

Tackling Loneliness in Older Age – The Role of the Arts



David Cutler

The Baring Foundation

Campaign to
EndLoneliness
CONNECTIONS IN OLDER AGE

About the Baring Foundation

The Baring Foundation is an independent grant maker founded in 1969. Since then it has given over £100 million primarily to strengthen voluntary organisations in order to tackle discrimination and disadvantage. Part of this funding supports the arts. Since 2010 this has focussed on arts with older people.

About the Campaign to End Loneliness

The Campaign to End Loneliness's vision is for fewer people to feel lonely in older age and for more people to maintain their friendships and connections through times of life change. Led by a coalition of organisations: Age UK Oxfordshire, Independent Age, Sense, Manchester City Council and WRVS and is funded by the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation; our campaigns draw on research and practice from across the UK and are delivered through a small core team in collaboration with a wide range of organisations.

About the Author

David Cutler is the Director of the Baring Foundation.

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Foreword

In the UK we have an ageing population made up of a diverse group of people who still have much to offer. At the Baring Foundation we believe that there is intrinsic value in engaging the talent, experience and enthusiasm of older people in the creative arts and the pursuit of cultural activities. We want to promote investment in this area and to demonstrate positive artistic and social outcomes. So far we have funded a broad range of participative arts practice some of which is highlighted in the pages that follow. Despite there being much cutting edge good practice, the arts and older people has been a largely neglected area for funders – whether public, private or corporate.

There are many bodies providing community services and support that tackle the social care needs of older people, from befriending and circles of support to day care and lunch clubs. These are vital and there are fears that many will be tested by the increasingly challenging funding climate. Prevention works and reduces downstream health and social care costs. But older people need access to a broad range of community activities to help stave off loneliness – from faith groups to leisure, from the arts to fitness and outdoor pursuits, to education and learning, to hobbies and clubs. Older people also need access to reliable transport, safe environments and community spaces.

In this rich mix of community activity, the arts can break down barriers and inspire, they can encourage people to try, sometimes for the first time in their lives, new activities. They can give voice to the previously voiceless. Through the arts older people can build and grow their confidence and feel valued. There can be enormous social benefits - creating a 'look forward to' moment in the week, bringing people together and fostering new friendships.

Sadly much of our professional life is 'silo-ed'. Older people's charities and care suppliers may be very familiar with health and social care commissioning but rarely if ever cross paths with arts organisations and artists. Yet all of us understand that older

people are as diverse as you or I and have to be engaged with as individuals who want choice and control over their lives. We need to find more opportunities to bring together the people and organisations working with older people to share good practice and build common understanding. We need to understand better how to reach the most isolated in our communities. We need to see how the arts can be embedded in other services and settings and be part of the day to day routine. We need to understand the expertise of those who care for older people and consider how their needs are also met. We need to understand the confidence it takes to simply cross the threshold and embark on new activities. We need better diversity of provision that recognises gender differences, cultural differences and our different preferences for personal expression. And we need to respect the preferences of those who prefer to watch from the side-lines or do not wish to take part and those who choose solitude.

This report demonstrates the passion we have for the arts and older people, gives a window to the variety and quality of the arts undertaken and highlights the skills of the artists that lead the work. I hope that the voice of older people comes through the art here in all its eclectic, technicolour glory.

Janet Morrison

Trustee

Baring Foundation

Chief Executive

Independent Age

Founder member

The Campaign to End Loneliness

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Photo courtesy of Creative Art East.



Key messages

- Loneliness is a pressing issue among older people because of changes that occur in our older lives that puts us at risk of loneliness. Over 1 million people over 65 are lonely.
- Loneliness correlates strongly with other problems and is associated with poor physical and mental health.
- Older people need a broad range of opportunities and activities to help tackle loneliness. These can include care and befriending support, but just as important are opportunities that connect them to their communities, such as faith, learning, fitness, leisure and cultural activities.
- The arts are an effective way to tackle loneliness but can be overlooked by older people's services.
- There are many good examples of arts work with older people including those living with dementia and in care homes.
- The arts exemplify the 'five ways to wellbeing': connect; be active; keep learning, take notice and give.
- Feeling valued, creative expression, using skills and engaging with other older people all build friendships and enhance feelings of well being which strengthens resilience in tough times.
- Commissioners and organisations serving older people should support the arts as part of a spectrum of activities to tackle loneliness and poor quality of life in older age.
- Artists and arts organisations should be alive to the social dimension of their practice in working with older people.

The purpose of this report

The Baring Foundation and the Campaign to End Loneliness have come together to promote the case for the arts as a powerful tool to tackle the scourge of loneliness among older people. We intend that this report should be relevant to a wide range of people who work with older people: commissioners of health and social care services; members of health and wellbeing boards; managers running residential and day care centres; artists and arts organisations.

