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## TRAVEL FELLOWSHIP REPORT MICHELLE WEINER

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**GALLERY AND BEYOND:  
TRAINING TO TRANSFORM *GOOD TIMES***  
What it takes to build a sustainable creative arts  
programme for older adults

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

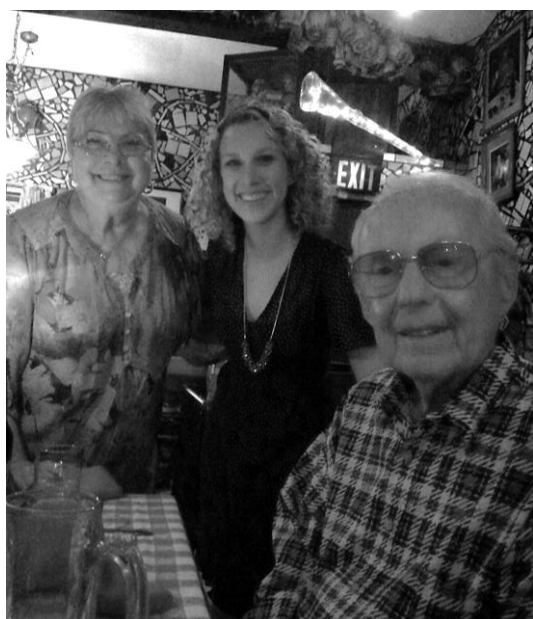
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I would like to thank the Winston Churchill Memorial Trust and Baring Foundation for the opportunity to undertake this life-changing travel Fellowship and their continued support and guidance.



I am hugely indebted to my hosts; the professionals who gave me much more time than I ever could have anticipated; who allowed me to participate in their programmes, answered my questions; who sat beside me during workshops, welcomed me into their groups, arranged meetings and presentations for me; who opened doors.

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**My dear hosts in Cincinnati, Ohio –  
Lisa (above)  
Jeanie & Marshall (below)**

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## OVERVIEW

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I was awarded this Fellowship in the financial year 2014-2015. August to November 2014, I embarked on two journeys, the first over three-and-a-half weeks in America and the second over two weeks in Australia. During my travels, I visited seven cities and fourteen museums and galleries. I worked with and alongside twenty-two art-based programmes for older adults and/or people with dementia, all of which have influenced my study in its goal of building a case for the vital importance of this work.

This report explores how museums can inspire creativity and build exceptional arts programmes for people in later life and highlights how this momentum can be sustained within a museum setting. It aims to address why and how museums and galleries are engaging in this agenda to play an essential role for the social wellbeing of a global ageing population.

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# BACKGROUND

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## Professional Expertise

For the past four years I have been in the privileged position of directing a growing arts programme for older people at Dulwich Picture Gallery in South-East London. What makes my programme significant is that it is not a social enterprise, nor is it government-run or funded or even community centre-based. The programme is, in fact, an innovation of England's oldest art gallery, containing a priceless collection of Old Master paintings in the leafiest, traditional and preserved surroundings of London's Dulwich Village.

To some, Dulwich Village might represent a proverbial 'comfort zone'. Although only a ten minute train journey from central London, the Village feels somehow safe, protected and cocooned away from the more 'gritty' urban environment of London 'proper'. The Village has its own rhythm and pathos, with room to breathe and potter around quaint shops and green spaces nestled amongst the old, large and sprawling houses – a sign of the affluence that characterises the local area. White-picket fences line the grass-verged streets, dog walkers relax over slow coffees in cafes.



Dulwich Picture Gallery by Stuart Leech

In the heart of the Village sits Dulwich Picture Gallery, its distinctive architecture making it a focal point for many local residents. With a programme of exclusive exhibitions, its desirable café and ever-popular gift shop, the Gallery is a dream come true for a traditional gallery-going audience. There are, however, many people who steer clear of such a place. Maybe some do not know it is there but many would not dare to set foot inside. This is because for a large proportion of the local (and not so local) population Dulwich Picture Gallery is far from a 'comfort zone' - it feels exclusive, stuffy, potentially alien and even intellectually intimidating.

When I joined the Education Department at Dulwich Picture Gallery, coinciding with the launch of the Oxford Institute of Ageing Report, *This Is Living* (Harper & Hamblin, 2010), I was delighted to finally put my creative ideas into action. I came from a mixed arts background in theatre, textiles and ceramics and have always had a profound interest in the positive impact arts can have on those from all 'walks of life' and at all levels in society. It was, however, in my role as an activity manager in a day centre for older adults where I began to feel extremely frustrated at the underrepresentation of creativity and the underexposure of high quality arts for people in later life.

When I joined the Education team at Dulwich Picture Gallery, I was to look after and manage a programme that was already six years in the making. I was keen to investigate possibilities for this audience further. Being intimately involved with '*Good Times: Art for Older People*' at Dulwich Picture Gallery was an incredible opportunity for me to learn and develop, not just my own ideas, but alongside a growing community of practice.

Under the guidance of the Director of Learning, Gillian Wolfe CBE, I moved quickly from coordinating activities to managing the entire programme. Gillian, the pioneer of Arts Education at Dulwich Picture Gallery, has raised the standard of what older adults can achieve. With thirty years' experience of establishing relationships with the local community, reaching socially and ethnically diverse communities across London, Dulwich Picture Gallery introduce

everyday people to the benefits and sheer joy of the art gallery – in a non-loaded and non-exclusive way. The Education Department reach some of the most marginalised people in society and create programmes that have become a national model of excellence. *Good Times* is no exception.

