

# Learning to feel well at Jamtli Museum: A case study

**Anna Hansen**

The Nordic Centre of Heritage Learning and Creativity (NCK), Sweden

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## Abstract

Approximately one-fourth of the population of Sweden will suffer from mental health problems at some point in their lives. This article shares a case study of collaboration between Jamtli Museum and a local hospital (K2) that aimed to provide adult learning opportunities for people with diverse mental health issues. Findings show some differences between how women and men experienced the visits, as well as a marked increase in participants' confidence, social skills and senses of well-being. New knowledge gained on historical agriculture, as well as skills through working experientially with animals, changed how participants viewed their own capabilities and competencies. As a result, cultural heritage organisations such as Jamtli need to be seen as important pedagogical sites that contribute in multiple ways to human well-being.

## Keywords

Mental health, cultural heritage, adult learning, well-being

## Introduction

Large parts of the population in the western world will suffer from some form of mental health disorder at some point in their lives. Mental health problems are understood by agencies such as the Mental Health Foundation as including depression, eating disorders, anxiety or panic attacks, schizophrenia and bipolar disorder, to name but a few. These illnesses can lead to social isolation, low self-esteem and even suicide. In the United Kingdom statistics show approximately 20% of the population in any year has problems (Mental Health Foundation, 2016) and the figure is the same in the US (National Institute of Mental Health, 2016). In Sweden

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### Corresponding author:

Anna Hansen, The Nordic Centre of Heritage Learning and Creativity (NCK), P.O. Box 709, 83128 Östersund, Sweden.

Email: [anna.hansen@nckkultur.org](mailto:anna.hansen@nckkultur.org)

between 20 and 40% of the population suffers from mental health problems at some point of their lives (Hjärnkoll, 2016).

A number of agencies are working to respond to this issue. In particular, a growing number of museums are equipping themselves to provide opportunities for people with mental health issues to develop and grow. One way they are doing this is through the development of networks of organisations such as the national alliance for museums, health and well-being in the UK or Art, culture and mental health, part of the Bergen municipality in Norway. In addition to these networks, there are a growing number of projects and events. One of these is the Arteffact project in Wales that uses material from museums and archives to inspire creativity and to promote mental well-being. Another event is 'Lys i mørket' (light in the dark) by the Preus museum in Norway. Their aim is to render visible the number of people who suffer from depression during the dark winter period of the year.

This article explores how one museum in Sweden, the Jamtli Museum in Ostersund, uses cultural heritage to create learning opportunities aimed to improve adult mental health. Jamtli's primary emphasis is in fact on lifelong learning, delivering a diversity of learning experiences to all adults. This case study specifically illustrates cooperation between Jamtli museum and the local hospital's unit for recovery and rehabilitation from mental health problems called K2. Learning in this case study is understood as broadly defined and seen as something that makes the individual grow and develop. It is about developing new skills, values, attitudes, self-knowledge, emotions and social competences. Learning is also about interaction, development and change. In this sense, it responds to or parallels the definition by the Arts Council England and their website entitled *Inspiring learning for all* (2016): 'Learning is a process of active engagement with experience; Learning is what people do when they want to make sense of the world; Learning leads to change, development and the desire to learn more'.

## Jamtli Museum

Jamtli museum is an indoor but mostly, a large open-air museum – or heritage centre. The outdoor area offers the opportunity to take part in a wide range of activities. Jamtli is made up of many buildings from different time periods, filled with objects from those periods. Visitors and staff can use the objects within the buildings to take part in activities or chores typical for the time period they represent. This creates an illusion of what daily life was like, thus giving insights into how life could have been in the past. The vision is that the visitors not just learn about the past, but gain a deeper understanding by experiencing and participating in the daily life of the people who lived a long time ago. There is also an aim to make visitors participate in order to learn practical skills, for example of cheese making or harvesting.

At Jamtli museum there is also a farm where the agricultural work is carried out in the same way as it was during the end of the 19th century. This includes the use of old agricultural machinery in the work in the fields and keeping traditional

breeds of animals and plants to make sure they do not become extinct but are maintained for future use and understanding. Since 2009 a group of people from K2 visits Jamtli once a week and participates in the daily work in the outdoor area, helping out with the animals, agricultural work or minor building projects such as fences, but they also visit exhibitions in the indoor area from time to time. The participants are also given the opportunity to come back to the museum on their own, free of charge. The staff at Jamtli uses the historical buildings and agriculture to engage the participants in various activities and to help them learn new skills, gain knowledge, change their attitudes and get inspired.