It begins with a short essay looking at the scale and impact of loneliness among older people which argues that the arts are under appreciated as a means to tackle the problem. It concludes with some practical actions for this activity to be increased and a list of resources.

But the majority of this report, and the most important part of it, is an appended series of ten case studies drawn from some of the arts organisations currently funded by the Baring Foundation. These illustrate some of the many ways in which the arts can make a difference: in rural locations or in the inner city, in a residential care home, a community or an arts venue, through reinventing the tradition of the tea dance for the 21st century or in a major new festival.

What is loneliness?

Although loneliness and isolation are connected they are separate concepts. Loneliness is a subjective state with a number of forms. For example, 'social loneliness' is the absence of a social network or a broad group of friends, neighbours and colleagues. While 'emotional loneliness' is the absence of a significant other with whom a close emotional attachment is formed.¹ Loneliness can be a chronic condition which is exacerbated with age or a condition which flares up in later life in response to life changes such as bereavement. It can be difficult to measure.

In contrast, social isolation is an objective state, measurable by the number of contacts a person has. Although the terms are often used interchangeably they do remain distinct from each other. Social isolation often contributes to loneliness, but does not guarantee it.

So broadly, loneliness can be described as the gap a person feels between the quality and quantity of social interactions they have compared with the interactions they would like or expect. Loneliness can affect people irrespective of age, or class or background but can be triggered by key transitions in older age – the onset of major or chronic illness, sensory or cognitive impairment, becoming a long term carer, bereavement, moving away from family and friends or going into hospital or moving into sheltered housing or care homes settings. In addition, the availability of local facilities and amenities (shops, post offices, libraries, pharmacies, cafes, pubs and parks), transport, perceptions of safety and freedom from crime can all effect an individual's ability and readiness to get out and about and maintain their social connections.

How prevalent is loneliness among older people and why does it matter?

Over several decades research has consistently indicated that 6-13 per cent of older people feel lonely often or always. An increasing percentage report feeling lonely 'sometimes'.² Recent estimates suggest that more than one million people aged over 65 often or always feel lonely.³

Key risk factors include: being over 80; on a low income; in poor physical or mental health; living alone; in isolated rural or deprived urban communities. The scale of loneliness and isolation among older people is disturbing:

- 12 per cent of older people feel trapped in their own home;
- 6 per cent leave their house less than once a week and around 200,000 do not get out of their flat or home at all;

- 17 per cent are in contact with family, friends and neighbours less than once a week, 11 per cent less than once a month;⁴
- In 2010, 49 per cent of those aged over 75 in Great Britain lived alone.⁵

Given the scale of this problem there is a clear and compelling moral case for seeking to reduce loneliness among older people. But beyond this loneliness correlates with a series of conditions which generate substantial costs to providers of local services.

Loneliness has a significant and lasting effect on health. It is associated with higher blood pressure and depression and leads to higher rates of mortality, indeed comparable to those associated with smoking and alcohol consumption.

It is also linked to a higher incidence of dementia with one study reporting a doubled risk of Alzheimer's disease. Lonely people tend to make more use of health and social care services and are more likely to have early admission to residential or nursing care.⁶

Why are the arts so effective at tackling loneliness?

There are many ways to tackle loneliness. The resources section at the end of this report signposts a large range of such activities and interventions. But it is the contention of this report that the arts tend to be forgotten among these interventions.

The arts are intrinsically worthwhile. They give joy to our lives and beauty to our environments. They question who we are and why we are here in a profound and enlivening way. However in addition to this they produce many other benefits to individuals and to society in general, especially though improved mental and physical health.

As this report has shown, older people are particularly at risk of suffering from loneliness, with all its negative impacts. Peer reviewed scientific studies on the impact of the arts on older people, when taken as a group, have led the Mental Health Foundation to the conclusion, 'it is evident that engaging with

participatory art can improve the wellbeing of older people and mediate against the negative effects of becoming older'.⁷

Not everyone will wish to be involved in the arts. But many older people will take some interest in the arts and for some people they can be uniquely enjoyable and meaningful. For some older age will provide an opportunity to return to a passion which has lain dormant in busier periods of life, while for others, given some support and encouragement, the latter part of life can lead to a completely new interest.

Naturally professional artists working with older people tend to focus on the creative process and product. But when speaking to older arts participants it is striking how the first thing that they will mention is usually that an arts project has brought them into contact with new people, that they have formed new friendships and that they feel less isolated. A significant example of this comes from an evaluation of Bealtaine, the month long arts festival for older people which has taken place across the Republic of Ireland since 2000. 98 per cent of participants surveyed said that it increased their social networking and 94 per cent said that it increased their engagement in the local community.⁸

Taking part in the arts can broadly be divided into two modes, being a member of the audience and taking part in creating a piece of art yourself (whether that is dance, drama, film, the visual arts, etc.). Both these types of activities are going to bring an older person in contact with other people and offer opportunities for interaction and new friendships, though it is likely that the latter, creating art (sometimes called 'participatory arts') will be more prolonged, may be more satisfying, have greater depth and be more likely to break down isolation and loneliness. The Baring Foundation funds the latter sort of arts and the case studies and examples in this report are drawn from participatory arts projects.

