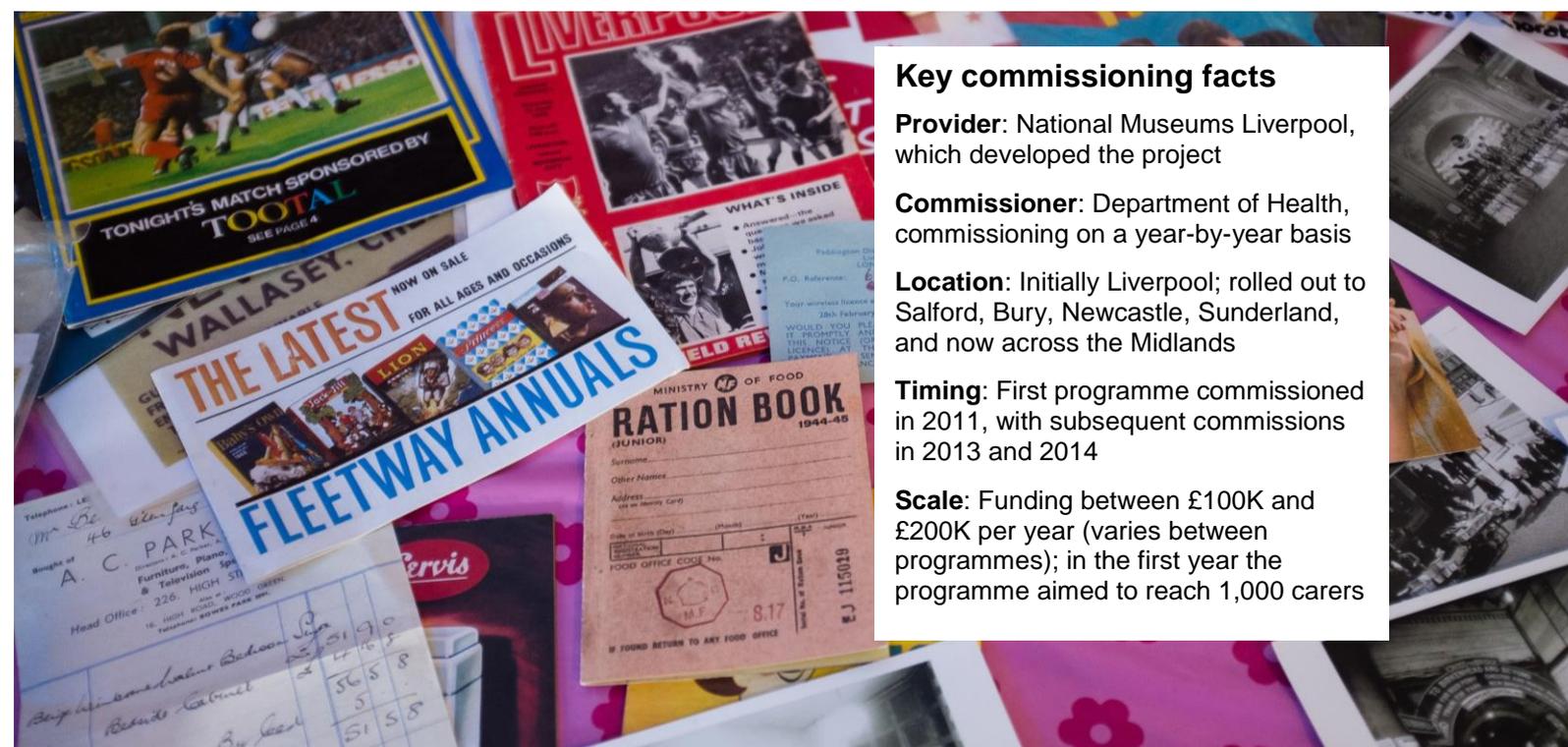
Location: Initially Liverpool; rolled out to Salford, Bury, Newcastle, Sunderland, and now across the Midlands

Timing: First programme commissioned in 2011, with subsequent commissions in 2013 and 2014

Scale: Funding between £100K and £200K per year (varies between programmes); in the first year the programme aimed to reach 1,000 carers

Looking for innovation

NML's work with older people first caught commissioners' eyes due to its innovative nature, which reflected two important aspects of national policy around dementia. Firstly, a push to reduce the use of anti-psychotic drugs in care homes to manage symptoms of residents with dementia. Rebecca Sidwell, Project Manager at the Department of Health, explains: *'It's really important to look at other ways of helping people with challenging behavior, and the museum's work really struck a chord. It encourages people with dementia to think about their memories and engage with the past, which can have a very positive effect.'*



House of Memories also reflects a second departmental priority: a national drive to improve the skills and quality of the workforce caring for people with dementia. *'NML put a lot of imagination into the programme, and really looked at what staff need,'* says Rebecca. *'For me, the most important thing about the project is the quality. The training provided is fantastic; NML really thought carefully and researched what was needed.'*

Getting on commissioners' radar

Behind House of Memories' success is a determined push from NML to build the profile of its work with older people, and position it to appeal to the health sector. Carol Rogers, Executive Director of Education and Visitors at NML, explains: *'We put a lot of effort into talking to people that didn't already know about us. That advocacy was a very important step on our commissioning journey. We took ourselves out of our immediate sector and tried to connect with a completely different group.'*