There are two basic principles that are important for this cooperation. First, activities offered need to be completely voluntary. If a participant simply wants to come along and watch the others, that is acceptable. If they wish to engage in a particular task of the agricultural work it is also possible to accommodate the K2 participants. As one participant put it: 'it is okay to come along to hug a cow', meaning there is no pressure on the participants to perform anything. What Jamtli offers, therefore, is a space where adults can simply walk about or sit in a lovely and calm environment or engage in the work with the animals. Second, it is essential that the work they do engage in is real work. They carry out proper tasks that need to be done. If the participants don't complete the tasks, the staff will do so. However, the things they engage in also have to be things that are not urgent or have to be completed at a certain time, so as not to create any pressure for the participants. This means that the participants partake in different activities, for instance planting or harvesting crops such as potatoes, mending fences, tending to the feet of the goats, washing the horses' tails, brushing the cows and other things that add value to historical agriculture and outdoor area.

The visits to Jamtli museum last approximately 2 h. The staff makes a plan a few months in advance in order to alert participants to what activities to expect on any given visit. The work follows the shifts of the year with planting in spring, harvesting in the autumn, tending to the animals throughout the year and, in the winter when there is less to do, an activity such as going around the area with horse and sleigh or to just sitting in one of the cottages making coffee over the open fire. If there are any wishes from the participants, if something unexpected turns up which requires the attention of the staff or if the weather is too bad to be outdoors, there is always flexibility built in to the plan so that it can be adapted to the needs of the participants. The staff from the museum and the staff from K2 know each other well after working together for several years. This has built up trust between them and makes the cooperation run smoothly. Both the museum and the hospital are engaged in this cooperation with the main objective being to improve the participants' health but there might also be other outcomes from the activities. Therefore, the questions that guided this case study were: What are the implications and contributions of these visits to people with mental health problems? What does it say about the value of the museum and these types of partnerships?

## **Learning as a framework**

As noted in 'Introduction' section, 'adult learning' is the framework adopted by Jamtli Museum, and this provides the analytical lens for this case study. Learning takes place in many different situations and is an ongoing process where people add new impressions and experiences to previous ones. It is a process that has impact on the person's identity (Kelly, 2011). This means that personal development and learning things about oneself that leads to better health and well-being can be seen as a form of learning.

Mezirow (1990) argued that learning was based on experiences and that an important part of learning is how you perceive causality. He coined the idea of 'meaning perspectives', by which he meant the ability to evaluate, socialise, structure and thus make meaning of the world. This leads to understandings and expectations about how the world works, how events and actions are interlinked and what causes and effects to expect from a particular behaviour or action. Mezirow further felt that learning was a process that created new interpretations of the world.

John Dewey's theories also focussed on the belief that experience was integral to learning, for this was from where all one's impressions come – the senses. Secondary experience comes from reflections and conclusions drawn from these primary experiences, which enable people to understand consequences, and see and make connections (Hartman, Roth, & Rönström, 2003). This develops into habits of thinking and acting, which can be firmly set in adulthood, and difficult to change (Dewey, 2005).

One goal of the activities in the case study was to provide opportunities for people to create new interpretations of themselves and new patterns of behaviours that would enhance their sense of agency and well-being. Mezirow (1990) wrote about this as 'psychic distortions', meaning that someone has learnt to expect other reactions and results than the ones they actually get or that he/she feels strong pressure or anxiety in certain circumstances, due to prior experiences. This means they need to learn to distinguish between 'irrational and rational feelings and to challenge distorting assumptions' (p. 11). The role of the 'teacher' or in the case of this study, the staff, is to help the learner reassess his/her presuppositions and to reflect upon the habits and experiences that make up the meaning perspectives (Mezirow, 1990). Learning is thus an ongoing process and an interaction with the surrounding world which gives us experiences from which we can form habits, get meaning perspectives and reform our way of thinking. Learning is something social that happens in interaction with other people and it is a transformative process, changing the views of the world and the views of oneself.

