



**the happy
museum**

**Case Study – real
practice, real impact**
**Museum of East Anglian
Life – building social
capital and promoting
wellbeing**

The **Museum of East Anglian Life** is a popular independent museum that employs the equivalent of 16 full time staff, supported by 120 volunteers, and attracts 39,000 visitors a year.

Museum of East Anglian Life – building social capital and promoting wellbeing

This case study looks at how the Museum of East Anglian life reimagined itself as a social enterprise and used appropriate evaluation tools to demonstrate the value of its work. The museum’s success in building social capital and promoting wellbeing inspired the creation of the Happy Museum Project in 2011.

This case study is relevant to:

- Senior management team
- Learning and community engagement teams

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Highlights

- The museum has defined active community engagement and promoting wellbeing as key guiding principles – strong community links and partnerships have flourished.
- A SROI analysis of the museum's projects found that over £4 of social value was created for every £1 invested
- Over 70 young people have been helped to find jobs and over 200 learners have been given accredited training since 2008
- The museum has zero budget for creating new displays and has experience of being resourceful and using recycling and upcycling



Museum profile

The Museum of East Anglian Life is a popular open air museum with historic buildings and working collections that occupies over 80 acres of countryside in the heart of Stowmarket. The museum presents the agricultural history of East Anglia through a mixture

of exhibits and living history demonstrations. The museum is an award-winning social enterprise funded through admissions, grants and project funding. The museum employs 16 full time equivalent staff, 120 volunteers and attracts some 39,000 visitors a year.

“We want to foster the idea that the museum belongs to the community – local people, volunteers and staff. This informs everything we do, from new exhibitions to the kind of evaluations we use.”

**Jo Rooks, Museum Learning Officer,
Museum of East Anglian Life**

Happy Museum funded activities

The work at the museum on wellbeing and social investment inspired the launch of the Happy Museum project in 2011. The Museum of East Anglian Life has long had a strong ethos as a ‘bringer’ of social capital, running a range of learning, training and skills development programmes that use its historic buildings, landscape and collections to inspire and support young people and vulnerable groups.

Since 2008 the museum has helped over 70 young people find

jobs, provided accredited training for over 200 new learners and provided new experiences for people that had never before set foot in a museum. In 2010 the museum commissioned research using the Social Return on Investment (SROI) model, which showed that for every £1 invested in its programmes, £4 of social value was created. The museum’s approach demonstrated that collaborative working with individuals over the long term has a positive impact on their wellbeing.



What happened?

“Since the 1960s, the museum has had zero budget for new displays and exhibitions. This has made us resourceful, we upcycle and recycle where we can. When we have a steam tractor weekend, we get the tractors to repair any potholes.”

**Jo Rooks, Museum Learning Officer,
Museum of East Anglian Life**

Through a series of exhibitions, the Museum of East Anglian Life worked with local people to explore wellbeing and local history. The first of these was *When Were We Happy*, an on-line exhibition that compared levels of happiness in the Suffolk Village of Stowupland in four different periods of time. The content was developing through a collaboration with the local Women’s Institute and the village school.

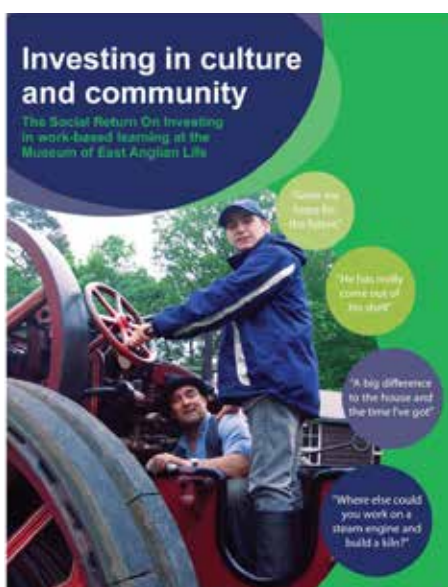
Another collaborative project was *Happy Days*, in which 7 and 8 year olds from a local primary school designed a special happy day for themselves and for a Victorian child. The children chose objects for their day and wrote about how they felt about them. For their own happy day, the children overwhelmingly chose objects that represented relationships – with family and friends – and time spent playing outdoors. Interestingly, their own material possessions were not mentioned. The objects chosen for Victorian children centred on food and festivities.