It is worth artists and arts organisations remembering that social interaction may be the most important aspect for an older person in taking part in an arts project. This needs time and sensitivity by the artist in creating the right atmosphere and allowing plenty of opportunities for socialising. It should not be assumed that older

people living in care homes cannot be lonely because they are living communally. The arts are particularly good way for people to tell their story and in itself this can be empowering for an older person but will also allow a carer (or even family members) to see that person in a new light and get to know more about them. This is all likely to deepen and improve relationships. Some of the projects or activities described have the explicit aim of tackling loneliness, although most do not set out to tackle loneliness as a core aim. However, all of the case studies show that whether explicit or not, bringing people together and keeping them connected is a central part of these arts activities.

Older people who are feeling lonely are likely to also feel disempowered and one of the great strengths of participatory arts work, when well used, is its empowering effect. The Hurdles project by Talking Birds (www.talkingbirds.co.uk) in Coventry identified the problems that elderly people had faced in their lives and the ways that they had overcome them. All the groups' members identified loneliness as one of the five major hurdles in their lives. Their work was curated into ten large photographic portraits with poems which were displayed at the Herbert Gallery.

This section would not be complete without noticing the rich tradition of intergenerational arts in the UK. A particularly popular expression of this has been joint arts projects between primary schools and people living in residential care. Participants often comment on the energy and joy brought into the care homes by younger children and how enriching they find the activities themselves, sometimes involving reminiscence sessions. Many arts organisations undertake this work but the leading and best known exponent is Magic Me based in East London (www.magicme.co.uk). Outside the arts, Magic Me has now extended their work to 'Cocktails in Care Homes' which are simply parties with residents and young adult volunteers, again a good antidote to loneliness.

People living with dementia engaging in the arts

800,000 people are currently living with dementia in the UK.⁹ People with dementia often end up lonely and isolated by their



Spare Tyre's 'Once Upon a Time'. Photo © Patrick Baldwin.

condition. There is a burgeoning interest among artists in working with people with dementia and some degree of coordination, for instance, Arts4Dementia (www.arts4dementia.org.uk) and Artz (Artists for Alzheimers www.artz.org.uk). Much of the participatory arts activities funded by the Baring Foundation work with people living with dementia. Spare Tyre, a theatre company based in London, has been working in the Nightingale House care home with new media artists to produce a multi-sensory story telling piece called Once Upon a Time (www.sparetyre.org). Another example is the Library Theatre Company in Manchester. They have been delivering fun, sensory workshops for people living with dementia called Storybox. Each week two artists and ten participants improvise a story around a theme with the help of props and music (www.librarytheatre.com).



Photo courtesy of Manchester Camerata.

The five ways to wellbeing and the arts

In 2008 the Government commissioned the New Economics Foundation (NEF www.neweconomics.org) to review the interdisciplinary work from 400 scientists from around the world regarding the factors that lead to wellbeing. The five ways (connect, be active, keep learning, take notice and give) can be used as a route to combatting loneliness. It is remarkable how well they fit an arts-based approach to working with older people.

- **Connect** Manchester Camerata (www.manchestercamerata.co.uk) is one of the UK's leading chamber orchestras. Music in Mind took place in two community venues partnering a music therapist and orchestral musicians. Workshops aimed to reveal the person behind the dementia through musical improvisations.

- **Be active** A growing number of dance companies work with older people, such as the Green Candle Dance Company (www.greencandle.com), the Company of Elders at Sadler's Wells (www.sadlerswells.com/page/company-of-elders) and East London Dance (www.east.londondance.com).
- **Keep Learning** Digital arts are a good way for older people to learn computing and film making skills. FACT (the Foundation for Arts and Creative Technology (www.fact.co.uk))



Photo courtesy of FACT.

in Liverpool has an international reputation in new media art. It set up an internet TV channel staffed by older tenants in a high rise block. Creative Arts east (www.creativeartseast.co.uk)

runs a rural touring programme for live performance and cinema across Norfolk and Suffolk. Its Memories and Moving Pictures project was an intergenerational project involving schools looking at the memories of cinema going of older community members. The resulting short animations again developed digital skills.

- **Take Notice** The Clod Ensemble (www.clodensemble.com) based in East London creates performance projects.



Photo courtesy of Helen Marshall/
Extravagant Acts/Clod Ensemble.

For several years its Extravagant Acts for Mature People programme has offered high quality shows in day care centres. The diverse range of music and performance comes from all over the world.

- **Give** Read Aloud is a volunteer-based project started by Edinburgh City Libraries and the Scottish Poetry Library (www.scottishpoetrylibrary.org.uk). Volunteers visit Edinburgh care homes monthly, reading familiar and new poems and songs as a trigger for reminiscence and conversation.