In 2009, NML partnered with [Mary Seacole House](#) to provide art-based workshops encouraging creativity in older people with mental illness, a project funded by Liverpool Primary Care Trust. As part of its drive to gain wider recognition, NML submitted the project to the Guardian Public Sector Awards, and won, an achievement Carol describes as *'absolutely fantastic. On the back of that, we became visible on a national stage in a way we weren't before. We were on the radar of some important people.'*

Amongst those involved in the award were representatives from the Department of Health, who were looking for new ways to approach dementia care. They asked NML whether it was doing any work in this area. *'The moment we knew the department was interested in dementia, we made it our business to find out as much as we could,'* says Carol. *'Our starting point was the National Dementia Strategy. We really did our homework to find out what areas of care were a priority to them. You've got to know a commissioner's world. It's not about rushing in with an ask, but really understanding the challenge they face and coming up with something that is a fit with them.'*



Relationships and research

Building a relationship took time: *'There was a process of familiarisation and sharing, and keeping them informed,'* explains Carol. *'At the time, there were a lot of reports saying that while basic needs like nutrition and clinical support were being met, compassion and empathy was an area for development.'* Following discussions with Rebecca to really understand the Department of Health's needs, and where NML's work could best address them, the team designed a programme to help professional carers use museum resources as a tool to connect with the people they care for. NML undertook a long consultation process with national and local groups, including [Skills for Care](#), before submitting a formal proposal for House of Memories, with a clear business case breaking down the cost-per-head for a carer to attend the programme. It was then invited to present to the department's Dementia Workforce Advisory Group, the national panel responsible for the final decision.

Once the project got the go ahead, both parties signed a Memorandum of Agreement setting out the key targets and outcomes before any funding was released, in what Rebecca describes as *'very much a joint process'*. Desired outcomes for NML's social care partners included readily accessing House of Memories resources, and embracing a wide range of practical skills and knowledge to develop practice. For individual attendees, outcomes included understanding how information about a person's life history and personality can be used to support them to live well with dementia, and being able to help people living with dementia to rebuild self-esteem and confidence.

In its first year, House of Memories aimed to reach 1,000 carers, a target that Carol initially worried may be over-ambitious. But NML's efforts to build relationships with the health and social care sector paid off. On December 8th 2011, House of Memories went live. Within two weeks, 800 people were booked onto the programme. By January 2012, NML had surpassed its target of 1,000 bookings, and had a waiting list of 200. *'All of that 'getting to know people' stage, was crucial,'* says Carol. *'Building those relationships wasn't just informative to developing the project; it helped deliver the engagement.'*

Embracing evaluation

NML has produced an evaluation report for each year of the project, with the cost included as standard in the Department of Health's funding. Rebecca Sidwell praises its thorough approach: *'The way NML has embraced evaluation is really positive, and has really supported us at the end of each year to consider whether to work together again, whether that provides good value for money for taxpayers.'* The **evaluation of the first year of the programme** focused on the value of NML as a cultural partner for the health and social care sector on the ground, digging down to see how carers felt about the experience through questionnaires given to participants at the start and end of the training day, focus groups of museum and health and social care staff, in-depth interviews, and the field notes of the evaluators. After the training, participants reported increased feelings of empathy for people with dementia, and increased willingness to listen to them as individuals. Many appreciated the training style—the lack of powerpoint and interactive, immersive methods challenged them to think differently.

Scaling up

House of Memories was developed with a mind to being rolled out in other regions. *'We were very aware that the Department of Health traditionally doesn't fund regional initiatives,'* explains Carol, *'so we knew from the outset that whatever we proposed needed to be transferable.'* In February and March 2013, the Department of Health commissioned House of Memories at the Salford Museum and Art Gallery, Bury Art Museum, and Tyne and Wear Archives & Museums. This time round, the **evaluation** focused on the programme's transferability and sustainability. Following positive results, the Department of Health agreed to fund House of Memories into other geographical settings. In its Midlands programme, NML is keen to use its evaluation to explore how carers' experiences have changed over the past three years in line with wider developments in healthcare.

Thinking about the future

House of Memories' endorsement by the Department of Health has opened doors for NML's work around dementia, adding value beyond the initial funding for both sides of the commissioning relationship. *'Local health and social care bodies are commissioning them in a way they might not have without that initial support from the department to get things up and running,'* says Rebecca. The project was included as an example in the Prime Minister's Challenge on Dementia annual progress report, and has been debated in the House of Commons.



'Some very interesting developments have come from that core model, which is a win for the Department of Health too,' says Carol. One project builds on analysis of data on attendees at past sessions, which has shown a demand for training amongst hospital trusts and housing providers. NML secured funding from a group of housing providers to develop a bespoke model for them, and hopes to develop something similar for hospital trusts. With funding from Liverpool City Council, NML is joining with cultural institutions across Liverpool to launch a cultural network for older people in the city. It has also secured funding earmarked for innovative technology projects in health and social care from its outgoing Primary Care Trust to develop a House of Memories application for iPad. *'It's always about the step after the step that you've taken,'* says Carol. *'You've always got to think about where you go next.'*

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Case study researched and written by Matilda Macduff