**SHARE Museums East: Front of House Network Event**

**11 October 2013 Chelmsford Museum**

**Welcoming speaker:**

**Kate Carreno, Assistant Director, Central Services Fitzwilliam Museum**

This is the third of three Front of House Network events focussing on security issues that concern Front of House (FoH). The first event, held in Cambridge, focussed on Visitor Services today and experience of reorganisation. The second, held at Norwich Castle in July, concentrated on retail and income generation.

In only six months the network has been successful in generating two initiatives:

* *The Mystery Shopper scheme* (for more information please speak to Linda Brooklyn). Between us we can organise a mystery shopper evaluation service at less cost than commissioning an external company.
* *The QCF (formerly known as NVQ) programme for supporting cultural organisations*. We are building on the expertise of Sue Foakes who ran courses for Cambridge Regional College.

Pleasingly, all three events have reached a different audience in the East of England. We would like to hold more if it would be useful, so please let us know key topics you would be interested in.

**Keynote speaker:**

**Working Wonders: an Action Plan for Front of House Museum Workforce: Iain Watson, Director Tyne and Wear Archives & Museums (TWAM) and member of the Museums Association board.**

Please see Iain Watson’s very comprehensive power-point presentation available on the SHARE website.

Topics covered:

The TWAM, a service of nine museums that range greatly in scale and subject

The MA*Working Wonders* report- [www.museumsassociation.org/download?id=969394](http://www.museumsassociation.org/download?id=969394)

How the current crisis is affecting museums

The future of FoH

Particular issues concerning TWAM

Since 2008 we have seen a period of rapid retraction in the museum sector

The key issues for museum workers have been to:

* maintain museums as knowledge based institutions
* remain inclusive
* promote social justice
* sustain motivation to work in museums.

A new style of business leadership has emerged which is more collaborative and creative.

The Museums Association’s cuts survey, published last week, highlighted some very interesting statistics (please see power-point presentation). One of the most surprising was a 31% drop in school visits (this didn’t seem to be consistent across the entire sector which suggests cuts to school funding are not responsible).

The *Working Wonders*(WW) report presented museums with five key recommendations:

* Strengthen business and leadership
* Develop business enterprise
* Facilitate entry to sector and diversify
* Commit to continuing professional development for staff
* Develop sector specific skills

Suggestions for where we should priorities.

1. Strategic bodies should support leadership and management programmes
2. Funders should support models for CPD in regional and local networks
3. Managers should create clear visions, enterprising attitudes, support diversity and CPD, online support for museum users, work out how to share information within the organisation.

Iain’s power-point details key concerns raised in the WW report and key motivations of museum sector workers. Iain also recommended *My Iceberg is Melting* by John Kotter, a light-hearted but pertinent read about leading change.

**The future of Front of House (FoH).**

FoH staff are usually the first and only contact visitors have with an organisation so connecting with your FoH teams is vital.

FoH job titles impact staff attitudes. We have seen a shift over the last generation from Warden to Visitor Services Assistant; from object guard to proactive host.

What do we ask of FoH services? They often have a very wide range of responsibilities: retail; housekeeping; tours; cleaning; object handling sessions; ticket sales etc. Have we got the right combinations?

Data is a great source of motivation so make it available to FoH eg: sales figures; visitor numbers; feedback; evaluation reports.

Amongst top ten mistakes people make when thinking about the future are assumptions that: the future will be like the past; trends will end; ‘group think’ is necessarily bad; if it’s taboo then it’s probably important; any useful ideas should sound ridiculous in the first instance; the other side is always wrong; we’re thinking ahead by 5-10 years- it ought to be 100-500 years.

FoH staff are often the most important drive for repeat visits because they establish relationships with visitors on behalf of the organisation. How can we ensure audiences who have made contact through specific programmes feel welcome once the programmes have finished?

