



# **Accompanied Walks 2020**

## **Project Report**



### THE PROJECT

#### Accompanied Walks at Chiltern Open Air Museum for vulnerable members of the elderly community

The team at Chiltern Open Air Museum (COAM) recognised that since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, difficulties for those members of the elderly community who were already experiencing social isolation have been exacerbated. To promote and support the health and wellbeing of this sector of our community, COAM invited individuals and some couples to the museum for an accompanied walk with a friendly and knowledgeable COAM volunteer. Walkers were encouraged to invite along a carer or friend for both support and to increase access to the programme. Government guidelines on social distancing were followed.

This project, funded by the Sherling Trust, gave visitors the opportunity to enjoy a walk around the Chalfont St Giles-based museum and learn about its 37 heritage buildings which are set in 45 beautiful acres of gardens, park and woodland.



*"Really enjoyed my walk,  
and it was a lovely  
sunny morning.  
Thank you!"*

Walker

Accompanied Walks ran on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 1st September to 29th October 2020. These days of the week were chosen so as not to clash with other museum activities. They were free of charge and finished with a free hot or cold drink on the Museum's village green. For those without transport, taxis were arranged at a pre-agreed cost.

### INSPIRATION FOR THE PROJECT

Our work in Social Prescription is inspired by the success of social prescribing initiatives in the heritage sector such as 'Museums on Prescription' and by our collaboration in a cultural partnership with other leading organisations for culture in Buckinghamshire, set up by Bucks County Council, to ensure the county champions culture as a key way to improve quality of life, enhance well-being and deliver sustainable and inclusive economic growth. As a registered charity we always seek new ways of fulfilling our charitable objective of operating for public benefit.

Additionally, we couldn't agree more with the findings of [Walking for Health's Walking Works report](#) which includes the following:

*"Being physically active is particularly beneficial for the mental health of older people, improving cognitive functioning, memory, attention and processing speed, reducing symptoms of dementia, improving mood and satisfaction with life, and decreasing feelings of loneliness."*

The British Heart Foundation National Centre for Physical Activity and Health



### PERCEIVED AND ACTUAL BENEFITS

*"Brilliant idea and I am so glad it's taking off. Would you like me to suggest it to my U3a?"*

Walker's companion

Before the project began, the perceived benefits to the visitor were thought to be:

- **A dose of 'vitamin green' from being outdoors in a rural setting.**
- **The security of being in a supervised setting (as opposed to a public park) with clean and attended toilets.**
- **A social interaction.**
- **The knock-on well-being benefits associated with the above, such as an increase in confidence, a greater ability to manage existing health conditions, and a diversion from negative thoughts.**
- **An introduction to COAM and warm-up towards next year's fuller Social Prescription museum activities programme.**

Observed, collected (via a feedback questionnaire) and anecdotal evidence suggests that we were successful in delivering all the above and more specifically:

- **Promotion of COAM**

All walkers stated that they would recommend COAM to family and friends.

- **Pure enjoyment**

When asked, "on a scale of 1 to 5, how much did you enjoy your walk?", all walkers replied 5

- **A sense of being safe**

When asked, "On a scale of 1 to 5, how safe did you feel during your visit to COAM?", all walkers replied 5

- **Happiness**

When asked, "On a scale of 1 to 5, did you feel that your mood was happier after the walk than before the walk?", all walkers replied 5

A majority of the benefits listed here were also experienced by the accompanying COAM volunteers.

*"I thoroughly enjoyed the project. It was great to see so many people having a nice time and I really think everyone left feeling better than when they arrived. I'm certainly keen to do more!"*

COAM Volunteer

*"Doing the walks has given me incentive to enquire about volunteering because it is such a lovely friendly place."*

Walker

Additionally, we were delighted when several of the accompanied walkers announced interest in COAM's volunteer programme. This demonstrates the potential for a deeper and ongoing engagement with the Museum.

### FACTS AND FIGURES

- Number of Walks - 19
- Number of Walkers - 26
- Number of Volunteers - 5
- Age of Walkers – ranged from 65 to 84
- Number of walkers who requested a return visit – 2
- First visit to COAM – 60%
- Medical conditions noted - Alzheimer's, Parkinson's Disease, depression, various joint-related ailments



*"I accompanied my mother who was a little unsure about going on the walk but she really enjoyed it. We had lovely weather, our volunteer was helpful, kind and very informative. Everyone we met in the walk was kind too. We both really appreciated the opportunity given. Thank you very much."*

Walker's daughter



*"I think the programme greatly helped the walkers while also getting the museum's name better known. Quite sure the volunteers benefitted too."*

COAM Volunteer



### PROJECT PLANNING

A number of steps were taken to ensure that our offer of accompanied walks was on track to meet the needs of the target participants and that it would work within the Government guidelines. We consulted with several social prescribers, local professionals who support older, vulnerable people, and Simply Walks, Buckinghamshire County Councils Walking for Health programme.