Hooper-Greenhill (2006) has written that learning in museums, as sites of history, story, objects or artefacts have a unique potential to create and provide different kinds of learning opportunities that cannot found elsewhere in other types of pedagogical institutions. Learning in museums is unpredictable, open-ended and individually directed and specifically different from the formal learning system. There are two types of learning that takes place in museums. One is informal

learning and the other, non-formal education. Informal learning is self-directed, non-intentional and not organised around clear objectives and outcomes or goals. Non-formal education, on the other hand, is more intentional and often organised around specific objectives and activities and lead by an educator. The learner comes to a non-formal experience specifically to learn from organised access to resources, experiential opportunities and so forth (OECD, 2016). The participants with mental health problems who took part in our study did not necessarily come to Jamtli to learn or to be educated. Most just came for entertainment and enjoyment. They came to a place where few if any demands would be put upon them, unless they themselves wanted that. Nevertheless, as museums are first and foremost sites of education and learning, and when the participants were asked, as I take this up more below, most were able to articulate several important types of things they had learned as a result of their visit. In other words, learning may have been intentional, but it did occur simply because this is what museums do/offer. As such, it makes them important spaces for learning, although they are not often viewed as such in the field of adult education. Having said this, it is important to remember that the staff at Jamtli is trained to create situations where informal learning will occur as well as to provide non-formal education experiences. A primary aim of Jamtli's lifelong learning agenda is to make the site interesting and to encourage a sense of curiosity to explore and to find out more whether on one's own, or in a group.

## **Well-being through culture**

The arts have been used as tools of education and learning in many types of institutions. In particular, the employment of the arts in hospitals and other care settings has been in play for several years now. In Britain the Department of Health and Arts Council England (2007) published a prospectus concerning the benefits of using arts for improving health. They found that arts in healthcare shortened the time the patients needed to be in care, increased the well-being of patients, improved the quality of the patients' environment and improved the communication between patients and care staff. Similar initiatives to use arts have also been implemented in other countries. There are studies on dance, art, music and theatre related to health (for example research presented at the website *Den kulturella hjärnan*). Other studies focussed on participation in cultural activities, for example going to the cinema, the theatre, concerts or being part of choir and how that leads to better health amongst older people. The report *Better health for older people* (Berleen, 2003) states that those participating in cultural activities such as these have significantly better health than those who do not. But this report also points out that those participating in cultural activities usually have a higher educational level, which could also be a factor that influences the results, and that people with poorer health cannot participate in cultural activities because of their health. Thus, it is difficult to determine what is the cause and what is the effect.

Other studies focus on the physical effects of culture, trying to measure different functions in the body and how these change when participating in a

cultural activity. Bojner Horwitz (as cited in Ringmar (2013)) stresses how a mixture of cultural activities can be beneficial to women with mental health problems. In particular, enjoyable activities can change the level of hormones in the blood and also create changes in the brain, which are positive. Bojner Horwitz (2011) has found that acting out strong emotions in theatre settings will decrease stress-related pain. Further, Theorell (2009) has shown that singing and listening to music changes the heart rhythm, which can have an important calming effect as well as an increase in levels of hormones that are good for the immune system. What these studies make clear is that engaging in culture is beneficial to health, and that active, creative participation is most beneficial. However, these studies do not say anything about cultural heritage or in particular, the use or value of cultural heritage sites such as Jamtli.

In our case study the participants engaged not only with cultural heritage, but also with agriculture and animals. And there are a few studies that show engagement with nature and animals has a positive impact on health (e.g. Jordbruksverket, 2014; LRF, 2010). For example, Norling's (2002) findings argue that exposure to nature – being out in nature, looking at landscape paintings or even simply looking out through a window – can lead to lower blood pressure, a decrease in the need for painkillers and shortens the time a patient needs to be in care. He also shows how a combination of physical activity and social and mental stimulation is most effective and suggests using animals to achieve this combination. For example, having a dog can lead to increased physical activity but it equally provides opportunities for social interactions with other dog owners. Norling also states that nature and animals have a better impact than culture in stimulating our social, physical and psychological needs, since nature and animals touches upon all these aspects while culture, according to Norling, only provides mental stimulation.

Berget, Ekeberg and Brasstad (2008) who also research experiences of nature or participation in agricultural work have found that bringing people together as a group enhances social skills, something health officials argue is important to people with mental health problems. They also found participation in 'real work' experiences encourage confidence and build self-esteem. None of the studies above, however, focus on heritage sites such as Jamtli and the contributions it can make. This has been changed, it is not what I wrote. What I wrote is that cultural heritage sites are important places for adult education, but they are often neglected when looking at mental health issues.