**Questions:**

**Why are school visitor figures dropping?**

It’s likely to be because there are less learning staff with the loss of Renaissance and some museums have started charging. Changes to the curriculum will be felt in the next year.

**Our older visitors have shown no interest in online and digital resources/information, how do we overcome this issue?**

Museums can be places that support use of online resources, for example Culture Shock <http://www.cultureshock.org.uk/stories/my-dancing-days.html> It seemed that when people were motivated and interested it was possible to break through the technological barrier. Kate Carreno notes that there has been a shift over the last five years in attitudes to technology amongst the older UCM Friends who are increasingly interested. Computers are also a great way of providing resources to libraries or community centres, outside city centres, which may benefit older visitors who cannot get into town easily.

**The National Trust: Creating a visitor centric culture: A Consultant and National Trust Property’s Experience!**

**Emily Badger, Visitor experience Officer, Anglesey Abbey, National Trust. (Elizabeth Champion, East Suffolk Visitor Experience Manager, National Trust was unable to attend)**

What reputation does the National Trust (NT) FoH service have? There have been mixed and inconsistent responses to this question. Elizabeth Champion has been working across NT properties to initiate a more proactive Customer Service (CS) across all NT organisations (around 7500 members of staff).

Maslow’s hierarchy of needs was a starting point for the review. (image): [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Maslow%27s\_Hierarchy\_of\_Needs.svg](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Maslow%27s_Hierarchy_of_Needs.svg)

Managers wanted teams to progress to the higher Maslow functions (eg confidence, creativity) but the concern amongst FoH staff was often with the more basic levels, (eg physical comfort, financial stability). It is the duty of organisations to demonstrate that staff are valued, as they are then more likely to feel empowered to provide genuine and outstanding service. Providing relevant training, for example, can help long-term volunteers who may not have had any follow up training since they began. Whilst focussing on relationships with visitors, NT also considered how internal relations could be improved, with very positive results.

**Method**

12 workshops, over two weeks, were led by nominated ‘Champions’ in different areas. Everyone was encouraged to attend. Some staff were resistant because they already knew how to do their job. In these cases people were encouraged to come along and share their experience and expertise. Through the workshops, NT hoped to update CS expectations and develop a more visitor centric approach to FoH. Participants discussed what great customer service is for them. They considered the impact of actions on others and how they would describe experiences of outstanding service. The teams developed their own CS promises and produced posters which they distributed around the sites. Assumptions were challenged by using a service pyramid. With the service pyramid the teams established what was deemed to be satisfactory service, good service and outstanding service. This was an opportunity to challenge any low expectations. Good results seemed to be dependent on drawing out attitudes which staff already held such as love of the places, satisfaction of working as a team with a common goal and inspiring the visitors.

**Impact**

* A significant and immediate impact was felt after considering internal communication and introducing morning meetings. The new opportunities to communicate between teams led to information being passed out far more effectively to visitors.
* Visitor satisfaction rates have gone up by about 20% since the project began in April 2013.
* Feedback improved greatly. Anglesey Abby are hearing ‘this is the best NT property I have visited’ four times more frequently, and the difficult customers have disappeared. The new behaviours have almost proved that there is no such thing as a difficult customer, simply a tricky experience.
* Ickworth won the Museum and Heritage award for excellence in Customer Services 2013 after using this method in consultation with Elizabeth Champion.

**Questions:**

**Did you launch the new standards to the public?**

No, not yet. Not sure it is appropriate.

**Will you make promises to customers?**

No, we feel that the standard is already set and we’re working towards making that the norm rather than promoting a new initiative.

**Have you ever felt that the new open friendly approach undermines security?**

No, CS stay convinced of the basic ground rules and develop skills to convince visitors to behave appropriately.

**Are there any examples of where the friendly approach has been an aid to security?**

It’s an opportunity for staff to become more observant and develop the ability to assess risks more easily.