The arts and older people's service providers

There is a tendency for arts organisations and commissioners and providers of services for older people to live in two different worlds with little exchange. It is not surprising, therefore, that the arts may not be at the forefront of commissioners' minds when thinking about combatting loneliness.

There are some impressive exceptions to this. Manchester City Council is leading the way in seeking to make their city 'age-friendly' for all people. Amongst many other things, the Council has established a unique 'cultural offer' for older people, which is supported by the Baring Foundation.

Manchester has a particularly rich cultural life including great museums, the Royal Exchange Theatre and the Halle Orchestra. As part of the new 'cultural offer' a total of 22 arts organisations in the City come together to offer a wide range of artistic opportunities to older people including through the use of Cultural Champions (www.allaboutaudiences.com/projects/valuingolderpeople/culturaloffergroup).

There have been several examples of 'arts on prescription' or social prescribing (e.g. www.equalarts.org.uk/pages/posts/autumn-programme-launched-for-creative-ageing-arts-on-prescription-scheme-11.php) where GPs have referred patients to arts projects aware of the positive effect that these are likely to have on their morale and sense of enjoyment in life at very low cost.

The next section of this publication gives some quick first steps for both commissioners and providers of older people's services and artists and arts organisations to use the power of the arts in tackling loneliness among older people.

What you can do

If you are a health and wellbeing board member or commissioner of services for older people:

- consider whether loneliness is a significant issue for the older people whom you are serving (through your joint strategic needs assessment or other mapping exercises) and if so whether the arts could play a part on tackling this;
- find out about the relevant art provision in your area. A new website www.ageofcreativity.co.uk should help in this;
- meet with local arts organisations to discover how they think they can improve health, wellbeing and social connections of older populations;
- visit or take part in an arts activity involving older people and talk to them and the artists about it.

If you run services for older people, for instance a care home:

- ask residents or service users if they want to participate in the arts, and what they enjoyed when younger;
- find out about local arts provision through www.ageofcreativity.co.uk and other sources such as Arts Development UK which includes 265 local authority members (www.artsdevelopmentuk.org);
- explore specific sources of advice for work in care homes such as *Creative Homes* available from the Baring Foundation;
- learn from others and find out about how they are using different themes and activities to tackle loneliness: join the Campaign to End Loneliness.

If you are an artist or work for an arts organisation:

- consider what your offer is for older people and how you reach them;
- ask how your arts practice with older people can focus on building long term friendships and break down isolation and loneliness;
- join the Campaign to End Loneliness;
- become a member of www.ageofcreativity.co.uk and send in examples of your work;
- consider how to reach the most isolated in your community and how to reduce the barriers to participation;
- consider the confidence and resilience required for individuals to cross the threshold and take part and look at ways to reduce the barriers to getting involved;
- bear in mind the diversity of older people, their cultural experiences, their varying sensory and cognitive abilities their differing desires, needs and interests;
- engage families, carers, friends and communities in the activities or the work that's produced;
- ensure you are aware of social care best practice and how your activities will complement other services, get fluent in the language of social care commissioners and providers and consider how your work contributes to their goals.

Resources

Arts and Older People

www.ageofcreativity.co.uk a new national website dedicated to arts and older people.

The National Association for Providers of Activities for Older People (NAPA) is the leading charity dedicated to increasing the profile and understanding of the activity needs of older people and equipping staff to meet these while living in care settings, www.nanpa-activities.co.uk

All Baring Foundation publications are free and available at www.baringfoundation.org.uk

Ageing Artfully; Older people and professional participatory arts in the UK, Baring Foundation, 2009 – a mapping study used by the Foundation in initiating its five year programme.

Creative Homes; how the arts can contribute to quality of life in residential care, Baring Foundation, 2011 – lists examples of good practice as well as pointers for Care Home Managers and Arts Practitioners.

Loneliness in older age

Loneliness and isolation: a toolkit for health and wellbeing boards, Campaign to End Loneliness, 2012
<http://www.campaigntoendloneliness.org.uk/toolkit/>

Combating loneliness – a guide for local authorities, Local Government Association and the Campaign to End Loneliness, 2012.

Safeguarding the Convoy – a call to action from the Campaign to End Loneliness, Age UK Oxfordshire, 2011.



Theatre de Complicite Tea Project, Dora House.
Photo courtesy of Ainsley So and Sarah Ainslie.

Case studies

Transforming a Residential Centre

Around 400,000 people live in residential care. While residents are not socially isolated, as they have regular contact with a range of people, loneliness remains a serious issue for many.¹⁰ Although an increasing number of arts organisations are seeking to work in care homes, provision overall is sparse and there are far too few examples of good work for such a large part of society. This caused the Baring Foundation to focus its last grants round on these settings and to publish a good practice guide with our partners the National Care Forum and NAPA called *Creative Homes: How the arts can contribute to quality of life in residential care*. Here is one inspiring example from those grants.

