

Museum Change Lives *Scotland*



“Museums are vital spaces, rooted in our communities, responding to the challenges that are presented by current affairs, and now, when the world is more polarised than ever before, museums truly do have the potential to change lives.

Across Scotland, our museums are working with partners and communities to address inequalities, support mental health and build connections, creating lasting legacies of work. From tackling rural isolation and supporting young people’s voices, to co-production of exhibitions that challenge injustice and spark conversation, these case studies show that not only do our Scottish museums care for and display a wide variety of collections but they are actively engaged in just as wide a variety of challenges that we are facing today.

Museums are not neutral spaces: narratives are re-examined, challenging histories are explored and diverse perspectives are centred. By collaborating with others and engaging communities in their work, these museums showcase just a snippet of what is possible when we work together with others.

The Museums Association (MA) is proud to champion this work in Scotland, recognising the key role that museums can play in building more inclusive and connected communities in a time when many feel more disconnected than ever before.”

Foreword

Ross McKirdy, *Board Member,*
Museums Association and Museum Manager
at Grampian Transport Museum

Inspiring Museums to Change Lives

Enhancing health and wellbeing

- Museums enhance our quality of life and help improve our mental and physical health.
- Museums work in partnership with communities and health and wellbeing organisations to support the wellbeing of a diverse range of people.
- Participation in the work of the museum promotes wellbeing and self-confidence and broadens the knowledge and horizons of participants, the museum and the wider public.
- Museums recognise health inequalities and strive to overcome them by working with specialist health organisations and a wide range of people and communities.
- Museums support the wellbeing of everyone who works in and with them including staff, freelancers and volunteers.
- Museums recognise that they are not safe places for everyone and take measures to minimise harm in displays, programming and interpretation.

01

Creating better and more equitable places to live and work

- Museums help us to value the places where we live, work and visit.
- Museums work together with communities to raise awareness of the climate crisis and to protect the environment.
- Museums help to create a sense of belonging and empowerment by engaging with communities and encouraging active public participation in decision-making.
- Museums use engagement, learning and collections to generate understanding within and between different groups in society and work to actively tackle racism, ableism and discrimination.
- Museums work in equal partnerships with community groups, charities and other organisations to create civic spaces that are open and accessible to all.

02

Inspiring engagement, debate and reflection

- Museums work with the public as active and creative participants – using collections as a starting point for exchanging opinions, experiences, ideas and knowledge.
- Museums help us to understand and negotiate the complex world around us, encouraging us to reflect and take action on contemporary challenges such as racism, discrimination, poverty and the climate crisis.
- Museums work with community partners to research collections, to challenge assumptions, foster debate and motivate people to contribute to positive change in the world. They are not neutral spaces.
- Museums inspire learning and creativity for all and work actively to ensure that a wide range of people can access these opportunities at any stage in life.

03

Enhancing health and wellbeing

The People’s
Mobile Archive
Timespan

*An outreach programme
tackling rural isolation,
health inequalities and
cultural exclusion in
East Sutherland.*



Developed during Covid recovery, the People’s Mobile Archive (PMA) brings collections, digital tools and creative resources to marginalised groups – older people, carers, refugee families, those with mobility or mental health challenges – through home visits, activity packs and low-barrier public programmes.

Co-designed with local communities and cross-sector partners, the PMA delivers oral history sessions, intergenerational podcasts, climate justice reading groups, film screenings, and collection-based memory work. The project has demonstrable impact: participants report increased connection, confidence and memory recall. It shows how small museums can meet pressing social and environmental needs through collaboration, care and collections – transforming heritage into a tool for justice and recovery.

The PMA builds sustained partnerships with NHS Highland, Women’s Aid, Dementia Scotland, Highland Pride, Moving Image Archive, Highland Supports Refugees and others. The Library Lounge offers a civic, care-centred space where cultural participation supports wellbeing and social prescribing.

The pilot reached over 800 older participants across Helmsdale, Loth, Kildonan and surrounding areas. Formal evaluation showed reduced isolation, improved mood and stronger social bonds. Feedback evidenced a strong appetite for continued, co-created engagement and cultural participation. Where formal provision is limited, the PMA demonstrates that cultural infrastructure can deliver long-term, place-based wellbeing outcomes through embedded, equitable and participatory practice.

Wellbeing at the Museum OnFife

OnFife’s Wellbeing at the Museum project delivered creative sessions to people experiencing symptoms of anxiety and social isolation. It was made possible thanks to Museums Galleries Scotland’s Creative Minds fund with support from The Baring Foundation.