**Show case: What’s for your museum? Insight into NVQ (QCF):EDI Certificate in Supporting Cultural Venue Operation:**

**Sue Foakes, Freelance Assessor**

20 staff at the Fitzwilliam Museum Cambridge have taken the Cultural Heritage NVQ (now known as the QCF) and the museum is now providing an ITQ for seven of its staff. Sue Foakes has 20 years’ experience of delivering these courses and both individuals and the organisations have greatly benefitted from these programmes.

There are various levels of NVQ/QCF but it is usually obvious from the job description which level will be relevant for each individual. The Fitzwilliam museum found that level 2 of the Cultural Heritage NVQ worked very well. Level 3 took more organisation as individuals must gain experience of running events over a sustained period.

The courses normally take nine months to a year to complete. The qualifications are made up of core units and elective units. Modules include how to: deal with customers effectively; reduce risks; ensure security; follow customer care policies; lifting and handling; cleaning; non-verbal communication; point of sale; object handling; dealing with waste. There are IT modules but the ITQ NVQ covers these.

The NVQ/QCF qualification is standardised and recognised UK wide.

The learner collects information such as a portfolio or e-portfolio; logs/diaries; statements; witness testaments; photographs. A supportive external assessor observes the learner three times as a quality control measure. Recordings are made, of a discussion with the candidate, about aspects of their job, in relation to the learning outcomes. Any certificates and expert witness testaments from previous training/courses can be considered and incorporated, providing they are no more than two years old and that the candidate can explain what they have learnt, thoroughly, to the assessor.

Being workplace based, the NVQ/QCF can be conducted in working hours. Cost depends on the provider. There are various funding opportunities available. Volunteers may also take the course.

More information can be found on the EDI website : [www.ediplc.com/index.asp](http://www.ediplc.com/index.asp)

**Questions:**

**What’s the point if we provide this sort of training anyway?**

* The certificate is recognised.
* It is very valuable to the individuals. It seems to have an enormous impact on their sense of value and approach to work. Charlotte Stephenson VSA at Fitzwilliam Museum Cambridge recommended the NVQ with great enthusiasm. Individuals have spoken about feeling validated, that the course clarified their role in team and the individual contribution they brought. (A FoH service member at the Norwich FoH Network event also fervently recommended the NVQ in July)
* Credits can also be taken forward to contribute to higher diplomas and degrees in some cases.
* It has also helped museums contribute to their role as Investors In People.

**Hot Topic: One for All and all for one: Security and Visitor Experience Teams working together as one:**

**Vernon Rapley Head of Security & Visitor Services Victoria & Albert Museum London**

Vernon Rapely has over 24 years’ experience of investigating crime in the art world, both with the police and in the museum sector. He has been instrumental in setting up the National Museums’ Security Group (NMSG) in order to make relevant security information available across the sector and to the police [www.nmsg.uk.com](http://www.nmsg.uk.com)

The V&A conjoins Security with Visitor Services (VS) which is unusual but since VS contribution to security is essential, connecting the two Front of House (FoH) functions can greatly strengthen security.

**Understanding the threats**

Museum security is often much lower than security in other high security buildings like banks, despite often holding contents of far greater value. We therefore often provide easy pickings for thieves.

Who robs museums?

They come in all shapes and sizes, (NB art thieves very rarely look anything like Catherine Zeta Jones from *Entrapment*)

What to look out for:

* Although trends change, stay abreast of what is valuable in the current market.
* Protestors or people looking for publicity. (eg.[www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/art/news/damien-hirst-in-vicious-feud-with-teenage-artist-over-a-box-of-pencils-1781463.html](http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/art/news/damien-hirst-in-vicious-feud-with-teenage-artist-over-a-box-of-pencils-1781463.html))
* What is going into your archives, not just what is coming out. There have been incidents of organised groups planting false provenances in collections.
* Criminals may work to build up trust with staff (eg of thief handing in a £20 note he “found on the floor” to demonstrate honesty)
* Work to cut down petty crime in your museum and this has an impact on larger scale crime.
* There is a lot more happening during the day than we realise, much goes unnoticed.
* We are concerned with FoH but stores and behind scenes are also targeted.

