

# *The Megaphone*

*August 25, 2011*

**meg·a·phone** [**meg-uh-fohn**] –*noun*

1. a cone-shaped device for magnifying or directing the voice, chiefly used in addressing a large audience out of doors or in calling to someone at a distance.

[www.dictionary.com](http://www.dictionary.com)

Hello everyone,

In this month's Megaphone we talk about developing a museum in a suitcase based on your museum's collection.

I'd like to take this opportunity to acknowledge two people who helped me greatly with this article: Sandra Massey, for her knowledge and expertise on the development of Reminiscence Kits and Connie LePage, Heritage and Exhibits Programmer from Greater Sudbury Public Library for her information on developing Educational Kits.

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A Museum in a Suitcase seems to be a hot topic around museums all over Saskatchewan. One of the main questions that always comes up is how do we develop our own? Here are the steps that will help you to develop your own museum in a suitcase:

## 1.) Choose the type of kit/suitcase you would like to develop

- Reminiscence Kit – Reminiscence kits are developed to illicit memories and encourage conversation, they are most used with the elderly and have proven to be therapeutic and can improve an individual's sense of well-being. They are often useful for people who suffer from Alzheimer's or other forms of dementia. These kits can be altered for community groups, families, youth at risk, seniors and those with mental or physical disabilities.
- Educational Kit – Educational kits are specifically targeted toward the younger generation. It is your opportunity to bring parts of the museum into the classroom. These kits engage students and start conversation as they provide a hands on opportunity for students to physically touch artifacts. These kits can be altered for each grade level and should tie into the current curriculum (Social Studies, History and Geography).

## 2.) Brainstorm and Discuss

Both kits involve sitting down and discussing "what is it that we want to accomplish here?" Here are a few things that need to be discussed:

- What are our goals and objectives for developing this kit? (This will help you to later evaluate if your kit was a success).
- What are the potential problems that could arise when developing our kit?
- What objects could we include that will encourage conversation and socialization? (For Reminiscence Kits this involves thinking of items which also will illicit memories).

### 3.) Choose a Theme

Choose a theme based on your museums collection.

Examples of themes:

- Reminiscence Themes, kits developed by Sandra Massey for the Regina Plains Museum: “School Days”, “The Kitchen”, “War Years”, and “Fun Games”.
- Educational Themes, kits developed by Connie LePage for Greater Sudbury Public Library: “Toy box from Grandma’s Attic” (pioneer toys), “Money Talks: The history of Canadian Money” and “How we communicate”. They also chose to develop a variety of kits based on the history of the area: Sudbury mining, farming, logging and railroads.

### 4.) Select your Artifacts

Select artifacts based on the theme that you chose. A few things to keep in mind are:

- Be sure to choose artifacts that are in a condition that can be handled, that are poorly documented, or that you have duplicates of. That way if the artifact gets lost or broken it would not be a significant loss to the collection.
- Choose artifacts that can fit in a suitcase/kit.
- For Reminiscence Kits choose items that are not overly large so that they can be handled by the elderly.
- Consider using a few photographs, these can be especially useful in the educational kits.

### 5.) Assemble your artifacts into a kit or suitcase.

Items you will need:

- Hard-sided suitcase, preferably with ties to secure contents before closing
- Polyethylene foam, 2 pieces, each ½ the depth of the suitcase so that top and bottom will fill the suitcase
- Matt knife to cut out the shape of each object into foam of bottom half of suitcase
- Acid free folders, polyethylene covers as needed (depending on artifacts chosen)

\* Suggestion – If possible, purchase a suitcase with wheels. This can help if you are traveling to multiple locations with your suitcase.

### 6.) Final tips and things to think about when you are developing your kit.

- Reminiscence Kit – Set up a meeting with educators, therapists and other health professionals, social workers and/or the police to start the conversation. This can help you to discover the variety of ways your museum collection can benefit those in the community.
- Educational Kit – Develop classroom activities to go along with your kit. The Greater Sudbury Public Library developed a slideshow presentation (Powerpoint) to go along with their kits. As well, think about developing a teacher’s package with follow-up activities and a feedback form (List questions such as: What worked? What did not? How can we improve our kits?)

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## The Value of Reminiscence Kits

Sandra Masey tells of Recreation Therapist Joanne Bracken, who has used the Reminiscence Kits. She says that Joanne repeatedly testifies to the value of Reminiscence Kits:

*“Reminiscence Kits are invaluable to our Reminiscence Therapy Program. The kits are a*

*powerful tool that has increased the benefits to our groups. With the use of the artifacts and photographs within the kits, not only are we discussing the past but also we are triggering memories by touching, smelling, seeing, and experiencing those memories all over again. You can just see the faces of our participants light up when we begin to unpack the kit. The recollection is immediate and the memories just begin to flow."*

Joanne also told Sandra of a client who suffered from Alzheimer's and who had been non-communicative for a couple of years. Her daughter participated in the program the day the Reminiscence Kit was used and she had a conversation with her mother for the first time in two years. As the woman held an object in her hand she began to speak, and while she held the object, the conversation continued.

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### **Additional Resources**

Connie LePage (GSPL) found this book useful when developing her Educational Kits: *The Evolution of an Exhibit: Community Museums and Travelling Exhibits* written for the Ontario Museum Association by Ruth Freeman and Paul Martinovich.

This handbook offers practical advice and real-life examples for developing, producing or borrowing travelling exhibits. It has great information for a small or large staff and provides helpful tips and comments from museum professionals on their experiences with travelling exhibits.

This book is available to borrow from our Resource Library! Please fill out a [Resource Request](#) or contact the MAS office by phone (toll free in sk) 1-866-568-7386 or by email [mas@saskmuseums.org](mailto:mas@saskmuseums.org).

Descriptions of Greater Sudbury Public Library Educational Kits are also available on their website: [GSPL Museum in a Suitcase Program](#)

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### **Museum in a Suitcase Success Story!**

About a month ago MAS received this email from Jackie Rathgeber from the Melville Heritage Museum:

*"On behalf of the Melville Heritage Museum, I would like to thank you for the support of MAS. We got the idea for "Museum in a Suitcase" from one of the other members (I'm not sure which one).*

*On July 12, myself and one other volunteer, Donna Mucha and our summer student, Kayla McCutcheon, took the "Museum in a Suitcase" to make a presentation at St. Paul's Lutheran Care Home in Melville. We made the presentation to a group of residents and the Day Wellness clients. We took items which would be easily identified and could be handled by the residents. After asking the residents to identify the item, we then asked them to share their personal stories in relation to the item. This was a very rewarding and enjoyable experience for all of us.*

*After the presentation, we were invited to stay and share coffee and cookies with the residents. This gave us an extra opportunity to talk with the residents on a one-to-one basis. This was such a success that we will be making another presentation in August with different articles. Thank you for this great idea.”*

Does your museum have a good idea, program or activity that you would like featured in a future issue of *Megaphone*? You can even feature a previous program that you felt was successful and might be beneficial to other museums. This is your chance to share your museum’s great ideas with the museum community.

*Megaphone* is released on the last Thursday of every month so if you contact us by the middle of the month we can make sure that your item makes it into the *Megaphone*. We can even work on it with you. You can give us content as well as pictures and together we can create something you are happy with.

Feel free to contact me, Brittany Knudsen, the Communications Coordinator by phone at (306) 780-9451 or by email at [communications@saskmuseums.org](mailto:communications@saskmuseums.org).

