



NICHE
Anchor Institute



NICHE BLOG

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STEWARDING CREATIVE ARTS, CULTURE AND HERITAGE AS RESTORATIVE CITIZENS

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The Restoration Trust is a charity organisation based in Norfolk and Waveney supporting people with mental health issues through building effective partnerships across heritage, culture, arts, health and social care. Our work involves people living with mental health challenges, facilitating their connection with our local and national heritage. What we mean by 'Heritage' can be defined as literally everything we have inherited; including our wonderful historic landscapes and townscapes, our green (e.g., woods, parks, meadows) and blue (rivers, lakes and the sea) spaces¹, our historic treasures, artefacts, things and memories.

We live in an historic, old country² with an excess of ancient places to explore, archives to research, stories to record, treasure to excavate, so the past is always present here. There is a wealth of knowledge and expertise we can call upon to bring history to life, learning lessons from the past through people such as ecologists, archaeologists, archivists, artists, musicians and writers, who are rich resources in themselves.

We don't want to claim that heritage offers more wellbeing benefits than any other kind of asset, but what we do know is that research is building an evidence base for us to truly believe that accessing cultural heritage can be a part of how we optimise health and wellbeing. Our history is part of everyone's DNA, these heritage assets are an integral part of our daily lives and the basis on which we have shaped our locally vibrant, diverse and distinctive communities.

¹ University of York Green and Blues Spaces:

<https://www.york.ac.uk/healthsciences/closing-the-gap/research-themes/green-and-blue-space/#:~:text=This%20theme%20is%20all%20about,as%20rivers%2C%20lakes%20and%20sea> (last accessed 25.1.2024)

² Oldest footprints found in Happisburgh.

<https://www.theguardian.com/science/2014/feb/07/oldest-human-footprints-happisburgh-norfolk#:~:text=The%20oldest%20human%20footprints%20found,stretch%20of%20the%20British%20coast>

The Restoration Trust's task is to overcome the barriers that prevent some people from enjoying heritage experiences. Through effective, mutually, respectful partnerships, and accessing funds and expertise, we can collaborate with health and connect with heritage providers to tackle intractable inequality. Given such a generous supply of heritage against an escalating demand for health and care services, it makes sense to match one with the other.

It is encouraging for those of us operating at the interface between community assets and health to see NICHE integrate nature, creativity and heritage into its work. From a health perspective, our Heritage Link Work social prescribing pilot in Great Yarmouth and Waveney has found that for our participants;

- 56% noted an improvement to their mental wellbeing,
- 18% reduced their use of health services,
- 28% reduced their medication usage, and
- 50% have been more physically active.

The project has also improved social connections with;

- 72% of our participants having met new friends and
- 50% of participants socialising with someone they met on the project outside of group activities.

From the heritage perspective, we want to build upon these encouraging percentages to help organisations fulfil their social purpose.

Another project we have initiated is our long-standing Change Minds³ partnership. This project links the Norfolk Record Office with local health and care partners. We have worked with prisoners, people with serious mental illnesses, vulnerable young people and people who are socially isolated. This aligns the archives service with Norfolk County Council's vision that 'no one is left behind'. Facilitating access to the Record Office and getting up close and personal with the archives themselves has reduced feelings of exclusion and boosted peoples' confidence. Change Minds has substantial evidence from which to demonstrate how looking to the past helps build creative, purposeful connections in the present. The Change Minds Project is being delivered across other parts of the UK, and we would be keen to work with anyone interested in taking this established format forward within your areas. Do get in touch.

We all know that times are hard for the 120,000+ people living and working in deprived parts of Norfolk, where many of our members are located. In isolated rural places and deprived coastal towns and villages, people can feel abandoned by authorities, who themselves have increasing pressures to reduce spend, and have a limited workforce from which to address

³ <https://changeminds.org.uk>

escalating need. Climate change has literally taken the ground from beneath our ⁴as our natural world shows signs of disintegration. Coastal cliffs are falling into the sea⁵ and rivers are flooding, removing valuable arable land and affecting local businesses, as houses and incomes are lost, which inevitably negatively impacts our mental health.

In the media we can read reports of institutional scandals across almost all our public sector organisations⁵. The local mental health care NHS trust has been accused of failures to record the cause of death of more than 8,000 patients⁶. Ofsted Inspections are causing education staff to take their own lives⁷. Most recently we read in the press that the police ignored a 999 call with devastating results⁸, to name but a few examples.

Sir Michael Marmot, the author of yet another damning report on the social determinants of health, states that there has been little improvement in the past decade⁹. He calls for political attention across eight principles¹⁰ which include early years (our children and young people), those in employment (who are still identified as in poverty), living standards, communities, ill health prevention, discrimination and environment sustainability.