Responding to the overwhelming reports of elderly abuse, fatal social isolation and poor care, the Gallery had built a programme that would inspire the way museums could socially engage older adults. The year 2005 represented a 'line in the sand' - a time where 'campaigns to end loneliness' did not exist and 'dementia friendly' societies were not even on the government agenda. A staggering twenty percent of pensioners were living in poverty (Adams & West, 2006), a third of people over sixty-five reported having no visitors each month (Victor & Scharf, 2005), one in four people aged sixty-five and over continued to be affected by depression (Department of Health, 2009) and nearly one half of older people admitted to residential or nursing home care died within eighteen months of admission (Curtis & Netten, 2006). The need to address these issues was greater than ever.

Surrounded by a wonderful, dedicated team of people, we hold the simple belief that all people can find empowerment through excellent arts activities, increasing their wellbeing in an environment where people care. We have built on the foundation of six years of discovery, learning through the research we conduct, from the people we meet and the partnerships we form. We have refined areas of the programme, grown successful workshops and piloted new projects to reach more people. We have pushed our offer to effectively meet the needs of our audience to ensure that our impact grows stronger as our programmes expand.

Since 2010, *Good Times* has grown considerably, programmes such as Prescription for Art (reaching isolated older individuals through GP referrals to art workshops at the Gallery) have doubled. The number of people engaging with the programme has increased by a third. In the fiscal year 2013 - 2014, the weekly programme reached a record number of just over two thousand participants. So much so that the demand for people wanting to take part, make a referral and sign up for projects was over-whelming for such a small team.

## Travelling with a purpose

Being immersed in the programme, both emotionally and practically, over such a prolonged period has made it challenging to step back; to objectively evaluate interest and demand from a bird's eye' perspective and to gather ideas for the future. With that in mind, the opportunity to undertake the travel Fellowship presented the chance to consider how a decade of programming might be understood at both a granular and a strategic level and how lessons and best-practice might be shared and embedded.

This study draws parallels between the intricacies and familiarities of the work at Dulwich Picture Gallery and the many programmes happening nearly ten thousand miles away. The simultaneous nature of our methods and discoveries clearly pinpoint a universal set of principles that transcend culture. The introduction to new environments, practitioners and participants has helped to define the attributes that contribute to a long-term agenda for older adults in the Arts which should be beneficial to museums worldwide.

There are also contrasts with the *Good Times* programme that need to be considered. Initiating research for a Fellowship of this nature (i.e. identifying places to visit, people to contact, etc.) I found it difficult to find museum programmes which responded to the older population as a group in itself. The majority of programmes I looked at focus on work engaging solely with adults with dementia. Whilst many of the programmes of this sort are not as long-standing as *Good Times*, they presented an opportunity for me to meet with people thinking about starting a programme, to observe the early stages of this work and the challenges institutions and organisations running the programmes faced and to meet the mentors and trainers who were guiding institutions into this new venture.

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## GUIDING NOTES

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I would like to clarify some of the terminology used throughout the report. As stated in the *Overview*, this journey enabled me to discover twenty-two art-based programmes for older adults and/or people living with dementia. I did not limit my investigation to art galleries and museums alone. In order to broaden my findings, draw greater comparisons and highlight areas where museums can learn from arts interventions outside of an established cultural institutional setting, I have included all the creative and cultural institutions I visited – regional and national art galleries, museums, art centres, non-profit organisations, charities, universities as well as artist’s studios. Therefore, to simplify the range of organisations, this report refers to ‘galleries’ and ‘museums’ interchangeably.

The activities reviewed in the report have been grouped together by the term ‘art-based programmes’, to encompass the notion that they are not solely focused on visual arts and art making. In this report, comparisons have been made between many art forms, including; ceramics, painting, drawing, music and dance, as well as discussion-based/art-viewing sessions. This should give a broader basis for dissemination and wider impact for more organisations to develop programmes with this population.

The references to the ‘population’, ‘audience’ and/or ‘demographic’ in this report are expressly to denote ‘older people’ or ‘older adults’ and will include people living with dementia, unless stated otherwise.

‘Dementia’ is an umbrella term that is used to encompass several forms of cognitive impairment including, Alzheimer’s Disease, vascular dementia, Lewy Body’s and Picks Disease, to name but a few.

This report distinguishes all individuals engaged in the programmes as ‘participants’ not ‘visitors’. This is to identify the role of the older adults and their caregivers in a way that is standardised throughout the report, even though often they should be given the more dynamic title of ‘artist’.

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# INTRODUCTION

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## Objectives

This Travel Fellowship sought to answer several questions about working with arts and older people in galleries:

- How are art organisations around the world responding to a growing ageing population?
- What impact does this have (or could it have) on museums/galleries?
- What can museums offer older adults? A look at the breadth of programming to share a programme-wide definition of 'best practice'
- Are there organisational models of arts for older people that are sustainable?
- How are workshops, training and evaluative resources used to share best practice, deliver projects with confidence and improve arts for older adults?
- How do these programmes impact on community and contribute to museum's ability to innovate, remain resilient and relevant?

## Museums and socially motivated agendas

Many museums rely heavily on their organisational mission statements to communicate the purpose, philosophy, and vision which underpins their agenda. Within the context of museums, the American Alliance of Museums (2012) explains that, "a mission statement is the beating heart of a museum . . . [it] drives everything the museum does; vision, policy-making, planning and operation." This might suggest that all decision-making at museums flows outward from the mission statement. If so, it could be assumed that the shift towards social awareness should be conveyed within these visions. This would enable a greater focus on relevance and might increase the museums' wider impact.

Of the fourteen museums I visited on my travels, seven had clearly formulated and easily accessible mission statements for comparison. Below are some of the key goals I have isolated from strategic visions/mission statements of the organisations I visited:

- To collect/ preserve/ conserve art
- To strive for scholarly excellence
- To creatively engage visitors
- To be respectful and embrace diversity
- To remain relevant and be progressive

At face-value, these statements appear to be relatively interchangeable. In other words, articulated in this way, these words and phrases seem to do very little in terms of presenting features that distinguish one museum's agenda from another.