Theatre de Complicite

In May and June 2012 Complicite, a touring theatre company based in London, and Geraldine Pilgrim, an installation artist specialising in performances in unusual buildings, collaborated to create *Tea*.

Tea was an intergenerational arts project that brought older and younger people together to recapture the stories and traditions passed down through families. Piloted at Dora House Sheltered Housing, a Central and Cecil Housing Trust scheme in St John's Wood, Complicite and Geraldine used a focus on afternoon tea to bring 30 tenants together with five young design students from Wimbledon College of Art and Central St Martins.

Five trainee chefs from Le Cordon Bleu cookery school transformed the communal lounge at Dora House into a fully functioning tearoom. Then, over 8 weeks, tenants shared their memories of teatimes past – of Lyons' Corner Houses, sugar rationing and the avocado pear – collected recipes and designed a perfect afternoon tea menu with the students.



Theatre de Complicite Tea Project, Dora House. Photo courtesy of Ainsley So and Sarah Ainslie.

The communal lounge was also re-designed, decorated and then opened to the public for three days, becoming the setting for a performance inspired by the memories of afternoon tea. Seven young actors performed as waiters and tearoom guests in 'Tea at Dora's House' and more than 250 people were served at the performance.

The project was evaluated by Central and Cecil. Participants reported the project generated a positive atmosphere and increased sense of community that lasted after it had finished. Tenants also felt it had brought people together who did not normally meet and they knew their neighbours better as a result. One tenant said *"it brought life back into Dora House"*.

Although sheltered accommodation schemes appear to provide a convenient community for older people, isolation remains prevalent. Projects such as *Tea* have demonstrated their ability to build long-lasting community in care settings, reducing loneliness and improving health and wellbeing.

www.complicite.org

Rural Isolation

Rural areas are ageing at a faster rate than urban areas. The fastest rate of growth is amongst the oldest old (age 85 years and over). These parts of the country continue to become depopulated and suffer from poor public transport and the lack of other amenities, including access to the arts. A number of organisations have dedicated themselves to working in rural areas and are aware of the particular needs of older people. Here are two examples from Devon and Buckinghamshire.

Aune Head Arts

Aune Head Arts is a contemporary arts organisation that specialises in working with rural lives and rural places. As part of the Arts and Health South West REACH initiative¹¹, Aune Head Arts worked with Villages in Action and the NHS Devon Partnership Trust to develop a project called 'soundings'.¹² This project targeted older people at risk of developing mental health problems as a result of isolation or lack of engagement with their communities and the mental health system.

The work took place in three communities Milton Abbot, Princetown and Chudleigh with professional artists bringing residents, both young and old, together to create a series of autobiographical audio recordings. A mental health support worker was engaged for each phase of the project to provide advice and information to the artists where required. Although the three areas varied in size and demography, all three have significant older populations and face problems with isolation and poor access to services.

With each community, the lead artists created a radio programme that covered topics including memory, listening, exchange, care, home and loss. The programmes were designed to celebrate the ageing process as well as sharing some of the trials, fears, and tribulations the participants were facing.

An informal evaluation of the project showed that for some older participants benefits included, a reduced sense of isolation and

increased sense of connection to own community, increased sense of wellbeing and being valued by others and reduced stigma and discrimination.

In Chudleigh, a group formed through the project has continued to meet, and are continuing to get together socially, with new members joining too. Aune Head Arts hope to be able to support them further with new arts workshops in the future.

www.auneheadarts.org.uk

The Oxford Concert Party (OCP) 'Food for Thought' programme

The Oxford Concert Party use music, poetry and art to improve people's lives, aiming to reach those isolated by disability or illness and older people living in rural communities throughout the United Kingdom.

The Food for Thought project was a six week interactive programme for older people attending day centres in Buckinghamshire. The project using a mix of creative arts, based around the theme of food, combining music, song, drama, storytelling, visual and decorative arts and reminiscence.

For many of the participants, this was their only social activity in a week and all had very limited access to arts activities. Despite regularly attending the day centre, 40% of the participants