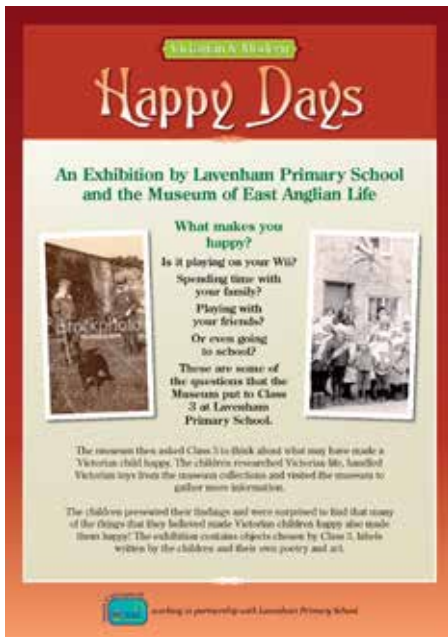
In 2010, the museum held an exhibition examining the ties which bound communities in rural Suffolk over the last 100 years. The *Trust* exhibition drew on research which noted that people’s wellbeing was associated with predictability, numbers of friends within a 15 minute walk and opportunities to connect

with others. The exhibition was a chance to show objects from the collection that are not normally displayed – such as Girl Guide badges and a doctor’s box.

The Museum of East Anglian Life’s experiences in promoting wellbeing and community participation led to the development of a set of guiding principles or organisational pillars that guide the museum’s work. They are:

- **Working Together:** Part of the Communities around us, we actively involve people in everything we do, encouraging visitors, volunteers and local people to take part, share ideas and get involved.
- **Courage:** We think big. Our enterprising, bold and far-sighted ideas influence and enrich people’s lives within and beyond the community. Through our ambition, we help people to achieve theirs.
- **Belonging:** We share our knowledge of East Anglian heritage, telling the stories of our ancestors through our unique landscape and treasured collections, inspiring a greater sense of place.
- **Discovery:** We provoke people to think about the world differently, encouraging enjoyment through an immersive, moving and fun experience.





"These four organisational pillars form our core identity and we use them as the basis for all our work," says Jo Rooks, Museum Learning Officer. "We want to foster the idea that the Museum belongs to the community – local people, volunteers and staff. This informs everything we do, from new exhibitions to the kind of evaluations we do. For instance, we include staff and volunteers as well as visitors when we do evaluations related to exhibitions."

"We received funding from Paul Hamlyn as a part Our Museum, a special initiative. We received funding due to our involvement in the Happy Museum Project and good record of working well with local communities. Through a programme of change, Our Museum aims at embedding participatory practice at a strategic organisation level. This work has involved several strands, including experimental work with geographic communities, implementing a programme of evaluation assessing how our visitors view our offer and implementing recommendations, and introducing a community curated exhibition case.

"In terms of personal wellbeing, I think staff at the museum have taken the message on board, we put time aside to do things we enjoy, and the organisation is open to that. There is a very low turnover of staff which is a pretty good wellbeing indicator I think."

Sustainability is also an important dimension, for financial as well as environmental reasons. "Basically, since the 1960s the museum has had zero budget for new displays and exhibitions. This has made us resourceful, we upcycle and recycle

where we can. When we have a steam tractor weekend, we get the tractors to crush stones and repair any potholes."

Part of the countryside that the museum manages are wet meadowlands, areas of special natural interest. Rather than use large machines to cut the growth, the museum uses traditional methods, such as through grazing animals via agreements with local farmers and the using tractors from the 40s and 50s which are smaller than and less damaging than newer machines. In other managed fields, crop rotation rather than fertiliser is used. Garden produce is sold to pay to keep garden running.