As suggested by museum educator and historian, Nick Sacco (2015), mission statements are often conceived and drafted in order to please the Boards of Directors for their respective institutions rather than to ultimately benefit



the visitors. They communicate what the site does or intends to do, but often fail to communicate why this work is important and meaningful.

There is no doubt that we are witnessing a shifting focus in public representation and the drive, sector-wide, to contribute to wellbeing within a community. In this context, social inclusion in museums is becoming less about cultural assimilation, a process concerned with getting communities to 'accept' the legitimacy of, and 'share in' the dominant celebrated narratives offered by museums, but an engagement with democratising exhibition content. In other words, making arts enjoyable and accessible to everyone.

One of the key questions in this research has to be whether social agendas fit with museum core values and have a place in their mission statements? My research into cultural institutions who already have socially motivated programmes, however, indicates that whilst they are aware that telling audiences what they need is outmoded, their mission statements and values still conform to their traditional roots. They continue to (or at least articulate) an emphasis on, 'collecting', 'studying', 'conserving' and 'presenting' significant works of art. Furthermore, the communication of their 'mission' often conflicts with the key objectives for their socially motivated programmes. With an omission of such objectives as; opportunities for self-expression, enhancing a sense of identity, improving quality of life, or enhancing communication. Rarely do museums ever mention building resilience of any nature that is not financial, or taking an active responsibility for diversity and long-term community wellbeing and engagement.

The problem with a generic mission statement is that the specific cultural institution will already have the knowledge and passion for their collections and subject matter. The audiences and patrons who might support and benefit from these places may not have the same level of knowledge or enthusiasm. They want the mission explained in clear terms which highlight why it is important and how it benefits society. In this context, there is simply a lack of connection – emotional and intellectual.

In response to organisational behaviour specialist and management consultant, Margaret Wheatley's (1992) statement, "There is no power for change greater than a community discovering what it cares about." Editor-in-Chief of the Journal of Museum Management and Curatorship, Robert R. Janes (2010) asks, "Will communities continue to care about museums in their current guise? Will museums discover what they care about?"

For a large majority of museums social impact is prioritised when funders start requesting evidence that museums are achieving their missions. For these funders, museums tend to discuss outputs (i.e. how many, how much and how big) rather than outcomes or impact, whether one is discussing programmes, attendance, or collections. Historically, museums have put a great emphasis on producing outputs, citing their attendance levels - how many school children visit; how many objects were accessioned; and how much money was raised. For the findings of this report to have a positive impact and, indeed, for museums to be display true resilience and (more practically) a progressive approach to programming, the communicated value of museums must extend well beyond outputs.

The challenge lies in recognising that Boards of Directors/Trustees are primarily interested in outputs. They work with a bottom-line driven philosophy often with backgrounds in businesses unfamiliar with alternative other ways to define success. Return on investment is a simple calculation – symptomatic of a 'black or white' approach often adopted in the context of operational 'success'. With this in mind, it is vital that a convincing strategy is articulated of the role museums can play in tackling social change.

There is progress here, however. A few valid considerations and observations we might offer are:

- It is important to recognise the role curators feel they have in making sense of history (and the myths that may surround it) in modern terms. They know that their choices need to reflect and respond to other voices

within the local community if they want to lend more credibility to their interpretation. This role (or at least the curators' belief in it) contributes to the creation of the right environment for the widening of access to collections and exhibits

- With the above in mind, there is also a marked progression towards museums acting in consultation with their visitors and communities. “Museums are seen as central spaces of mutual understanding and cohesion where cultural identity can be developed. This may be driven by museum professionals or communities. Such identities may reflect previously unacknowledged histories or more recent social change” (Tait, 2008). For this reason, museums today are more appreciative that, “it is people who bring the value and consequence to objects and collections; as a result, if a museum cannot forge associations with people it will have no meaning.” (Crooke, 2007)
- Museums and cultural organisations have long been responsible for representing, educating and shaping ‘collective values and social understandings’ (Hammond, 2004) through their Collections. For example, with the representation of an historic event such as the Second World War, the content may serve as commending or condoning the actions of some, a reflection on memories for others, or the chance to connect to a national identity or understand common values. This ability of museums to govern or regulate social values that underpin a sense of citizenship and define a range of identities, is well-documented (Watson, 2007).

Museums often lay claim to expertise, rationality and assumed neutrality (Walsh, 1992). This report recognises this power and highlights the current ongoing critical reflection by museum professionals and academics about the obligation of museums to acknowledge and represent cultural and community diversity responsibly. With a sole focus on the current societal issue of an ageing population, this report aims to show that the art gallery/museum can be an agency for both building communities and bringing about social change. Works of art, public interpretation and arts education is at the heart of this change, worthy of a place in the overall vision, policy-making, planning and operation of museums.



## Social issue: An ageing population

Around the world, populations are ageing due to declining fertility rates and increasing life expectancy (WHO, 2015). While the growing number of older people is an achievement, reflective of better living standards (more nutritious

diets, cleaner water, and advances in preventative medicines) many countries have raised concerns regarding the societal, economic and resulting health consequences of ageing. Of particular concern is the anticipated increase in costs associated with care and support of a growing aged population.

The reality is that living longer with declining health means that older people are socially vulnerable. Their quality of life is reduced and their dependency on others (often family or the state) increases.