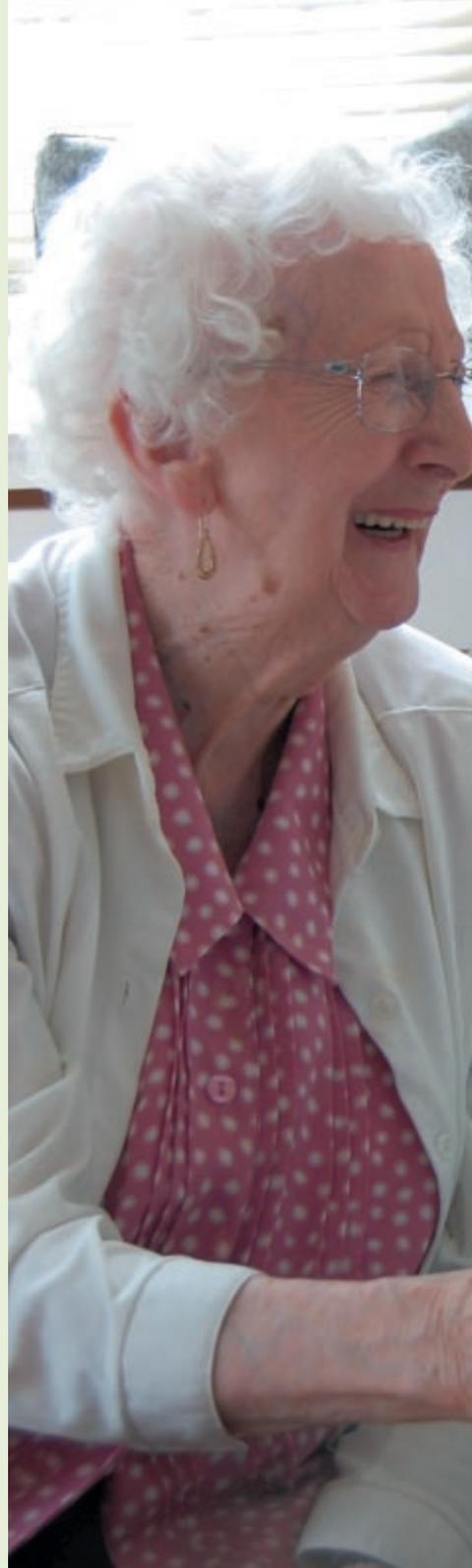






Photo courtesy of Isabel Knowland.

felt they did not get together enough with other attendees. The artists found the participants needed the sessions to help to create friendships in the day centre. 67% of participants said the group was both enjoyable and enabled them to get to know their fellow day centre attendees better. The staff also benefited, learning more about their members life history as they exchanged memories and stories in the sessions.

www.oxfordconcertparty.org

Urban isolation

Towns and cities can also be lonely and alienating places for older people. Sometimes friends and family move on or die, transport can be difficult to navigate and the night time city intimidating. Here are two case studies from major cities, Glasgow and Leeds.

Plantation Productions

Plantation Productions is a community based media company based in Govan, one of Scotland's most socially and economically deprived cities. They offer community groups of all ages the opportunity to learn about film making, media and the arts.

The Portal Seniors' Film Club has been running at The Portal in Govan, Glasgow, for the past five years. A mixed group of around 15 pensioners aged 65-94 meet for two hours every Thursday afternoon to explore their creativity, enjoy the company of others and produce some compelling film works after learning the film making process of research, script writing, interview skills, acting, filming and editing. The finished films vary in genre from social history documentaries to investigative journalism and most recently a comedy sketch show. Each completed film is given a red carpet premiere, allowing the group to celebrate the culmination of their hard work and proudly share their achievements.

In 2010 the group embarked on art classes, learning to draw and ultimately exhibiting their works in the Glasgow Museum of Modern Art (GOMA). For some group members, this was the first time they had ever tried drawing in their lives. This fascinating project was documented in a film entitled 'From Govan to GOMA', and the film was played as part of the exhibition.

The Portal Seniors' Film Club is not formally evaluated but Plantation Productions describe the group as lively and adventurous, and report that they enjoy each other's company and are mentally and physically stimulated. Many of the group have created friendships and meet out with the film club either on other projects, or at cultural events that they find out about through The Portal.

www.plantation.org.uk



Skippko Tall Tales 'Gone with the Windows' art work with Doreen Hamilton Day Centre.
Photo courtesy of SKIPPKO.

Skippko Arts Team

Skippko run visual arts projects with individuals, groups and communities across Yorkshire. Their projects range from one-off sessions to large programmes of work over two to three years. *Tall Tales* was a two year visual arts project with older people in Leeds that ran from November 2005 to March 2008 using a theme of 'Books and Stories'. The project aimed to reduce social isolation and loneliness in older people and improve confidence and self-esteem. Skippko was particularly keen to work with groups who had had little or no access to creative arts activities, and to reach the most isolated members of the community.

Tall Tales encouraged group members to share their life experiences and tell them in creative and unique ways, and then gathered the stories in visual and written ways. It wanted to celebrate the knowledge and experience that older people have and share that with others.

As part of the project, groups made links with local schools and made further visual artworks with the children, to raise awareness of each other's lives. A wide range of artwork was created by the participants, from a giant fabric book to a series of spoof movie posters starring group members. At the end of the project a *Tall Tales* exhibition was held in Leeds Central Library.

Skipkko partnered with Leeds' Neighbourhood Network schemes to work with 22 different older people's groups in a range of settings including care homes, sheltered housing and in the community.

A qualitative evaluation on the project's impact on loneliness and isolation was gathered through project diaries and through case studies of a selection of individual group members.