MEAL's experience with SROI introduced the museum to the importance of 'Measuring What Matters', one of the guiding principles of SROI. It also found that at the time there were limitations in the valuation of happiness or wellbeing as distinct from more 'instrumental' outcomes.

As a result of this, Happy Museum uses several SROI concepts, including measuring what matters, having a guiding 'story of change' and using econometrics to value outcomes. It appointed subjective wellbeing valuation expert Daniel Fujiwara to do this, a first for the cultural sector. The resulting partnership has since seen Daniel work with DCMS, ACE and AHRC on the evidence for wellbeing in the cultural sector.

“In 2010 the museum commissioned research using the Social Return on Investment (SROI) model, which showed that for every £1 invested in its programmes, £4 of social value was created.”

What's changed?

Community engagement: The museum has defined active engagement with the community as one of the organisation's guiding principles. A series of co-curated exhibitions is just one aspect of this commitment. The museum is part of the Paul Hamlyn funded Our Museum initiative.

Social capital: A SROI analysis of the museum's projects found that over £4 of social value was created for every £1 invested. Since 2008 the museum has helped over 70 young people find jobs and provided accredited training for

over 200 new learners – among other activities.

Wellbeing: Improving wellbeing is at the heart of the museum's ethos. Within the organisation, the importance of the wellbeing of staff is recognised and acted on in day to day practice.

Resilience: Strong community links and partnerships are established. The museum has through necessity become resourceful, recycling and upcycling when creating 'new' displays.



Happy Museum success factors

Since 2008, The Happy Museum project has been testing a set of working principles through commissioned projects. These 'action research' projects have helped us identify critical success factors of how, what and why museums might re-imagine

themselves in the light of these principles. The table below is a summary of our 'Story of Change' tool (More information here: www.happymuseumproject.org). This case study best demonstrates the aspects of practice highlighted in red.

Principles	How? Drivers	What? Delivery	Why? Difference we make
Measure what matters	Share a wellbeing vision Share a Story of Change	Use time, resources and scope creatively Measure what matters to people	To re-think what matters
Be an active citizen	Encourage active engagement Anticipate challenge and change	Work experimentally Use everyone's potential	To create happy, resilient people
Pursue mutual relationships	Share ownership Ensure mutual benefit	Work across hierarchies and teams	To create happy, resilient teams
All of which help re-imagine museums for better community LIFE*			
Create the conditions for wellbeing Learn for resilience	Consider playfulness, creativity, activity and aesthetics	Be a good host Broker relationships	Communities are: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learning • Interacting • Feeling happy, satisfied and worthwhile • Environmentally aware
Value the environment and be a steward of the future as well as the past	Consider the social and financial benefits of being green	Use the museum's unique resources. Lead by example: care of people, place and planet	

* The Happy Museum Project is conducting a national LIFE survey, where LIFE = Learning, Interactions with others, Feelings and emotions, and Environmental awareness. More: www.happymuseumproject.org

Tools used



Social Return on Investment (SROI)

In 2011 the Museum of East Anglian Life published its first Social Return On Investment (SROI) analysis. It shows how MEAL's training programme for long term unemployed people gives them a real chance of getting a job, as well as helping them make new friends and develop hope for the future. Not only that, the programme provides a boost

to families and the community by linking with services that work with some of the most disadvantaged folk in Stowmarket. SROI is a young approach that combines a story of change with financial proxies for a numeric result. The analysis was completed over the last year by MB Associates supported by the New Economics Foundation.

The Museum of East Anglian Life SROI report:

www.eastanglianlife.org.uk/meal-in-the-community/meals-social-return-on-investment-study-2011/

Daniel Fujiwara evaluation: *Museums and happiness: the value of participating in museums and the arts* www.happymuseumproject.org

“Since 2008 the Museum has helped over 70 young people find jobs, provided accredited training for over 200 new learners and provided new experiences for people that had never before set foot in a museum.”

Online resources

Museum website: www.eastanglianlife.org.uk

Paul Hamlyn funded, Our Museum project: <http://ourmuseum.ning.com>

Happy Museum principles, Measure what matters: www.happymuseumproject.org