The Restoration Trust cannot compensate for these infrastructural disasters. Yet, like 19th century asylums or 20th century therapeutic communities, we can offer some respite and consolation, creating our own version of a modern form of ‘asylum’ as a safe space from which to find ourselves living and functioning well again, in a trusting connection with individuals, communities and benign institutions.

⁴ The Guardian newspaper (11 March 2023)

<https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2023/mar/11/pulling-down-of-coastal-houses-because-of-erosion-will-harm-norfolk-economy>

⁵ Public Sector Trend Predictions 2024 (30 November 2023)

<https://www.openaccessgovernment.org/public-sector-trend-predictions-2024-addressing-challenges-and-embracing-innovation/170807/>

⁶ The Guardian newspaper (21 January 2024)

<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2024/jan/21/mental-health-trust-deaths>

⁷ Head Teacher takes her life pre Ofsted inspection (7 December, 2023)

<https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-berkshire-67620626#>

⁸ Police fail to respond to 999 call. (24 January 2024)

<https://www.edp24.co.uk/news/24069567.police-review-999-call-policy-changes-costessey-deaths/>

⁹ Health Foundation (February, 2020)

<https://www.health.org.uk/publications/reports/the-marmot-review-10-years-on>

¹⁰ Embedding the Marmot Principles (30th July, 2021)

<https://www.instituteofhealthequity.org/resources-reports/embedding-the-marmot-principles-in-tendring-esssex/embedding-the-marmot-principles-in-tendring-esssex.pdf>

We are keen to continue to work with NICHE to address the shocking social aspects that damage our mental health and wellbeing. Several ideas and initiatives are underway, such as setting up the Norfolk and Waveney Arts and Health Collaborative¹¹. We need to seek funders willing to help us address these cultural, heritage and health related issues as a matter of urgency. Then people can be positively engaged as restorative citizens, stewards of our heritage, landscapes and each other's longevity.

Further reading and resources

Astell-Burt, T., Hipp, J. A., Gatersleben, B., Adlakha, D., Marselle, M., Olcoń, K., ... & Feng, X. (2023). Need and interest in nature prescriptions to protect cardiovascular and mental health: a nationally-representative study with insights for future randomised trials. *Heart, Lung and Circulation*, 32(1), 114-123.

Brizi, A., Rabinovich, A., & Lewis, C. (2023). Psychological outcomes of local heritage engagement: Participation in community archaeological excavations increases well-being, self-efficacy, and perceived community support. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*.

Hoppe, B. O., Prussia, L., Manning, C., Raab, K. K., & Jones-Casey, K. V. (2023). "It's Hard to Give Hope Sometimes": Climate Change, Mental Health, and the Challenges for Mental Health Professionals. *Ecopsychology*, 15(1), 13-25.

Liu, F., Chang-Richards, A., Wang, K. I. K., & Dirks, K. N. (2023). Effects of climate change on health and wellbeing: A systematic review. *Sustainable Development*.

Marmot, M. (1999). The solid facts: the social determinants of health. *Health Promotion Journal of Australia: Official Journal of Australian Association of Health Promotion Professionals*, 9(2).

Marmot, M. (2024). We know what we need to do to improve health and reduce inequalities, now we need politicians to act. *bmj*, 384.

Restoration Trust Publications and resources

Our publications can all be found on our website: <https://restorationtrust.org.uk/our-impact/>

Creatively Minded and Heritage is one of a set of excellent arts and health reports published by The Baring Foundation. <https://baringfoundation.org.uk/resource/creatively-minded-and-heritage/>.

Historic England's Wellbeing Strategy is significant and it has a bibliography of useful publications. <https://historicengland.org.uk/content/docs/about/strategy-wellbeing-heritage-2022-25/>

The Creative Health Review published by the National Centre for Creative Health is a valuable update on the 2017 Creative Health Report by the All Party Parliamentary Group on Arts, Health and Wellbeing. <https://ncch.org.uk/creative-health-review>

¹¹ <https://norfolkartsandhealth.com>

The National Academy for Social Prescribing has some useful information and this evidence review. <https://socialprescribingacademy.org.uk/media/5xhmkfwh/how-arts-heritage-and-culture-can-support-health-and-wellbeing-through-social-prescribing.pdf>

Key organisations that people can link with:

The National Centre for Creative Health: <https://ncch.org.uk/>

Culture Health and Wellbeing Alliance: <https://www.culturehealthandwellbeing.org.uk/>

Norfolk and Suffolk Culture Board Annual Report: <https://nationalcentreforwriting.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/Culture-Drives-Impact-The-New-Anglia-LEP.pdf>