At the start one participant said *"I have felt isolated and lonely recently with being ill."* By the end of the project, the same participant said *"it has helped to bring my confidence back, I took part in the first schools sessions, the kids were lovely, it has been lovely since. Four children in the street said hello after the session. One little boy lives in these flats and I have spoken to him."*

Another participant said at the beginning *"I sleep mostly, I suppose I want to sleep away my troubles. My wife is very poorly and has dementia, it's sad for me. I do get depressed all the time."* And at the end said: *"I have made friends, yes definitely, we meet in the corridor. I didn't have friendships in the group before."*

www.skipkko.org.uk

Festivals for Creativity and Older People

There are a gradually increasing number of arts festivals for older people, and the Baring Foundation has joined forces with Creative Scotland to commission a major new Scotland wide month long festival beginning in October 2012. Below is an example of what has been achieved by a longer standing festival.

Capital Age Festival

Capital Age Festival is London's arts festival run by older people. The organisation produces an annual festival of creative work made by, for and with older Londoners. The festival showcases and promotes work of arts organisations and older people in venues across the capital.

In 2012, Capital Age Festival showcased over 50 events and activities aimed at, or performed by, older Londoners. The festival brought together professional artists, experienced participatory performers and those who had never taken part in arts activity before. Activity took place across London featuring a diverse range of art forms including theatre, music, dance, comedy, visual art, poetry and film.

Headline events took place at the Albany in Lewisham and artsdepot in Barnet, both of which brought together over 100 performers from a variety of arts organisations. The shared experience of performing creates a common bond and qualitative feedback has demonstrated a high level of interaction between performers and many friendships formed.

Contributing artists and groups also spend time coming together and working creatively to prepare for the festival, creating deep connections through shared experiences and collectively sharing ideas and life stories.

For many older audience members, the festival has acted as an inspiration to become involved in creative activity. The festival brochure contained listings of events and activities led by external arts organisations working with older people. The motivation engendered by festival events was strengthened by these listings, signposting to local opportunities for participation.

As a regular and long-term event, the festival has become a much-anticipated opportunity to connect with old friends and with other older participatory performers. Feedback from previous festivals indicates that many older participants look forward to the festival as a highlight in their summer calendar and a chance to re-

connect with peers and friends that may otherwise be difficult to maintain contact with.

There are a growing number of professional arts organisations in London working in the community with older people. Most of these struggle to secure even a moderate profile or find appropriate platforms to showcase their work. The festival plays a unique role meeting the needs of arts groups and brings together a large number of stakeholders and older artists in one place at one time. The focus this creates works to tackle the on-going isolation of not only the performers but also the large numbers of older Londoners that attend the festival.

www.capitalagefestival.org.uk

Museums and Galleries in Action

There is a growing movement across the UK of museums and galleries which are seeking to engage with older audiences in different ways, for instance through events for people with dementia, taking objects and archive material out into care homes for reminiscence work, and offering arts classes to older people and many other projects. Here are examples from London and Manchester.

Whitworth Art Gallery

The Whitworth Art Gallery and Johnnie Johnson Housing have been collaborating for just under a year to run the Art Appreciation group with JJ Housing residents. These are monthly art workshops and gallery visits have seen the residents of two schemes engage with a variety of art practices, from experimental drawing to screen printing and weaving. The idea behind this project was to explore the role of technology in the lives of older people through visual art but the groups have developed socially and have focused on experimentation, discussion and building friendship before the digital elements are introduced.

The Whitworth Art Gallery design the programme and the groups meet once a week with an lead artist, regularly touring the gallery to inform their work.



Art Appreciation with JJ Housing residents. Photo courtesy of Whitworth Art Gallery.

One of the project objectives is to tackle loneliness and the artists have created a social group dynamic where the group has ownership of their own learning. The digital elements are due to be integrated into the project the autumn of 2012 with a blog, digital cameras and iPads being used to develop new skills and artwork.

Informal evaluation of the sessions demonstrate a range of benefits for the sheltered housing scheme community. As discussions often start with sharing memories, the workshops have stimulated discussions and friendship groups in a community where it is all too easy to stay in separate flats. Many participants quote this as being their main reason for continuing to attend these workshops, often the art is taken for granted and it's the social feel to the sessions that make them thrive.

Serpentine Gallery London

Serpentine Gallery is one of London's most prominent galleries for modern and contemporary art. Its Exhibition, Architecture, Education and Public Programmes attracts up to 800,000 visitors in any one year.

Skills Exchange was the Serpentine's collaborative art and social research project that took place between January 2007 and April 2012. Through five, multi-year residencies, *Skills Exchange* tested the idea that isolation and discrimination are decreased when artists, older people and care-workers exchange their skills on equal ground, altering roles and well-rehearsed relations through processes of creative exchange.

Projects ranged from artist-residencies working with elderly residents of Woodberry Down Estate, patients of St John's Hospice and Inspire community group at St Peter's Church to artist-residencies with residents of care homes in Camden and Westminster.