By 2050 the global number of people over sixty-five will treble (National Institute on Aging, 2015). Great concern about this ageing population is seen in countries like Japan with its low birth-rate, long life expectancy and minimal immigration. Forecasting suggests that nearly forty percent of the Japanese population will be aged sixty-five or over in 2060. In large countries like Australia, dementia is the single greatest cause of disability in people aged sixty-five years and older (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2012). In fact, it is estimated that over half of our aged population will be living with dementia by 2050 – a predicted one hundred and thirty-five million people living with a diagnosis of dementia. An estimated \$600 billion a year spent globally on dementia has resulted in this health issue being tackled at the forefront of government agendas (Alz.org, 2015).

These factors, predictions and forecasts present a potential 'perfect storm' scenario hovering on the horizon. Recognising this, the impact of ageing and dementia has resulted in a greater need, and government push, for public involvement. In the UK especially, health and wellbeing is now seen as a societal issue. Rather than pinning all prospects on a cure, the focus is on addressing ways in which people can learn to cope and adapt – to 'live' with and not against circumstances. In essence, being more proactive in reacting and responding to dramatic changes in health, including the complexities of economic inequalities, social deprivation and lifestyle in general. The facts clearly identify that an ageing population is one of the biggest societal issues we face.

Museums have begun finding areas where they too can respond to wider societal health and social needs (which are often so inextricably linked). Addressing what it takes to build a sustainable creative programme for older adults in museums is a crucial part of understanding how museums can contribute to and even bring about social change on a local level. This, of course, can feed into a national and even international debate around the key issues.

There is both strong evidence and a long-held view that museums already have social value (Bennett, 1995) and that audiences gain learning and therapeutic benefits from participation (Sandell, 2012). As Carolyn Halpin-Healy (2015) suggests in her Transformative Learning paper, it is possible for museums to, “develop practices that are simultaneously person-centred and art-focused.”

Museums and galleries are shared spaces embedded in communities. They offer meaning, excellence in scholarship and opportunities for learning experiences. Arts and culture can empower people and honour identity by focusing on the interconnectedness of our world and its challenges. A museum that incorporates the best of its enduring values with a sense of social responsibility, can offer a foundation for a sustainable future. We know the predictions of our ageing society – could museums be locally-embedded problem-solvers in tune with the challenges and aspirations of this community?

There is evidence in this report of how museums can shape normative conceptions of ageing, learning and creativity to directly impact lived experiences and add value to institutions and their communities. Does this require museums to adapt complex organisational structures, divert funding streams, or tackle concerns about traditional curatorial remits? Perhaps it necessitates new values, or redefining old agendas. Museums already possess creative tools to respond to the speed of social change and by being in tune with the challenges and aspirations of their communities, they may have the opportunity to remain relevant and be vital contributors to a sustainable quality of life for an ageing society.

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# METHODS

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## Conducting Fellowship Research

Most of my research has been observational. I met with museum professionals at their workplaces and participated with the groups wherever possible. This offered the opportunity to engage with the participants and the task first-hand and compare facilitator approaches. I was invited to attend the staff/volunteer de-briefings after sessions to get a sense of how the sessions were being evaluated. Where I was not able to see programmes in action, I met with directors or programme managers to understand the objectives, methods and activities with which they are engaged. Discovering the background and motivation for their work and the future of their programming in the way they described it helped compare their approach with others. I was able to attend two training sessions to learn about the methodology and preparation that is essential to develop a programme and disseminate a clear vision. I shared my professional practice by presenting the work that I do in four formal settings which initiated discussion and debate.

## Selecting Programmes

I began my selection through contacts and networks I am already involved with. This presented a few museum visits to begin my research. These people in turn recommended other museums and professionals to inform my study. I then researched each city to ascertain if I could visit more than one programme. This broadened my investigation from museum programming to programmes outside the museum sector with established long-term agendas. My final schedule included visiting and/or discussing the following programmes:

### USA

**Minneapolis:** ART@HAND: Programs for Vital Aging, Northern Clay Center ▪ Discover Your Story, Minnesota Institute of Art ▪ Dancing Heart, Kairos Alive ▪ MacPhail Music for Life, MacPhail Center for Music

**Ohio:** Taft Museum of Art ▪ Opening Minds through Art, Scripps Center of Gerontology, Miami University

**Florida:** Meet Me at PMoA, Polk Museum of Art

**New York:** Meet Me at MoMA, MoMA ▪ Met Escapes, Metropolitan Museum of Art ▪ Elders Share the Arts ▪ Sweet Readers, Inc. ▪ Lifetime Arts, Inc. ▪ Arts & Minds, Inc., Studio Museum ▪ Alzheimer's Poetry Project ▪ Brooklyn Afternoons, Brooklyn Museum

### Australia

**Sydney:** Art and Dementia Tours, Art Gallery of New South Wales ▪ Art Engage Dementia Program, Hazelhurst Regional Gallery and Art Centre ▪ Social & Therapeutic Programs, Alzheimer's Australia

**Canberra:** Art and Alzheimer's, National Gallery of Australia

**Melbourne:** Reminiscing Kits, Museum of Victoria ▪ Reminiscence Cottage, National Wool Museum ▪ National Gallery of Victoria

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# FINDINGS

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## Assessing the evidence

As I travelled across cities and experienced different programmes, I noticed the essential role art is playing in response to the needs of a growing ageing population. With a substantial push for programmes aimed at people living with dementia, the Arts are being promoted as an aid to wellbeing, healing and living a more meaningful existence. Similar discoveries are being made globally around the use of creativity in this way. Whilst the agendas may be different and the triggers or motivators diverse, all programmes are seeing exciting results when older adults engage in the Arts.

