

# **The Empty Chair Project**

## **Entry for the Community Award**

### **Project Aim**

To mark the World War One (WWI) centenary the museum aimed to involve schools and community groups in a project to enable the Daventry community to remember the 114 Soldiers named on the Daventry War Memorial.

Participants were given the decision on how they wished to represent an individual soldier by enabling them to make and decorate a model chair.

The idea behind the empty chair is simple yet symbolic; those who did not return from the war to their families left an empty chair at home. The physical presence of the chair provides a constant reminder of a missing son, father, grandson, grandfather, brother, nephew or uncle, never to return home.

To further encourage the community to take part, these unique chairs were displayed at the museum and then given to those who wished to remember a soldier by promising to set an empty chair at their table on Remembrance Sunday 2018.

### **Activities**

A significant amount of organisation and preparation was involved in carrying out the project. In order to involve as many of the Daventry Community as possible, promotion commenced early with posters and press releases sent to various publications, social media and the museum's networks within the local community. Local schools and community groups were invited to take part in the project via participation letters.

Each chair had a certificate with the name of the soldier written in calligraphy and a photograph of the soldier was displayed with a 2018 poppy pin, donated by The Royal British Legion. The chair, certificate and photo were given to those who wished to reserve the chairs.

To emphasise the significance of the 114 lost Daventry Soldiers, a map of Daventry was displayed alongside the chairs, highlighting where these soldiers lived. This display was heartrending as it demonstrated how much this loss of life would have impacted upon a small community during WWI.

The museum opened especially on Remembrance Sunday for visitors to reflect on the sacrifice made by so many; members of the public were invited to attend the museum after the War Memorial and Remembrance Service held in the town.

### **Who benefitted & how**

In total 33 schools and community groups took part in the project. One primary school was so inspired that they took on the theme of the 'Empty Chair' as their topic for the term. The entire school then visited the museum to see their chairs on display,

enabling children to further understand the meaning of the project. Further evidence of how the project inspired others can be found in the supporting evidence.

Several of the chairs were reserved by relatives of the soldiers, who were grateful for the respectful way their family member was remembered. A local War Historian also helped these families discover more about their family history.

The museum benefitted greatly from the project; whilst it empowered the community to be involved in remembering an important part of our history, it encouraged visits to the museum not only by those who participated in the project, but also their friends and families. In turn the profile of the museum was raised and gained three school and two group visits the following January and February by participants of the project.

### **Development and Delivery**

The Development and Liaison Officer (DLO) coordinated the project and worked closely with a local War Historian, who had researched all 114 soldiers. The DLO, War Historian and team of volunteers put all 114 empty chair kits together ready for collection by participants in September.

### **Attendance**

The display, which ran from 3<sup>rd</sup> to 11<sup>th</sup> November attracted 1329 visitors, which reflects just how much the soldiers' sacrifice means to the Daventry community, 100 years on. Just under half of the total visitor figure represents an entire primary school and infant school, who took part in the project.

### **Budget**

The budget was sourced from Daventry Town Council's Museum exhibition budget:

<b>Item</b>	<b>Cost</b>
Printing	£21.00
Chair certificates	£112.00
Calligraphy	£100.00
Chair stickers	£25.00
Wood glue	£66.00
Chair kits (donated by local woodworker)	£0.00
Poppy pins & photos (donated by TRBL)	£0.00
	<b>Total: £324.00</b>

The museum team are very proud of the project, which has brought the Daventry community together. Never before has the museum worked with schools and groups on such a large scale. We received wonderful feedback from participants and visitors alike, with many groups asking to be involved in any future projects, and have organised return visits to the museum's new exhibitions.