## **The case study methodology**

This research can best be described as a case study, as it was 'bound' to a specific time, place and situation. Merriam (1988) contends that case study research is important because it focuses 'on discovery, insight, and understanding from the perspectives of those being studied offers the greatest promise of making significant contributions to the knowledge base and practice of education' (p. 3). Further,

a case study can be characterised as particularistic, meaning that it looks into a specific time, place, group or phenomenon. It is also descriptive and not generalisable to, in our case, all cultural heritage sites in Sweden. A case study is also heuristic, which means that it contributes to new understandings and new meaning of phenomenon. The phenomenon in question in this study was how the participants in the Jamtli setting experienced the museum and its implications in their lives.

This case study emanates from activities that the staff of Jamtli organised in collaboration with a local hospital, K2, to intentionally provide participants with opportunities to improve their health and well-being. As noted earlier in this article, the questions that guided this study were: What are the implications and contributions of visits to Jamtli to people with mental health problems? What does it say about the value of the museum and these types of partnerships? We were also interested in understanding what the key activities or elements were that encouraged their senses of well-being. The research aimed to provide insights into, and understanding of, the value of a museum's pedagogical and engagement work to people with mental illnesses.

This case study was based on interviews with 11 participants, three men and eight women. Since many of the participants had difficulties with social interactions and settings, we left the selection process of participants for the study to the staff at K2. In other words, their mental ability to participate in this study was assessed by medical staff and not museum staff. All of the participants had taken part in the activities at Jamtli at some point during the year preceding the interviews.

In the interviews we asked questions about knowledge, skills, emotions and personal development in order to capture many different aspects of learning and understand those that were most significant to the participants and what the learning outcomes of the activities were for the participants as well as for the staff. The questions asked in the interviews were structured around the 'Generic Learning Outcomes' which is a system developed in Britain to measure learning outcomes in cultural heritage settings. This system identifies five main fields of learning: Knowledge and understanding; Skills; Attitudes and values; Enjoyment, inspiration and creativity; Behaviour and progression (Arts Council England, 2016a, 2016b). The questions were open ended in order to let the participants elaborate the parts that were most important to them. This also helped to identify what were the most prominent fields of learning and if that differed between different individuals.

In addition to participant interviews, three staff from the hospital and three staff from the museum were interviewed. These were all the staff involved at Jamtli and at K2; they were staff members who were most frequently involved in these activities. They were asked questions concerning how they perceived the development and reactions of the participants – who they knew well through their work – to augment the data we received from the participants' about their own subjective experiences and learning. Staff were also asked about their own learning

experiences from the collaboration and the activities. In addition, we used observations of the participants during their visits to the museum, in order to assess interactions between participants and staff. The participants and staff were also asked to answer a question about what they appreciated the most at Jamtli during that day at the end of the visit. Participation in the study was completely voluntary. At no time were participants asked about their particular mental problems, as the research focused on their experiences of the activities and what they meant to them.

Notes were taken by hand during all the interviews and then transcribed. The comments and answers were then analysed through the lenses of the five fields of learning in the Generic Learning Outcome framework. Comments and answers falling outside these categories were also marked. When grouped together the answers conveyed different patterns and similarities, which are described in more detail below. It also became evident that there were some gender differences to be seen in the answers, which led to further questions concerning gender to the staff.

## **Findings of the study**

We found in general that the visits to the museum had an uplifting impact on most of the participants. Some participants claimed these activities have saved their lives and hence they felt very positive about the experience. These participants had been taking part in visits to Jamtli for more than a year. Other participants had only taken part a few visits and determined that it was not for them, although they could still see the benefit the visits had to others. Only one out of the 11 people interviewed stated that the visits had not made any difference to him/her, although the reason was not elaborated upon.

In the following section, I outline the results of the case study. The various activities at Jamtli had different kinds of impacts and for different reasons. While some experienced less anxiety and felt calmer others became more sociable. They acquired new information and knowledge, skills, but also a new sense of themselves. The interviews with the staff confirmed many of the statements from the participants giving us a quite clear picture of the benefits of these activities.