Analysing the impact of art specifically for people living with dementia, the outcomes can be characterised as follows:

- Enhances confidence
- Builds emotional resilience
- Combats isolation
- Shifts attitudes and challenges stereotypes about dementia (and older people)
- Is fun
- Extends social networks and cultivates new friendships
- Gives people a sense of being valued/self-worth/morale
- Enhances communication (even if only short-term)
- Freedom to explore and learn new things
- Opportunity to share memories helps to connect to personal histories and strengthen identity
- Improves sense of community
- Combats depression
- Improves mood
- Builds a sense of achievement
- Increases attention and interest
- Increases concentration

These outcomes are not exclusive to people with a diagnosis of dementia. The scope for impact can be considered much wider.

Outcomes that were not homogenous across programmes have been identified as follows:

- Develops procedural memory through regularity and familiarity
- Provides opportunity to exercise choice
- Stimulation of a new environment
- Deepens understanding of self-expression
- Maintains/supports fine motor skills and hand/eye coordination
- Acquires and maintains strength and balance
- Distracts from the burdens of care

How can we explain why some programmes obtained these results where others did not? There are a number of potential explanations:

- Firstly, not all programmes are aimed exclusively at people living with dementia; not all programmes are museum-based; and not all programmes involve art-making – some are solely discussion-based.
- The programmes analysed include dance and music and therefore are not solely visual arts focus

- Some programmes are very formulaic, where outputs and outcomes are already decided and there is little room for alternatives or autonomy outside the prescribed activity. Often programmes did not encourage reflection on creativity.
- Finally, some programmes include family members and/or caregivers which present a variety of additional outcomes, but can also add a layer of complexity dependent on relationship dynamics.

## Best Practice

Making a programme successful is not easy. It requires patience and perseverance. To this end, a set of clear goals and a shared team understanding appeared to be very high up on most programme directors' requirements.

After visiting a range of programmes for people with dementia and a handful of programmes focused on arts for older adults, there were a strong set of shared principles aimed at increasing the chances of success, namely to:

1. *Provide a caring environment*
2. *Incorporate ritual, routine and repetition*
3. *Enhance language and communication*
4. *Provide an in-the-moment experience*
5. *Ensure professional quality*
6. *Accommodate individual creativity*
7. *Be equal*
8. *Celebrate creativity*

The theme of (9) **Commitment** can be added to this list to reflect the time and effort required to devise, organise and run programmes such as these. I believe this is a theme that can be expanded upon to highlight programme success.

### 1. Provide a caring environment

In the museum world, *care* is mainly discussed in reference to collections, and art centres, in reference to the space and materials. *Care* is the upkeep of things and spaces. Care of people tends to be much more the concern of legislature and 'keeping the customer satisfied'.

For some, *care* only has a place in the health sector. Physical, personal and emotional care are maintained within a medical environment and only in this environment can they be assessed as a marker of success. In the Arts (where skill and precision are highly valued within professional practice) prioritising a *caring environment* to nurture artists (of any age) makes the difference in an arts programme between a satisfied customer and a fulfilled participant.

We begin looking at best practice by addressing the importance of the *caring environment* because this appears to underpin the success of arts programmes for older people that have been sustained over many years. Even museums starting out in this type of work felt that they had introduced an 'enhanced level of care' for these particular participants.

I have defined this as 'caring' because I am rounding together a number of actions that provide a successful programme foundation. I have noticed that care is of the utmost importance, perhaps even before the art. The humanist psychologist, Abraham Maslow, enunciated a well-known theory on the hierarchy of 'needs'. He offered that only when basic or fundamental human needs, e.g. food, water, sleep, are met (those at the base of the his 'ranking' pyramid) a person can move on to needs higher up on the ladder, for example safety and security - then belonging, love and esteem. I have noticed something similar occur in art programmes for older people and, with an

emphasis on working with people living with dementia, this is echoed by Tom Kitwood (1997) in 'Dementia Reconsidered'.

Kitwood's model of person-centred care restructured the more traditional hierarchy of human needs into something 'cooperative'. Rather than layering these needs in a pyramid, Kitwood clusters the needs of people living with dementia, identifying six simple themes; inclusion, occupation, comfort, identity, attachment and love. The person-centred approach is modelled in a number of ways in museums. For example, in New York, I observed, as participants arrived to a session at The Studio Museum in Harlem that each person was greeted by name at eye level by the artist and organiser of *Arts & Minds*. I could see participants instantly boosted by this mark of respect.



Art & Dementia Tours - Art Gallery NSW, Sydney

The Studio Museum in Harlem is not the only place where a greeting like this is observed. For some museums and organisations working with people with dementia, this welcome serves as a sessional ritual. It is very familiar to staff and carers and helps aid reassurance in an unfamiliar environment. What makes this stand out is the effect it has on each person as they arrive – both the recipient and the person with whom they attend. The sense that the facilitators are genuinely glad to see their visitors is uplifting. There is a warmth in meeting new participants and an affection in welcoming others back. Doing this in a genuine way allays fears. It starts to address 'needs' suggested by Kitwood such as inclusion, comfort, identity and attachment. Participants feel safe and welcome in a new environment, in addition, facilitators have the chance to gauge how each person feels. Carers also begin to feel secure and know immediately who they can go to for information and help.

It is interesting to note that this method, delivered in this calm, personal and levelling manner, can look and feel distinctly different if not modelled by everyone in the room. In some sessions, I observed this 'meet and greet' become confusing as too many people arrived into a room at once, or too many facilitators were involved in welcoming participants. A welcome can just as easily become a 'labelling up' exercise as a group is given name tags and rushed through the entrance of a museum to a 'safe' place to start their experience. Therefore, the initial approach to caring for participants is most effective when it is delivered as a key part of the experience and not just a bonus. This would include having the room(s) set up with plenty of time and agreeing roles of facilitators from the start to ensure that participants feel settled rather than overwhelmed.

