

# Museum For One Day

## A special museum experience on location

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### *Abstract*

Museum for One Day brings museum collections and their stories to nursing homes and care facilities. It is a mobile presentation of objects and their stories which are shared with the residents of homes in an esthetic and professional manner. Museum for One Day seeks to reach two groups of seniors: 1] vulnerable seniors who due to physical and mental limitation are no longer able to visit museums on their own and 2] active seniors as storytellers. The target audience is residents of the Somatic and/or Psychogenerative (dementia) wards of nursing homes.

Our goal is to make the contents of museums accessible to residents of nursing homes. Storytellers share the collection and relate the pieces to the lives of the seniors. The specific needs and preferences of this target audience determine which stories are told and the form of the presentation. Museum for One Day is a customized museum experience offered on location. It enables residents to temporarily enter another world and be exposed to new experiences and challenges.

The storytellers are trained to be not only experts on the collection but also in presentation, teaching and group dynamics. The storyteller needs to

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be able to tell a good story, create a dialogue and encourage curiosity and participation while also ensuring that there is respect for the varying needs and abilities of the individuals taking part.

*Keywords:* seniors, collections, lifelong learning, accessibility, museum experience.

## **1. The conception and planning of the programme**

Museum for One Day initially began as part of the Utrecht Museumprogram aside Museum Friday, an initiative of the Van Baaren Foundation, the health care organization AxionContinu and Stichting Utrechts Museumkwartier (community of museums in Utrecht).

The programme Museum Friday (started in 2008) enables residents of the nursing homes in Utrecht to visit one of the city's museums every other week. For groups of residents in the Somatic and Psychogenerative wards - those with physical and mental limitations, respectively – it proved to be too difficult to go to the museums. For this reason in 2011, special for these groups of residents, Museum for One Day was developed by an external partner (ArteKino). The goal was to reach these groups of vulnerable seniors and offer them an intellectual and cultural challenge and experience despite their limitations. For the museums it is a way to reach and inspire an even larger audience.

In 2013, after an extensive evaluation and research for the possibilities of expanding the programme, the Foundation Museum for One Day was established and financing was sought to expand the project to Amersfoort and the surrounding region (fig. 1). Museum for One Day fits in with current ideas and developments within geriatric care, which include more attention for the individual needs and wishes of residents.

At the same time, it also offers museums the possibility of greater mobility for and more interest in their collections. The Dutch Ministry of Education, Culture and Science noted the need to pay more attention to this role for museums in Museumbrief 2013. Minister Bussemaker states that museums should be expected to contribute more to the development of knowledge, historical awareness and identity. This idea has been evident

within a European context for several years now, as demonstrated by this quote from the publication *Encouraging collections mobility – a way forward for museums in Europe*:

“There is no point in hiding your collection in store or in unattractive galleries [...] By actively encouraging access to stored collections, we open up new possibilities for research, education, and creativity for our audiences and ourselves for now and in the future” (Matassa, 2010, pp. 107-135).



Fig. 1 - Highzone Photography - a museum experience on location in nursing home De Koperhorst.

## 2. Carrying out the programme

The target audience for this programme is unable to visit the museum, so the museum comes to them. The presentation takes place within the familiar and trusted environment of residents. In order to give participants the feeling of a day out, without actually going out, the space where the presentation is given is for one hour transformed into a temporary museum with its own atmosphere. Museum for One Day is an attractive, inviting, accessible and professional presentation that engages residents with the content by telling stories and discovering objects.

8 to 15 people participate per activity. This small size is a conscious choice. The strength of the programme lies in its attention for the individual participant's needs and capabilities, and in the attention given to the objects used to tell the stories. To achieve this, the storytellers need to not only be patient and flexible, but there also needs to be space for the participants to interact both with each other and with the objects.



*Fig. 2 - Highzone Photography - sensory-motor experience of collection in nursing home Tolsteeg.*

The objects used in Museum for One Day are those of local museums and galleries. The collections change and the programme is flexible. The objects are the starting point for a sensory-motor experience and for the telling of stories: stories about museums, (art)history, anecdotes and memories (fig. 2). The programme uses of both contemporary art and cultural heritage, allowing for opportunities to recognize and reminisce the familiar as to be exposed to and think and learn about the unknown. In this way Museum for One Day is relevant and accessible not only to residents suffering from dementia, but also to residents whose minds are still sharp and healthy and seek new challenges and stimulation.

With each object, different stories can be told and discovered in different ways. To help illustrate this, a special “object card” has been designed / we designed a special “object card”. The storytellers use these cards to help them determine, based on the information that the card gives them, which approach is best. They can customize which stories they share

and how they present them based on the group. On each card you find information about the museum, the collection and the object itself. There could be (art)historical anecdotes or small facts about the object on the card. The card might also offer suggestions as what senses can be stimulated with the object or give sample questions that the storyteller can ask the group.