## **Gender differences**

The study shows that these activities are often more appealing to women than to men. The hospital staff admitted that there were always more women than men who wanted to participate in these outings. The male participants interviewed were also more critical of the activities than the female participants. One man was extremely sceptical and stated that he had not in fact enjoyed the visits much. Another said he appreciated participating in order to take photos, since he is a keen photographer, but he did not really enjoy taking part in the activities offered. The third man however, was very enthusiastic and claimed the activities were life changing for him. The male participants also expressed wishes for more focus on physically demanding work, for example building projects or harvesting.

All the women interviewed were positive and expressed that they had thoroughly enjoyed engaging with the animals and the agriculture aspects of Jamtli. In fact, for many the animals were the primary reason for their participation. Even the ones who had not participated regularly claimed they found the activities rewarding. The interviews with the staff from K2 confirmed these gender differences. They have noticed that more women than men are interested in visiting the museum, even though the benefits they have perceived are the same for men and women. The gender differences, according to the staff interviews, lie primarily in the appeal of the activities, which is greater for women than for men. Many of the participants described the visits as ‘the highlight of the week’ and how these visits added ‘pleasure to everyday life’.

### **Calm through nature**

The outdoor area at Jamtli contains several historical buildings and it is a calm and peaceful place, which was noted by many participants as important. When working in public with the historical interpretation mobile phones are not permitted among the staff, which one participant felt was a good as it contributed to the calm atmosphere. Another participant says that ‘you had another pace’ meaning that at the end of the 19th century there appeared to be a much slower pace to life, and the historical agriculture activities at the museum brought one into that pace. This slower pace allowed the participants the opportunity to slow down as well, which contrasts to the outside hurried and hectic lives and encounters. Other participant spoke of the calming effect of the animals themselves, one of them saying: ‘just hearing the sound of hooves on the tarmac is soothing’. Several of the participants in fact had severe anxiety problems and for them, this sense of calmness of the environment was essential. Nearly all participants stated they ‘feel happier when leaving than they were before arriving’. Many participants related engagement with the environment with growth and learning. One aspect of the visit was to provide the participants with a better understanding of daily life during the latter part of 19th century, how a farm was run, what the buildings looked like and what tools were used and why. Mezirow (1990) might call this a change in ‘meaning perspective’, meaning the participants have gained a new perspective on what they can do to increase their sense of well-being and what they are capable of. Using cultural heritage – by showing a calmer way of life from the end of the 19th century, visiting beautiful buildings from different time periods and avoiding modern technology – is a good way of improving mental health.

### **Physical health**

It was not only mental health that was affected by the museum experience but also physical health. Two participants noted how beneficial it was just walking to Jamtli and the physical aspects of the work they did upon arrival. They particularly appreciated how the activities made them ‘take exercise without exercising’, meaning that their bodies moved a lot without them having to be fixated on getting

exercise as the main purpose. One of the participants claimed that the effect of the visits had really been remarkable in terms of his/her ulcer. He/she argued that as soon as he/she 'stepped through the gate the pain in my stomach disappeared, only to reappear when leaving Jamtli again'. Another person stated that exercise through the activities seemed to be helping him/her lose weight. These examples of how physical activity, combined with the mental stimulation, can lead to different forms or at least perceptions of well-being. This is in accordance with Norling's findings of the benefits of engaging with animals, since that gives both exposure to nature, social interaction and physical exercise.

## **Social skills**

The visits to Jamtli lead to changes within the participants and in their behaviour. Many of them describe these visits as very important in their process of recovery. 'Jamtli was the foundation in my recovery', one participant claims, meaning that the visits to Jamtli was a very important factor in his/her process of gaining good mental health again. Another participant says that the development from not being able to get out of bed a year earlier to actually having a work experience placement was '80 per cent Jamtli's doing'. A third participant says that 'I would probably have locked myself up at home without Jamtli', meaning that the visits to Jamtli is what lured him/her to leave home and actually go out to do something. Several of the participants described that they had difficulties in interacting with other people and with social contacts. Participants found the interactions with animals easier than with people, and that is what drew many of them to visit Jamtli. Once they were part of the group of visitors to the museum they began to interact with the other people in the group. One of the participants described this by saying, 'the animals make me come out of my comfort zone and start interacting with people' and another participant says that 'you create a desire to do things and to work by starting in a place like that'.