The level of detail needed for exemplary care on arrival to a museum is explored in the SPARK Alliance manual *Opening Doors to Memory & Imagination* (Tygesson, 2012);

"Starting a tour in a separate entrance to the museum that is relatively quiet is helpful. At this entrance, wheelchairs and camp stools should be available. Go out to the bus or van to help the facility staff unload participants and move them into the museum...greet the participants, welcome them to the museum and give them name tags... In an unhurried fashion, gather your group of four or five individuals with memory

loss and their partners and tell them in a relaxed abbreviated manner where they are and what they can expect from the tour.”

Jane Tygesson, Programme Director of *Opening Doors* and docent at the Minneapolis Institute of Art (MIA) for the past twenty years, offers the book and her services without charge so that more museums around the country can facilitate tours to adults with memory loss. Discussing her work, she articulated a strongly held belief that in order to develop a useful resource based on her work at the MIA and the SPARK Alliance (a uniquely funded model of museum and cultural institution collaboration for Wisconsin residents with memory loss), being pragmatic about the impacts of operational challenges on programmes is vital.

Tygesson encourages museums embarking on an arts programme for people with dementia to consider navigation routes through the museum, wheelchair accessibility, nearby parking and even having large umbrellas to hand to shelter people from the rain.

When I arrived at the Taft Museum in Cincinnati, not only was I greeted with a very warm welcome from both staff and volunteers I was also given a cup of tea and presented with a beautiful platter of fruit and biscuits. It was reminiscent of home. This is the same kind of hospitality I have come to expect from the programmes I run with my team at Dulwich Picture Gallery. It became increasingly apparent as my travels continued that this was the first element of programming to be omitted when a programme manager was concerned with their finances. However, as more and more people arrived at the Taft Museum and settled around tables chatting to staff, family and even making new friends, the welcome confirmed that hospitality of this kind serves a pivotal role.

To bring this new audience into a gallery, laying the foundation of basic comforts ensures that people feel safe and happy. The simple components that make up ‘hospitality’, the relationship between a guest and a host enhances the feeling of comfort before the activity itself and addresses other crucial needs such as inclusion, occupation, and attachment. Moreover, as Kitwood (1997) observes in his examination of ‘needs’, “It might be said that there is only one all-encompassing need – for love”.

Halpin-Healy, Director of *Arts & Minds*, eloquently proposes, eventually, over time, an “atmosphere of acceptance and compassion generates love. It may be surprising to speak of love in the context of museum education, but teaching at its most deeply humanist, whatever else it may be, is most decidedly an act of love”.

## 2. Incorporate ritual, routine and repetition

We have addressed how a warm, caring welcome is essential for a programme targeted at people living with dementia. However, it is not just how we greet people that is essential, but how we bid farewell to them as well. At the National Gallery of Australia, the *Art and Alzheimer’s* programme training pack includes the following description;

“The end of the tour is helpful for the educators’ feedback, discussions with carers and to set up plans for the following week. Accompany the participants to their transport and assist carers where necessary. A happy departure sets up positive reinforcement for the return visit.” (MacPherson, S. et al, 2009)

MoMA in New York would also recommend providing take-home reproductions of the paintings participants seen in the museum.

An extension of the *caring environment* previously discussed, these touches serve as a familiar ritual in breaking down barriers and ultimately providing a sense of control to an otherwise unfamiliar place and situation (not just for participants with dementia but often their carers as well). They also serve to give carers cues to act upon and to increase their buy-in to a programme which may initially attract scepticism or uncertainty.



*Scripps, Opening Minds through Art (OMA) Programme* at Miami University include a song as part of their art making sessions. In the leadership training I attended, 'ritual' was a key component of activity design. *OMA* sessions are always in the same space. People sit at the same place with the same partner. They use the same song; the same open and close for each session too. As part of the *OMA* methodology, leaders are trained to, "create structures to create freedom". Included in this principle is being sensitive to the fact that a person living with dementia has 'fragile' attention, therefore, everyone in the team is mindful to minimise interruptions, delays and clutter of all kinds (visual and audio). Elizabeth Lokon, *OMA* programme director, argues that by establishing a routine one can create "process predictability".

In the work I carry out in the UK, this process predictability for people with dementia has been noted in evaluative research conducted by Professor Paul Camic (2014), Canterbury Christ Church University. He reports the following about 'Visual to Vocal' (an intensive programme for people living with dementia to write and perform a new song-cycle with English Touring Opera);

"...the programme had become somewhat routine, although remaining positive... This might indicate that participants gained a familiarity about the sessions which is an interesting concept, considering that short term memory was a problem for all those with a dementia who participated in Visual to Vocal. While memory of specific details may vary or be absent, familiarity about the process of coming each week – and what that entailed – appeared to be retained as indicated in qualitative analysis."

This routine and repetition contributes to successful programming. Participants and carers feel safe, nurtured and able to focus on the task at hand. It is worth mentioning, however, that in my observations a 'light-touch' approach to this method makes it most effective. For sessions to remain engaging and, crucially, creative, the rituals should be utilised with ease. The *OMA* methodology of structure for freedom and without 'clutter' is paramount. Side discussions with care staff or the noise of a 're-hang' in a Gallery nearby can all disturb the routine. Very long introductions (which serve purely as ritual) can result in confusion, frustration and withdrawal. The art activity should remain at the heart of the process, the structures merely serve to build confidence and creative safety.