When does museum crime occur?

85% during opening hours, the majority is during the day.

What motivates criminals?

Usually, simply the money. If they ever steal a world famous object it is to ransom and get money for returning it. Objects in the £5000-£100,000 band are most at risk as they are easy to sell on. Think about what is valuable to criminals: non-identifiable, smaller things.

How do they do it?

* They will conduct hostile reconnaissance: this is the best opportunity to for detecting them. One criminal Vernon dealt with was frightened by a very friendly female, 70 year old, volunteer at the National Trust, who wanted to chat about his life story. Criminals are very put off by personal interaction. Their worst fear is that they will encounter somebody as they don’t want any risk of being recognised.
* Deception: they may come in in tweed and cap and remove these to become a skinhead in a football shirt. Or use yellow jackets to look like official maintenance staff.
* They are often commissioned and not paid much. Their chances of getting caught are lower if they stick to the plan that is provided. (eg of man stealing non identifiable medals for boss but pocketing some others that got him caught straight away when he tried to sell them)

**Working together**

The NMSG is a mechanism for circulating relevant information around 900 institutions and the police force. You can join the group online and subscribe to alerts. Currently most are relevant to London but in next six months we are working on widening reach. The site enables victims to immediately start up an evidence package by uploading: CCTV footage; statements; exhibition lists etc. This greatly reduces time spent building a report. Victims can access up-to-date progress reports. The mechanism also provides vital statistics for profiling museum crime, which may otherwise never be collated.

**Intelligence led layered security**

The nature of museums calls for a specific approach to security:

**- Proportionate and layered.**

Vernon showed a graph of about 15 different V&A security measures, in use simultaneously, at varying degrees of intensity, throughout the day. Security remains dynamic and changes on a daily basis. At the V&A the definition of VS is very broad. It includes catering, museum assistants, cleaning, tours, security (staff provided by external company but trained at V&A), retail. They wear the same uniform across the service.

People are the main security as they are a massive deterrent. VS are the eyes and ears who will notice vital signals and, in an instant, if there is an issue, Security can step straight in. Training is provided for recognising suspicious behaviour and the V&A also has a GOAL which is eventually to use more volunteers and ensure that all visitors are:

**G**reeted

**O**riented

**A**ssisted

and are interacted with as they **L**eave.

The V&A has looked at good Visitor Experience in museums and galleries around the world, at leading visitor attractions and even in the retail sector. The aim is to have spoken to every visitor. Technology it now available to track mobile phones and create alerts when a phone re-enters the building. CCTV with video analytics can also be used to track visitor movements and identify and flag up any unusual behaviour.

**- Empathetic**

As VS we aspire to world-class visitor experience, so our security functions stay somewhat hidden eg the costumed interpreter greeting and delivering a tour whilst remaining vigilant and being wired up to security.

**Questions:**

Do get in touch with your local crime prevention officer/advisor for a chat and for more support with securing your museum.

**What to do about teenagers becoming a nuisance and trespassing on a regular basis, we don’t feel we can keep telling the police?**

Keep letting local police know in order to keep a log and build up a continuing picture.

**What’s the latest trend in museum thefts?**

Chinese objects and Rhino horn. You can disrupt a network for a month but a new one will form in its place. Sharing information with NMSG is a good way of joining forces.

A key point for us is that criminals are put off by positive human interaction.

**Hot Topics from the participants**

Please let us know how you would like to go forward with the SHARE FoH network. There will be funding to organise another series of talks, what would you like to hear about? Sign up for the SHARE e-bulletin for more information.

For the next series, we already have an offer from a museum going through reorganisation who will share their experience with us. The Natural History Museum at Tring will also share their 2010 Investors in People experience.

Thank you very much indeed to all again, for the level of enthusiasm and willingness to share information.