The staff is of course very important to the success of Jamtli's work. In fact, the non-judgemental attitude and the kindness of Jamtli's staff was brought forth as important by several of the participants. One participant described how he/she at first did not dare to go into the staffroom to have coffee with the others, but after participating a few times and getting to know the staff at Jamtli the participant now feels quite at home there. 'For every new person you get to know you get closer to getting to know even more people' says one participant, feeling proud of the social skills acquired. Here the staff had the role of changing the participants' view of themselves, slowly making them comfortable with social interaction, overcoming their fears and feeling trust and confidence. They affect the second experience, in Dewey's (2005) terms. Dewey claimed that habits were the core of human nature. Habits are formed from people's inner drives in interplay with the social setting and can be changed or affected by new thoughts and experiences. However, habits are slow and hard to change, so changing the way you think and feel takes time and has to be learnt through new social settings and challenges.

In this case the participants are challenged to take part in a social setting, which will change their habits of withdrawing or feeling anxiety. There are, it appears, two different needs that are met by the visits. The first one is the need some of the participants have for a calm environment, without stress and pressure. The other one is the need to improve social skills and start having social interaction to break isolation. Both these needs are important to address and visiting a museum and engaging in activities is definitely a way to do this. This certainly confirms Hooper-Greenhill's statement that museums are challenging the notion of what a museum is and redefining their role in society and culture and to have 'a new approach to museum audiences' (Hooper-Greenhill, 2006, p. 1). It also confirms that museums can play an important role to people and make a difference in people's lives.

## Confidence

Another change that participants experience is in attitudes and values. Since they are in a group they learn to cooperate and to be considerate of one another, but they also learn to step forward and have the courage to try new things. Almost all the participants describe how they or another member of the group sometimes cry and hug one of the animals when they are feeling sad. Or they need to go away and be alone for a while. The other participants learn to accept other people's needs and understand their different stages of recovery. Their attitudes towards each other and towards themselves change and the acceptance they feel from the others helps to empower them. 'No one has opinions or thinks badly (of you)' says one of the participants, while another one concludes that 'No one looks down on you if you fall apart'. With the acceptance from others and the increased feeling of being competent, which comes with increased skills and knowledge, the participants feel more secure. The social interaction is, according to Dewey, an important part of human life because other people's reaction to our actions is what forms our thinking and habits (Dewey, 2005). To learn about other people's needs as well as your own is thus an important learning outcome. One person gives an example of a changed attitude. The person learnt that he/she needs to be firm and show confidence and determination around the animals. These skills concerning how to behave in a confident way could then be transferred to other situations, so that the participant could be more firm, determined and confident in other contexts.

A few of the participants also pointed out the changed attitudes of Jamtli's staff and visitors. By engaging in the museum's activities and meeting several of the staff – not only those directly involved in the activities but many others too – they feel that they influence the staff's attitudes towards mental health issues. By being at the museum, 'proving' that they are normal people and not someone to be afraid of, they will contribute to decreasing prejudice and ignorance. The Swedish government has a plan for improving work with mental health. The aim is to provide better healthcare for people with mental health problems and to make sure these problems are acknowledged when people are treated for physical conditions which may be connected to their mental status (Regeringskansliet, 2012). The government

also points out that people with mental health problems are often stigmatised and met by a degrading and sometimes offensive attitude. This attitude in society needs to change in order to prevent discrimination and improve people's inclusion into social and working life situations (Regeringskansliet, 2012). Changing the attitudes of the staff and visitors at the museum is thus a way of improving how people with mental health problems are met and treated in society; this improves the confidence and self-esteem of the people with mental health problems.

## **Knowledge and skills**

In addition to new ways of thinking and feeling about themselves, the Jamtli participants also learnt new knowledge and skills. The participants were involved in agriculture as it used to be a hundred years ago. Jamtli's farm is small scale with few animals that all have names and are seen as individuals. There is no modern machinery, everything is done in the same way as was the custom in the end of the 19th century. Even if there are many visitors to the museum, there are always parts of the outdoor area which are quieter, which means the K2 participants can find a calm spot if they want. To experience this and through discussions and comparisons with modern farms, half of the participants point out that their attitudes towards agriculture have changed. They understand the difficulties of many small-scale farms, while at the same time they get a firm conviction that small-scale farming is much better for the environment and the animals.

