

FRAMING IT DIFFERENTLY

The museum's Health and Wellbeing Team has been working with individuals who have cognitive impairments, to help aid understanding of how they see the world.

The Health and Wellbeing Team collaborated with Exeter University's ENLIVEN Project to produce Framing it Differently, a walking photography group for people who have a dementia diagnosis or are undergoing cognitive assessment.

ENLIVEN is a three-year project based at the University of Exeter and funded by the UK Research and Innovation's Healthy Ageing Challenge. The project aims to make the wellbeing benefits of outdoor activity more accessible to older people living with cognitive impairment.

Beth Marston, Health and Wellbeing Support Worker at the museum said: "We were approached by Exeter University's ENLIVEN Project to submit an application, as they were aware of the work that we do and had interviewed some of the members of our men's groups previously around the importance of meaningful activities in the outdoors.

"We jumped at the opportunity as their project focus was on the benefits of outdoor activity, and the natural landscape of the museum has such an influence on how Beamish Museum is loved and enjoyed. Watching the changes throughout the year as an outdoor museum adds such a uniqueness to people's experiences, and we were really keen to reflect this throughout the project."

The 12-week course saw participants walk around the museum, taking photographs of the changing landscapes through the spring and summer months.

Each week, the group was given an activity to be completed at the museum. The group also worked with local photographers and artists to learn more about traditional photography techniques such as tintype and cyanotype and also worked with a poet who helped the group find the words to describe how nature makes them feel.

Beth added: "All activities we run as part of the Health and Wellbeing programme incorporate different elements of the museum to make the groups we run completely distinctive, utilising our extensive collections and knowledge of heritage skills."

When developing the Framing it Differently project, the team wanted to make the process a mindful one, giving people the

opportunity to slow down and take notice of their environment. No previous photography experience was required.

Beth added: "The group was able to find something different each week and really focus on the small changes in the landscape, watching as the gardens, fields and wildflowers came to life during the spring and summer months. It was amazing to see how much people got out of seeing these small changes and the impact that it had on them."

The Framing it Differently group worked closely with other artists to help create the work, including Ian Beesley who created images of a dandelion scattering its seeds. Ian spoke to the group about how the words, thoughts and ideas people have will scatter to seed the future. Each seed was drawn to represent a memory or a personal moment a person would like to keep or pass along to a future generation.

Poet Rowan McCabe helped the group put the way nature makes them feel into words and visual artist and photographer Andy Martin taught the group the history and importance of photography.

To mark the completion of the 12-week course, the group held an exhibition of its work in the 1950s welfare hall. The display included the photographs, tintypes, cyanotypes and poems that had been created during the weekly workshops.

Beth said: "I think the final exhibition was really special for everyone, being able to share what they had done with friends, family and visitors. Everyone was really proud of what they had created and the poetry which we created with poet Rowan McCabe ended up matching each of the images perfectly."

Dr Steven Owen, Knowledge Exchange Officer at Exeter University, said: "It has been wonderful seeing how much participants have enjoyed visiting Beamish Museum, learning more about photography, and developing new friendships. My overriding memory of the sessions is seeing everyone smiling, laughing, and working together to develop the exhibits to be showcased at the exhibition.

"Feedback from participants has been great which shows the importance of organisations providing meaningful opportunities for people living with cognitive impairment to get outside into nature and be creative."

What the Group said...

Ian said: "I'm grateful for the opportunity to have been part of the group. I never took many photographs but I'm going to go back to using a camera that I used to have."

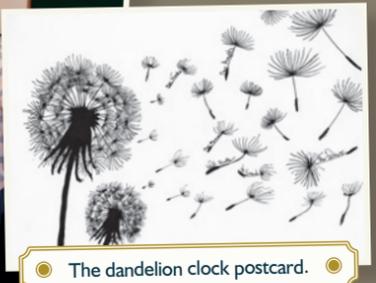
Jenny said: "I've been very privileged to join the group. I've had cameras in the past but I never really took many photos. Now, with an iPhone, it's so handy. I often send photographs to my friends."

Barry said: "It was good getting outdoors, you were looking at the different flowers and remembering different things about your childhood. We saw the flowers come into bloom through the seasons. Even now, following the course, I'm noticing things that I had never noticed before."

Speaking about the exhibition, Caroline said: "I can't get over how good it looks." Her husband Karl added: "It's brilliant!"



The Framing it Differently group held an exhibition of their photography in the 1950s welfare hall.



The dandelion clock postcard.



Jenny with a poem she wrote as part of the Framing it Differently project.



The group learnt about traditional photography techniques such as tintype.



A selection of the photographs taken by the Framing it Differently Group.