The project took its inspiration from the collections, history and ambience of Dunfermline Carnegie Library and Galleries (DCLG), one of OnFife’s venues. They worked in partnership with NHS Fife Psychology services to develop and promote the sessions.

Some participants were referred via the NHS whereas others were recruited through OnFife’s venues and social media channels. Participants disclosed that neurodivergence and health issues impacted their everyday lives, confidence and social interactions, so the project aimed to improve wellbeing through creativity.

Experienced facilitators delivered varied sessions including creative writing, origami, mindful art, breathing and grounding techniques, weaving and textile printing. Themes of home, belonging, and living in the moment were explored as part of the group



activities and participants were encouraged to share experiences. Sessions ran between September 2025 and July 2026, with six facilitators delivering sessions over six-week blocks.

Through participating in the sessions, group members grew in confidence and shared life experiences together. What started out as a group of strangers resulted in group bonding, friendships, social gatherings, and group chats held outside of the project.

Phase 2 of the project begins in August 2026 through December 2026 and the legacy of the group’s creative expression through mindful moments will be celebrated through a display in DCLG.

OnFife’s learning has been multi-faceted in recognising that when engaging individuals with creative experiences, it is important to go with the flow and allow the group and the project to evolve, wherever that takes them.

Working Together Scottish Maritime Museum



The Scottish Maritime Museum has developed its health and wellbeing work through the Working Together project, delivered in partnership with the Cultural Health and Wellbeing Alliance, the Group for Education in Museums, and supported by a Museums Galleries Scotland funded community engagement and development officer post.

Since 2021, the museum’s engagement team had been approached by a range of third sector organisations seeking wellbeing-focused activities. Recognising the need to upskill and define its role within this sphere, the museum began the project in 2022, incorporating training in trauma-informed practice, professional boundaries, and co-production methodologies.

Through this work, the museum has developed meaningful partnerships with Barnardo’s South West Scotland, North Ayrshire Ukrainian Community, the Irvine Youth Legacy Centre, Irvine senior’s forum, and local families.

The activity has included family wellbeing sessions, creative activities inspired by the museum’s collection, participatory artist-led workshops, community exhibitions, and new volunteering pathways.

A museum-wide commitment to accessibility and trauma awareness has been established, with staff from front of house to board level participating in training. The learning and engagement team now embeds co-production in its community work, incorporating partner feedback to introduce inclusive resources such as a symbol-based widget communication system and co-designed sensory bags with families. Staff wellbeing has also been prioritised with the training of five mental health first aiders, enabling better internal support and signposting.

The museum aimed to create a safe, welcoming, and inclusive environment that encouraged creativity, family connection, and confidence-building. Feedback highlighted increased wellbeing, reduced social anxiety, and improved access to creative experiences that would previously have been out of reach. Young people benefited from new social connections and shared experiences.



The museum’s growing understanding of the local health and social landscape, along with clearer communication with third sector partners, has strengthened trust, clarified boundaries, and fostered sustainable collaboration. Rather than prioritising participant numbers, the focus shifted to meaningful impact for individuals, facilitators, and the organisation. The museum’s commitment to co-production continues, including early steps toward establishing a community action group to ensure ongoing community voice and long-term positive outcomes.

*Creating better
and more equitable
places to live
and work*

Oceans – Wellbeing – Youth project Stromness Museum

Stromness Museum partnered with the West Mainland Youth Achievement Group and other local youth groups on a project exploring the connections between ocean health, climate action, and young people's wellbeing.



Titled Oceans – Wellbeing – Youth, the initiative included art, citizen science, and hands-on marine exploration to help young people connect with the marine environment on our doorstep. The project was funded by Orkney Youth Local Action Group, with the money allocated for young people by young people.

The project had multiple phases over several months. First, four local youth groups worked with Edinburgh-based artist Jenny Pope to make a creative climate wellbeing toolkit. Each young person imagined and invented then constructed a practical, playful ‘tool’ using found objects, each one a creative invention to counteract things which make them feel sad/upset in relation to the climate emergency.

Then the West Mainland Youth Achievement Group worked with STEM educator Joel Chaney of Tern360 to help engineer a temperature-sensing buoy capable of transmitting real-time sea temperature data to Stromness Museum. This gave participants direct experience of engineering for the marine environment as well as climate monitoring.

Finally, in late June, the group joined Kraken Diving for a snorkel safari right outside the museum and were invited to help record the species they saw, contributing meaningfully to citizen science project Seasearch. The buoy was officially launched, and streamed live data publicly.

Very sadly and rather ironically the sensor was damaged in heavy south-easterly storms in January 2026 and is currently being repaired. The hope is that version 2 can be attached to Jenny Pope's floating sculpture Shoogly Holm currently installed in the sea outside the museum.