The most obvious learning outcome when it comes to facts and understanding is the increase in knowledge about animals. Many of the visits include taking care of different kinds of animals in different ways. Jamtli has goats, cows, horses, hens and rabbits which all have to be cared for. This gives both practical training, which increases the skills of handling animals, and theoretical knowledge about how to care for animals, diseases they might get, what they eat and how much, etc. In addition, the observations of the activities showed that many of the conversations within the group concerned animals and pets. The increased knowledge is then often reinforced when other visitors to the museum ask questions about the animals. When the participants are able to answer the questions their self-confidence is increased. One of the participants expressed that 'you realise that you know more than you think', meaning that they acquire a lot of knowledge without thinking about it as learning. The learning is informal because the participants' objective is to have to good time with the animals, rather than learning about them, but when asked questions they realise that they have learnt many new things. The practical aspects of their work teach them how to handle different kinds of animals, how to behave around them and many other things. One of the participants says that 'to do practical work and to feel that you are needed is really positive'. To feel that they are needed and that the tasks they carry out are real is very important to the participants' confidence. All participants but one believe that their contribution is a great help to Jamtli's staff. The staff had the time to do what is necessary, but the participants' contributions will add something extra, for example extra care for

the animals. This strengthens Berget et al.'s (2008) assertions that being involved in real work is very important since it increases the feeling of being needed and valuable.

## **Changed behaviour**

As we have seen, the participants report that they learn a lot from the visits to Jamtli – anything from confidence and social skills to handling animals and facts about them. The staff at Jamtli and K2 also spoke of changes in the participants as they take part in the activities. They claimed that the participants' attitudes towards themselves seemed to change, as they gained new meaning and perspectives. By participating in real work they get motivated to move on in their lives and engage in other activities too. Several of the participants have, for example, moved on to 'work experience placements', both at Jamtli and in other places. These places are for people who need to get back into the labour market, to enable them to do so slowly without putting too much pressure on them to start with. They become more active and their psychic distortions disappear or are improved, that is, they learn to expect that they are capable and competent and can do things in their lives. The environment at Jamtli is different from that of the hospital, which the hospital staff think is a good thing. The environment is calm and the museum staff is used to interacting with and provide learning for different groups, which means they are hospitable, flexible and interact with the participants in a good way. The staff at Jamtli felt proud to be able to make a difference for the participants. When they hear comments from the participants such as 'thanks to the visit to Jamtli I didn't have to be admitted to hospital tonight' they get a lot of positive energy and feel that they contribute to the well-being of the participants. To be able to make life better for other people is rewarding work. The staff also contributed to learning about cultural history by answering the participants' questions about the historical agriculture, animals, the old buildings, the tools and other things.

It is not only the participants that learn new things, but also the staff – both at Jamtli and at K2. The staff at K2 learnt many of the same things as the participants – about historical agriculture, animals and the buildings in the area. The staff at Jamtli also learnt a lot about mental health. They feel they have increased their knowledge about different disorders and how to approach people with different needs. All staff feel they develop and change their behaviour through the interaction. Making two different sectors meet and learn from each other seems to be rewarding for all parties involved.

## **Conclusions**

This study shows that all participants have increased their self-esteem, some have broken their social isolation because of the activities and others have found the courage to go back to work or change their career, by starting off being active in the visits to the museum, learning confidence and social skills. This reflects

Mezirow's (1990) theories of learning as a transformative process that changes the way people think. The participants had what Mezirow calls psychic distortions, which means that they did not expect to be able to do things or to interact with people in the beginning, they felt stress and anxiety, but this has changed during the visits to the museum. They have changed their perspectives, thinking in new ways about themselves and what they are capable of, interacting socially and expecting to be successful in things they take on. This all has to do with learning; they have learnt a new way of thinking, enjoyment, health and well-being. The learning that takes place is mainly informal, since the participants' aim with the activity primarily is to have a good time in order to improve their health, not to learn. Apart from reaching the aim of the visit (improved mental health) a lot of other learning takes place. They learn about animals, both theoretically and practically, they learn about history, they learn about environment and food production. They all stress the calm and pleasant environment of the museum as beneficial to them. The historical agriculture, the old buildings they can enter and the slower pace is greatly appreciated by all of the participants. To conclude, this cooperation between a hospital and a museum seems to be successful. This case study concerns an outdoor area and work with agriculture, but of course each museum can build on their potential and contribute to mental health and learning through aspects of cultural heritage.

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