One residency brought design collective Abake to Westmead Elderly Resource Centre and Care Home in Westminster. Westmead provides residential care for 42 older people, many of whom have dementia and experience few or no visits.

Throughout their residency, Abake set up a series of group discussions between Westmead residents, care workers, artists and gallery staff. These discussions led to a series of exchanges designed to bridge the gap between the care home and the wider community, including a bus tour through London narrated by Westmead residents, commissioning portraits of the residents and Skype exchanges between residents of Westmead and visitors to the Serpentine.

A birthday party was held at the Serpentine Gallery for 98-year old Ellen, the home's oldest resident, and an 'Art Swap' was curated, where works from the walls of Westmead were swapped with contemporary prints from the Serpentine Gallery.



Photo courtesy of Serpentine Gallery.

It was anticipated that for many residents the 'Art Swap' would result in dis-orientation. However, a Goldsmiths University evaluation of *Skills Exchange* found the presentation of contemporary artworks in the home opened up new memory pathways and conversations about the future between residents and carers.

The evaluation also found that many care workers had been told "*not to get attached*" but the *Skills Exchange* projects helped



demonstrate the need to build relationship and empathy in their care homes, helping to reduce loneliness of residents.

The Goldsmiths report concluded that older participants benefited most from projects that lasted for one to two years, allowing artists to build relationships with residents and staff, and involve them in deciding the aims and activities of the residencies.¹³

www.serpentinegallery.org

The needs of carers

Carers are absolutely vital for a particularly vulnerable section of older people. Professional carers are usually poorly paid and often do not have the time and resources they need. Family carers can themselves be older people and feel that their responsibilities are heavy and preclude time for themselves. They can become almost as isolated as the person for whom they are caring.



Photos courtesy of Equal Arts.

Equal Arts

Equal Arts is a registered charity based in the North East of England which specialises in developing creative projects with older people. They aim to combat the isolation of older people through creative engagement and run projects in care homes, arts venues, community venues.

Photo courtesy of Equal Arts.



Equal Art's Carers' Adventures project involves family carers in a diverse arts programme – the group have already worked with many of the arts venues in the Tyne & Wear area including the Theatre Royal and BALTIC Centre for Contemporary Art. The Carers

Adventures group is designed to provide much needed respite to carers, as well as enable them to make new friends and try new things.

One of the carers described the programme as *“a chance to find yourself again, you get lost being a carer and being creative and being part of something helps you remember who you are.”*

The group has been running for 6 years and meet weekly. Carers joining the group choose a programme each year and Equal Arts help fundraise to enable them to work with a variety of art forms, including theatre, sculpture and design. They also help venues make their buildings more accessible to older people.

Equal Arts report many close friendships have been formed. One member said recently in a radio interview *“Equal Arts saved my life... the group has given me so many new experiences and a chance to meet new people. I was exhausted by caring and had lost everybody – but now I have new interests and a reason to go on.”*

www.equalarts.org.uk

Reinventing traditions; the 21st century tea dance

The arts are good at reinvention and creating new adventures. Traditions with which older people have grown up can be playfully re-examined and renewed in exciting ways for the artist as well as the older person.

Entelechy Arts

Entelechy Arts works with a diversity of groups living in south east London. The company works with marginalised and excluded communities including older people who have learning or age-acquired disabilities. Entelechy works across art forms including theatre, dance, music, the spoken word, craft work and digital media.



Photo courtesy of Entelechy Arts

Entelechy's 21st Century Tea Dance programme has become an important and re-occurring event in the lives of many lonely and isolated people in Deptford. For many, for whom the pattern of one day very much resembles the next, it has become something to make plans for and an opportunity to be valued and understood.

The Tea Dance Programme comprises of a loose confederation of about 150 individuals; about a quarter of that number experience loneliness. They may be living in an institutional setting where no one really knows who they are or they may be living on their own. The life stories that brought them to this situation often include the onset of chronic illness or loss of a partner. Many find it impossible to leave their homes without the help of others.

Entelechy Arts identify the most isolated and lonely people in their community through a regular programme of small-scale interventions, events and activities. For example, Entelechy artists work in hospital wards, alongside adult social care teams, in sheltered housing units, care homes and with small voluntary run clubs in church halls and other community settings. This enables

them to reach individuals who are typically excluded from or unaware of social support available.

The Tea Dance is both a social event and a shared act of creating large scale performance event. This brings isolated individuals into contact with many others: active older people, young people, artists and performers an exciting scoop of people who reflect the diversity of south London streets.

The Tea Dance events now happen in a range of venues, including large art houses, local theatres and community centres. In one residential care home, residents and staff now co-curate a Dance. During an evaluation, one carer commented:

“There are not many people who have visitors there. It really shocked me. Only arts projects like Entelechy lighten the load”.

www.entelechyarts.org.uk

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