We have, for example, a scaled model of a bronze sculpture in the collection as a mystery object (fig. 3). The participants are given the object, encouraged to touch and explore it with their hands and are asked, “What is this? What do you think this could be?”. In this way they are stimulated to look closely, pay attention, to think about what they are what they are seeing and feeling.

In response to the question “What is this?”, the different participants shared divergent associations: *“A candle holder, look in this hole you could fit a candle. A toy. A sled; you could sit here and slide over the ice with this flat surface. A reptile or something because it seems to be crawling. A crane like they use to build a clock tower. It’s just a piece of art, something to sit on and a vehicle...it looks like a bike, a bike you could lie on”*.

The residents composed in this way stories around the object. The story about the artist and what the artist intended is eventually told and responded to with surprise. The experience is memorable.



Fig. 3 - Scaled model of a bronze sculpture (8 meter) in Vathorst, Amersfoort. “Boa constrictor eat grandma(’s bicycle)” by Ram Katzir.

At this time there are two programmes within Museum for One Day: 1] in the city of Utrecht and 2] in Amersfoort and the surrounding region. Both programmes are based on the same concept. They both work with local partners in the cultural and health care sectors, but they differ in their organization structure, financing and the background of the storytellers. In Amersfoort the team of storytellers are well trained volunteers in the age of 55+ (active seniors), while in Utrecht the programme is still run by professionals.

This generation of seniors, more than any before it, has had opportunities for higher education and has throughout their lives continued to learn about and enjoy art and culture. They want, and are able, to continue being intellectually and culturally challenged. This is true for both the seniors (55+) who are active in the programme as storytellers as the vulnerable seniors who are no longer mobile. Museum for One Day makes it possible for both groups to experience the collections of the local museums and galleries together.

The success of Museum for One Day has proven to depend on the following points:

- the programme has a strong social mission and it is necessary that there is support on both a national and local level;
- a sustainable network of cultural, health care and financial partners;
- clear agreements with the project partners that ensure that the quality of the programme is maintained;
- small groups (max. 15 participants) per presentation, with smaller groups when participants suffer from dementia;
- varied museum collections consisting of contemporary art and cultural heritage and accessible with all senses;
- skilled storytellers that have an affinity with and knowledge of the collections as well as teaching and social skills;
- professional presentations – a distinct style of presentation is important;
- monitoring and evaluating the project, including the wishes and needs of the different partners and the residents, in order to maintain and keep improving quality;
- a professional organization that manages the different partners, ensuring leadership and a cohesive programme.

### 3. Evaluation and remedial process

Museum for One Day is not alone in their goal of offering vulnerable seniors a challenging experience. Diverse research and programmes in the health care and cultural sectors have shown the value art can have for the growing part of the population. This has also been confirmed by the experiences in Museum For One Day.

Museum For One Day has been proved valuable for museums helping to reach an audience that would otherwise be inaccessible. And the programme offers health care facilities a challenging cultural programme which gives the residents an opportunity to enjoy a tactile and intellectually stimulating experience of a museum's collection.

To ensure that Museum for One Day can continue to offers its partners all that is mentioned above, since its initiation in 2011 the programme has been continuously evaluated and adapted where necessary. During the presentations residents, activity leaders and coordinators and family are all given an opportunity to share the experiences and offer feedback in a guest book or evaluation form. The feedback has been used to adapt both the content and the organizational, practical aspects of the programme. In 2012 the programme was the topic of a research project for a master's study and has also been thoroughly evaluated by two additional partners.

The storytellers regularly share their experiences, tips and ideas with each other and the organization. Museum for One Day offers special training days for its storytellers (active seniors). These days help to increase the skill set of the storytellers and offer an opportunity to share knowledge, ideas and experiences with each other (fig. 4).

Museum for One Day is part of the national programmes "Vitaliteit ontmoet kwetbaarheid"/"Vitality meets vulnerability" (VITOK) where bringing active seniors in contact with more vulnerable seniors is a central goal, and "Lang Leve Kunst"/"Long Live Art", a multi-year programme aimed at stimulating cultural participation among the elderly population. Various conferences and intervision meeting stimulate the exchange of knowledge, help ensure the quality of the programmes and contribute to the visibility of the programmes.



Fig. 4 - Highzone Fotografie - Training: Learning from objects team storytellers (55+) – Museum Flehite, Amersfoort 2013.

In addition to the formal evaluations, we are given a lot of positive feedback during and after the presentations from the participants themselves and the activity leaders. That the programme clearly meets and need is shown in the following comments:

*Mrs. V. expressed that she was happy that she had an opportunity to think again.*

*Everyone was engaged, for an extended period of time, and that is remarkable for this group.*

*The residents felt like they were taken seriously and had fine time.*

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