One outcome for the young people was enjoyment, especially during the snorkel safari but it also contributed to work on their Dynamic Youth Award. One of the outcomes for the museum was working in partnership with Tern360 who have now developed an Energy Safari around Stromness, based from the museum.

The temperature buoy data represents a lasting contribution to local climate monitoring, the first time that the Orkney community could access live data on sea temperature that we are aware of. The project demonstrated how combining creative arts with practical science can create unique and engaging projects for the young people involved. This was also the pre-cursor for the artist Jenny Pope's arts/wellbeing/science project Shoogly Holm, which is ongoing at the museum.

Intercultural Youth Group
Glasgow Museums

The Intercultural Youth Group (ICY) is an MGS funded programme, part of the Delivering Change: Sustainable Co-Production Fund.

Established in October 2024, it's a creative community space for young people (aged 18-26) from minority ethnic groups in Glasgow. The group have met fortnightly at the Gallery of Modern Art (GoMA).

The project was established as a partnership with the Mental Health Foundation to better support the young people and staff's wellbeing. They provided training for staff and participants on how to look after their mental health, as well as ad hoc support throughout the programme.

Coordinating the group is a project assistant with lived experience, recruited specifically for the programme and who was also supported in undertaking an SVQ in Museums and Galleries Practice.

ICY sessions consisted of discussions, collaborative workshops, or visits to cultural venues. Participants had an allocated budget to plan museum-based events and workshops, which have included lates, art sessions, and participation in festivals like Glasgow Mela, the biggest South Asian festival in Scotland. The externally funded programme ended with an exhibition in GoMA's COMMONSpace, which opened on 19 June 2026.



The projects they've worked on will leave a lasting legacy within the museum and for audiences. These included a podcast discussing collections and issues of representation; a handling kit on Black history; a Gallery Test (companion to the Museum Test developed by Our Shared Cultural Heritage); an update of the display on the history of the GoMA building.

The main legacy, though, is the creation of an ongoing panel of young people aged 18-26 from minority ethnic backgrounds who will be involved in Glasgow Museums projects of interest to them — helping to shape work across venues and ensure youth participation and representation.

By engaging with Glasgow Museums' spaces and collection, ICY supported young people to challenge feelings of not-belonging and to reclaim museum spaces. It is a work in progress, and Glasgow Museums' commitment to it continues.

The museum as a community hub
The Devil’s Porridge Museum



The Devil’s Porridge Museum in Dumfries and Galloway sits on a site that, in the First World War, was the world’s largest munitions factory.

Eastriggs, where the museum is located, is one of the 10% of most access-deprived villages in Scotland, meaning low levels of car ownership and poor public transport. Gretna has 26% of children living in poverty, compared to an average of 15% across Scotland, so the museum recognises that it needs to remove as many barriers to participation as possible to allow their communities to engage with the museum.

With the challenges for people to travel to other areas, the museum has found an identity as a community hub. They offer a fortnightly lunch club for older people at risk of social isolation, with a hot meal, a chat, bingo, functional fitness activities, followed by a talk, craft, or music session. They also run after-school clubs and youth clubs every week which are free to attend. To deliver this programme of activities, the museum secured funding from the Holywood Trust and Young Start, two charitable funders who support work with 15–25 year-olds.



Thanks to this funding, the museum can support young people in the local community to develop their employment skills where they become members of the wider museum team, have mentoring from colleagues, and follow a development programme based around their own aspirations.

Owen, a 24 year-old volunteer from Easttriggs, reflected: “*The Devil’s Porridge has been a fun, extremely fulfilling experience to volunteer at. I joined at the start of 2025 and have actively been enjoying coming in when I’m able.*”



It’s helped move me towards personal goals and give me experience in sectors, most obviously in work with youth. I participate in activities such as school trips, where I give assistance to other volunteers leading sessions. The most fulfilling aspect however is just how heard you feel here. My biggest involvement with the museum is the Warhammer club we coordinated to set up. What was a personal hobby has turned into my very own club where I can introduce young people to the same hobby I was captured by.”

Inspiring
engagement,
debate and
reflection

We Make Museums Glasgow Women’s Library

A three-year project, supported by the Paul Hamlyn Foundation, brought together 17 women with lived experiences of complex inequalities and trauma to work collaboratively with the team at Glasgow Women’s Library (GWL) and wider community to shape new approaches to collecting and commissioning art works for museum collections.

From its inception in 1991, GWL’s co-founders have been thinking differently about curating, with germinal projects like Castlemilk Womanhouse giving marginalised communities a voice in exhibition making. With funds to commission artists (which traditionally GWL has not had, with the collection made up almost entirely of donations). We Make Museums follows this lead, exploring how collective decision making can shape collections in inspiring ways.

