



RAMM's Fine Art Curator chats at Culture Café.

## RAMM + older people

“It’s the first time I’ve been into Exeter town centre for 12 years. My neighbours don’t talk to me. I’m on my own at home. It’s nice to have a chat with people here. Everyone’s been so lovely.”

*Participant*

Case Study: Culture Café

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# RAMM + older people

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## Culture Café: Company, cake and conversations for older people

### The challenge

Isolation and loneliness are the main reasons that older people become excluded from the rest of society. Almost 1 million older people in the United Kingdom are socially isolated, according to Age UK, and this has a serious impact on quality of life. The charity's 2011 Loneliness and Isolation Evidence Review stated: "Tackling social isolation and loneliness is not currently a priority for service providers, but is vital if we are to end social exclusion."

### The background

Many museums use objects to spark conversations and memories or to inspire creativity, and research by organisations such as the Happy Museum Project (<http://www.happymuseumproject.org>) shows this kind of activity can improve people's wellbeing. It provides social interaction and refreshing stimulation. The focus on the moment often provides a welcome respite from the stresses of daily life, and the impact on happiness can last for some time beyond the session itself.

RAMM has worked with Age UK (<http://www.ageuk.org.uk/>) on numerous projects over many years. The museum values opportunities to take its collections and curatorial passion to an audience it could not reach without this partnership.

### The project

Around 145 older people attended bite-sized object-handling sessions involving curators and other specialist speakers, conversations, company and cake. RAMM provided the informal sessions in an elegant venue over six weeks in 2012, with a view to reducing isolation for older people – some with dementia – and their carers. It was documented in a video for YouTube: RAMM Culture Cafe Evaluation 2012.mov

### What changed?

The project provided fun, purposeful activity which was good for participants' wellbeing in many ways. It led to new friendships and re-ignited old friendships, so that isolation for the participants and their carers was reduced over the time of the project. The project demonstrated that it is possible to carry on learning and expanding your horizons throughout your life, whatever your age. Some participants rediscovered RAMM as a safe and welcoming place they felt able to return to – alone, or with friends and family.

### What did people say?

"I haven't been to the museum for a long time, not since it reopened. I hope to come and visit now I know I don't have to use stairs to get to see things." *Participant*

"Warm, satisfying, beautiful, comforting atmosphere, welcoming, healthy" *Participant*

"Learning about topics I wouldn't have thought about" *Participant*

### What next?

The project worked well and could be extended or repeated with very few changes. RAMM and Age UK initially thought the project might be able to continue with enthusiastic group members and volunteers running sessions themselves. However, participants' poor health and lack of transport meant they were unable to do as much as they had hoped. It became clear that the project could only continue with additional resources, which were not available. RAMM subsequently piloted a series of outreach sessions to older gentlemen, and continues to keep in touch with Age UK.