### 3. Enhance language and communication

A prominent feature in this investigation is how we use language and our methods for communication. There are four aspects of particular note:

- Communication to transform how participants engage
- Communication and language to transform how participants see themselves
- Communication to transform how participants are seen differently by others
- Language which transforms an institution and builds a message to share with the wider community

The enjoyment of an activity, whether viewing art or creating work, relies on strong communication from the facilitators. In the context of training when working with people with dementia, the *Opening Doors* training advises;

"Never dumb down your commentary, but be ready to reorient, redirect, repeat, rephrase and reassure. Use short sentences and comments. Encourage narrative, expect off-topic response and go with the flow...Look for non-verbal cues and expect the unexpected!" (Tygesson, 2012)

National Gallery of Australia (NGA) promotes the following communication strategies for a successful art-viewing experience:

- *Active listening* – include two staff members so that comments are not missed and ideas can be developed
- *Use silences* – allowing participants "to process the comments and then formulate a response."

- *Repeat responses* – reinforces what was said and values participant opinion. As well as ensures people with hearing difficulties are included
- *Non-verbal communication* – in the form of hand gestures or animated facial expressions to move discussion forward, including imitating a gesture in a painting to aid explanation
- *Stream-of-consciousness* – a technique used in some tours where “thoughts flow with ease and no particular outcome” is expected

The *Meet Me at MoMA* programme in New York, which partners with NGA, explores this further in their research summary;

“Beyond a doubt, it is the style and approach of the educators —which is never overly didactic or condescending, but rather warm and interactive — and the interaction with them that participants single out as being of exceptional importance to them. The way in which they involve the participants with dementia and elicit their comments, which are then met with genuine interest and appreciation, rekindles feelings of self-worth.”

Indeed, a participant commented,

“The program gave me the confidence to know that I had been able to retain my appreciation of art and that I could zero in on the points that were necessary in the artwork that I was seeing... That really was important. And to verbalize it ... because first you’re talking about a perception of it, and recalling it, but then you verbalize that perception, and you are able to verbalize what that means. And boy, is that important!”

For this participant the manner in which the art work was communicated and the resulting feeling of confidence in being a part of that discussion is transformative.

The sensitive awareness of language and the appropriate methods of communication can therefore boost self-esteem and reaffirm opinions which in turn build confidence. One of the strongest developments in art viewing programmes with people with dementia indicates how museums have learnt to maintain this level of engagement so that no member of the group is left out. A number of galleries noted that keeping group size small is essential.

A strong example of this in an art-making workshop format, is in the design of *OMA* sessions. By using “FLOW” (Csikszentmihalyi, 2008) methodology, the activity empowers participants to create work whilst facilitators build discussion and conversation around works of art. Csikszentmihalyi’s theory is the mental state of operation in which a person performing an activity is fully immersed in a feeling of energised focus, full involvement, and enjoyment in the process of the activity. In essence, ‘flow’ is characterized by complete absorption in what one is doing. In order to create this experience, the research directs leaders to design activities which:

- Incorporate minute-by-minute goals
- The activity gives immediate feedback
- The task matches skills
- The participant (artist) is in control

OMA also teaches volunteers how to recognise four levels of activity by using the Pool Activity Level (PAL) Instrument for Occupational Profiling (Pool, 2008). These activities are flexible enough to meet skill and ability levels so that volunteers can engage with individual members in the group according to where they are on the PAL chart. This ensures that the programme gets the best out of participants and empowers them to create work they can really be proud of.

Working with older adults, a facilitator or institution's use of language can also play a key role in redefining ageing and dispelling preconceptions of what older adults can achieve. *Lifetime Arts* state; "Our approach releases provider and participant from outdated stereotypes that define older people as needy, incapable or frail." This values-led approach to communication shifts the way people engage with the activity and how they feel about their participation, and also transforms how others might see them too. One participating carer of the *Meet Me at MoMA* programme commented;

"It was like the [man] I knew before this illness. The task of reacting to a picture is not beyond his capabilities—it has made me think of trying to focus more on 'feelings' than 'words' in my interaction with him."

The message we convey about older people, disability and illness, has a direct impact on how an institution receives their visitors and can reaffirm stereotypes and embed prejudice if not championed on all operational levels.

It is important to note that as we face an ageing population, not all older adults will attend galleries via the route of formulated programmes. An approach based on positive communication with and about older people and people living with dementia should be implemented beyond programme level. In this way, galleries may impact identity, guide communication and promote greater social understanding.

#### 4. Provide an in-the-moment experience

The ancient Greeks had two words for time, *chronos* and *kairos*. While the former refers to chronological or sequential time, the latter means a moment of indeterminate time in which everything happens. *Kairos* can therefore be interpreted as, 'the opportune moment'.



*Kairos Alive!* - Eastside Friendship Circle Day Centre, Minneapolis

At Eastside Friendship Circle Day Centre in Minneapolis, I felt that auspicious moment when Nicholas, Carla and Megan, facilitators of *Kairos Alive!* captured the attention of everyone in the centre - singing, moving, dancing and laughing. Throughout my travels I continued to question where reminiscence fitted in older adult programming in contrast with the 'in-the-moment' experiences, such as the one I had with the *Kairos Alive!* team.

At Australia's National Wool Museum, the *Reminiscence Programme* is developed into full therapeutic sessions. The guide given to care staff who bring participants to a session in the 'Mill Workers' Cottage' explains;

"The act of reminiscing is familiar to us all. It is an important part of identity-building and giving order to life experiences. Reminiscence Therapy is where a person with dementia engages in a facilitated activity to stimulate their recollection of past life experiences. For a person with dementia the act of reminiscing enhances interpersonal skills and engages their attention more fully. It increases the participants' mood, ability to interact socially, aids with depression, and is a positive creative and emotional practice." (Gillies, 2013)

This description seems well-researched in terms of how reminiscence might benefit people living with dementia. In theory, this method of revisiting past memories is both useful and entertaining. After attending a reminiscence-oriented session using outreach boxes from the Melbourne Museum and discussing the experience at the specially designed Mill Worker's Cottage I had a number of observations around the use of reminiscence in the Arts.