To this end the group has been exploring art works in the GWL collection as well as visiting cultural resources in Manchester, Rochdale and Edinburgh to learn about (other) intersectional feminist practices.



Together, they have deepened the GWL’s understanding about systemic exclusions and approaches to working that can either act to marginalise and misrepresent, or conversely to support and represent, diverse audiences.

In autumn 2025, after two years exploring collections and feminist histories, GWL launched an Open Call to artists, seeking proposals that would speak to their core values of addressing gender inequality, access, anti-racism and climate justice. From 120 applications they commissioned three remarkable artists, Sohaila Baluch, Ruth Ewan and Alixandra Prybyla, to make new works foregrounding socially engaged practices rooted in care, anti-racism, feminist protest and collective knowledge making.



The GWL has enjoyed seeing how each artist’s distinct vision intersects and complements one another and are excited that an exhibition of this work will animate their space and be part of Glasgow International Festival.

The exhibition runs from 5 June to 26 September 2026. Conversations and collaborations in We Make Museums are ongoing.

Sewing Hope National Museum of Scotland

National Museums Scotland partnered with the Scottish Government’s Public Engagement Team within the Domestic Climate Change Division to deliver Sewing Hope: Quilts for Climate Change at the National Museum of Scotland, as part of the wider Climate Change for All programme.

The project began through collaboration between National Museums Scotland’s learning and engagement team, climate scientist Sian Henley from the University of Edinburgh, and artist Laura Johnson. Together, we explored how art and science could support public engagement with climate change, particularly for children and families. The project also connected with the museum’s exhibition *Rising Tide: Art and Environment in Oceania*, which highlighted how communities in Oceania are responding to climate change.

Through a series of workshops, participants explored museum collections, exhibition themes and Sian Henley’s research before creating quilt squares that expressed their hopes for the future using sustainable and recycled materials. Workshops took place during school holidays, with invited community groups, and through support



from the Scottish Government Climate Engagement Fund. Seven museums across Scotland also produced quilts inspired by their own collections: Arctic Convoy Museum, The Devil’s Porridge Museum, The Great Tapestry of Scotland, Kilmartin Museum, Paxton House, Strathnaver Museum and West Highland Museum.

The quilts were stitched together in partnership with the award-winning sustainable enterprise, the Edinburgh Remakery. Alongside inspiring creative responses to climate action, the project produced a co-created toolkit for museums wishing to deliver similar work.

The project demonstrated the value of bringing together artists, scientists and museums to create meaningful public engagement with climate change. Families returned months later to see their work displayed in the museum, highlighting the strong sense of ownership and pride created through participation. The quilts continue to have a legacy across Scotland, including a planned display of the West Highland Museum quilt at a local hospital.



Rainbow Illuminations: Building a Queer Art Trail
Aberdeen Archives, Gallery & Museums

Aberdeen Archives, Gallery & Museums (AAGM) are always looking for ways to make their spaces more welcoming and reflective of the communities they serve.



Together, they selected artworks that explore themes like affection, companionship, and liberation – emotions that connect us all, but which carry particular resonance in queer lives. Members of the AAGM team met regularly with Four Pillars to shape the interpretation of these works.

We launched the trail on 1 June 2025 via the free digital guide Bloomberg Connects, so people can explore it any time, from anywhere. The audio is currently voiced by Four Pillars volunteers and AAGM staff, and we plan to update both the recordings and the featured artworks periodically to keep the trail fresh and relevant.

The response has been really encouraging. It's strengthened our relationship with Four Pillars and helped raise awareness of their support services. Visitors have told us they're enjoying seeing familiar artworks in a new light. For our team, it's sparked valuable conversations about how we approach representation and inclusion more broadly.

Rainbow Illuminations isn't a one-off – it's part of an ongoing conversation and is available year-round. But it's shown us how powerful it can be to open up our practice and share the storytelling space.

Over the past year, they've been working closely with Four Pillars – Aberdeen's local LGBT+ support charity and drop-in centre – to co-create Rainbow Illuminations, a queer art trail that starts a conversation about reinterpreting our permanent displays through the lens of LGBTQIA+ lived experience.

The idea started with a simple but important question: how can the museum ensure LGBTQIA+ stories are visible in their venues all year round – not just during Pride? They knew they had artworks in their collection that could speak to queer experiences, but they also knew they couldn't tell those stories alone.

So, they reached out to Four Pillars, who they'd previously collaborated with on the Prejudice and Solidarity Archived Throughout History (PATH) project, and invited them to help develop a trail for the art gallery.

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