*"This is the first time I have had an accompanied walk. It was truly excellent and it was particularly interesting to have "insider information" with personal stories about the efforts that had been put into moving/maintaining some of the buildings. I shall come again Thank you!"*

Walker



### Recruitment of Walkers

A combination of social media, traditional print, COAM's mailing list and website along with word of mouth was used to get the word out. Walkers could be referred by a relative, friend or care-giver or register directly. Most walkers self-registered.



# LOGISTICS

### Transport

COAM offered to pay reasonable, local travel expenses for taxis if Accompanied Walkers had no other means of transport. Otherwise, free on-site parking was provided.

### Access

We are an accessible Museum and made it as easy as possible for those with impaired mobility to move around our site with the provision of all-terrain wheelchairs, scooters and ramps. Wheelchair users had to be accompanied by a carer due to social distancing restrictions.



### Referral

Participants were able to register for the programme via their surgery Social Prescriber, care provider or directly by completing a registration form. In practice, the walkers or their companion, registered directly by telephone with COAM Outreach (Jacqui Gellman) who allowed time for a friendly and chatty conversation. This in itself, seemed to be appreciated by some of the more socially isolated and lonely participants.

### Participation criteria

Participants had to be 65+ yrs and consider or perceive to be socially isolated. As this project occurred during the Coronavirus pandemic and soon after the March/June lockdown, all participants had been less active than prior to the pandemic, with many having been anxious about leaving their homes.

### Dogs

Dogs on leads were welcome to join their owners.

### Confidentiality

All personal data on participants was treated with confidentiality and as per GDPR guidance.

### Indemnity

As with all public visiting the Museum, participants were covered by the Museum's Public Liability insurances. In addition, visitors were required to sign a Coronavirus Health Declaration form.

*"From the time my friend and I arrived and were greeted by Jacqui we were made to feel welcome. The walk was very well organised & put together. The volunteer had a wealth of knowledge on each exhibit, conveyed this in an interesting and informative way and sought input from us where available. The tea and biscuits at the end of the walk gave an opportunity to have further conversation in a friendly group."*

*Walker*

### RECOMMENDATIONS

Reactions from all parties suggests that Accompanied Walks should happen again in 2021.

Several of the walkers expected to pay and stated that they would have been happy to pay for the experience and this indicates that a small charge would not be a barrier to participation. A minimum donation could be suggested for those who self-refer to the programme and for those who are referred via their GP or care service, the place is given free of charge.

There is also scope to develop the project offering a regular weekly group walk to people who really are more acutely socially isolated. This would provide a regular meeting - Covid permitting - whereby a limited number of registered walkers could drop in and get together for a walk followed by refreshments. Each walk could be lead by a volunteer with a particular interest go present a themed walk such as traditional farming, horticulture, architecture and building techniques.

*"Most enjoyable day helped by excellent weather..... I had been shielding since early March, this was the first time I had been any distance from home apart from occasional shopping trip from the beginning of of August."*

**Walker**

*"Thank you for yesterday - it was lovely to get out and do something different... I never stopped talking (during the walk) but living with someone who can no longer converse is difficult and lonely."*

**Walker's carer and spouse**



*"It's a rewarding project to be involved in and if it helps just one person it has been worthwhile."*

**COAM Volunteer**



### GENERAL INFORMATION

Chiltern Open Air Museum is a leading regional visitor attraction with 37 heritage buildings set in 45 beautiful acres on the edge of Chilterns AONB. It is a leading centre of lifelong learning, keeping the heritage of the Chilterns alive for all to enjoy

Chiltern Open Air Museum is a registered charity and receives no regular grants towards its running costs or capital projects. We are grateful for the fantastic support of over 200 volunteers and the Friends of the Museum Association.



**For further information on Accompanied Walks at COAM, please contact Jacqui Gellman, COAM Outreach, [outreach@coam.org.uk](mailto:outreach@coam.org.uk), 01494 871117.**