The implication that familiar is good does not necessarily sit well with me. If the aim of visiting a museum, and/or these sessions is for enjoyment, what if the memory of revisiting the past is not comfortable? What if a person with dementia taking part finds it frustrating and cannot remember a particular object or experience? Is it too big an assumption that older people like talking about the past? I recall one of the participants in one of my projects telling evaluators, "I am still living in the present as far as I know (laughs) and I like looking and hearing about the past, but that doesn't keep me going."

I would hope that galleries are concerned with participants enjoying their visit and want to limit negative impact on mood. I might also argue that even if you reflect on the past, being in the 'here-and-now' and looking to the future in a positive way may be an added benefit to the programme.

I also wonder whether reminiscence programmes designed to work predominantly with people with dementia in the settings I observed is a bit patronising. Does it merely reflect our prejudices? Are we trying to understand dementia only on our terms by trying to make people with dementia 'remember'?

These questions are probably too simplistic but from what I have seen and experienced, in-the-moment experiences offer an opportunity to build new memories, to learn new things, to have a reason to keep going and to feel 'alive' – something I did not get from reminiscence sessions.

It is clear that reminiscence is important to some extent. For example, in most sessions I hear the phrase, 'it reminds me of...' both from sessions looking at or creating artwork. However, the pure reminiscence sessions pointed towards living in a different moment. Reminiscence also relies often on finding the 'right' words. In-the-moment art-making appeared vital in enabling people to express themselves non-verbally.

From the examples I have seen I am yet to be convinced that reminiscing enhances interpersonal skills and engages attention "more fully". It can be argued that it creates a point of connection for people to interact and the right trigger will hold attention for a while. However, I have seen a stronger case around discussing and making art - even without any prior knowledge - to offer the same results as reminiscence therapy. Through creative arts sessions I have seen amazing results where, without prompts of the past, family members say that they have got a part of their

loved one back through their artwork. People with dementia comment how they feel 'useful' and carers find a peaceful place where they can be in the present with their partner and all thoughts are celebrated as equal.

I champion in-the-moment experiences as best practice for sustainable, long-term art-making and discussion in galleries because discovering something new with other people can be a great leveller. Being in-the-moment may be risky, but no more so than triggering a bad memory. I also believe that older people, regardless of their ability, can and should be challenged. New research is proving that people with dementia can be part of this too. New learning is not the privilege of people with 'intact cognition'. The NGA, *Art and Alzheimer's* report (2009), aptly titled, 'You do it for the moment', found that the art-viewing programme was intellectually stimulating and encouraged participants to think and learn, as one participant states, "It makes me feel a bit intelligent."

The opportunity to be heard and to value others, particularly for people in their early stages of dementia, is huge when suddenly your independence seems diminished. The NGA report also noted that;

"One member had previously spent most days since his diagnosis walking by himself, avoiding social contact. Another described himself as very shy. Despite this, all members reported becoming at ease with one another and that they enjoyed the increased social contact. Part of the social enjoyment was the variety of ideas when presented with the same artwork."

## 5. Ensure professional quality

To take a programme from satisfactory to outstanding and achieve some of the results discussed in this report, the professional level with which participants are engaged needs to be very high. This is something I discussed at great length with my hosts and something research studies and programme evaluations echo.

To define what is meant by ensuring 'professional quality', I have identified four essential components: (i) **Materials**, (ii) **Tuition**, (iii) **Training**, and (iv) **Physical Space**.



Artwork created in Scripps OMA Workshop - Oxford, Ohio

## **(i) Materials**

One of the key principles of *Scripps OMA* is the use of, “artist grade materials”. This is a sentiment that I share, having seen the marked disparity in the work produced with budget art supplies, office stationery or very old, donated materials compared with art supplies used by professionals. Unless utilised for a very specific artistic effect, or part of an artist’s practice with known results, poor quality materials will produce poor artwork. I would like to emphasise that most people embarking on artistic activity with older adults have only the best intentions. However, I would also argue that it is a misguided belief that ‘doing art’ with older people ‘makes them feel better’, if the assumption is that it is simply taking part that counts. ‘Colouring in’ shapes with felt-tip pens, drawing with broken crayons, painting with poster paint that peels off paper, or even playing an out-of-tune instrument are all creative interactions which will not produce something that one can feel truly proud of.

A truly artistic experience has the ability to be meaningful and above all – transformative. The use of appropriate materials change the participant experience from simply engaging in an activity to being an artist creating art work. A phrase that I keep returning to is, “give me something I can achieve”. This was a request by a participant at a session I attended and highlights how emotional wellbeing is so explicitly interlinked with the process of art-making. Many older adults have not engaged in art-making since childhood, or perceive themselves to be ‘un-creative’ or even able to create. There is often a palpable fear in art workshops of being set up to fail. In this context, the materials can be a contributing factor between creating artwork that is either disappointing, or gratifying.

*Arts & Minds* are in constant dialogue with other museums to build research about their impact on the cognitive and emotional health of people living with dementia and those who care for them, Carolyn Halpin-Healy documents:

“We are consciously working against age-bias and the attitudes that infantilize older adults, which are all too prevalent in the US. For this reason, it is of the utmost importance that the art under discussion and the materials offered for art making be of high quality. The works of art that are chosen for discussion are not always beautiful but they are complex and worthy of attention. By presenting challenging work and good materials we convey respect and affirmation. In order to maintain cognitive function, it is important to stimulate the brain, therefore the choice of ‘difficult’ work is entirely appropriate.”

Materials that we may give to children, for example, cannot possibly “convey respect and affirmation”. In many programmes, museums are viewing and discussing artwork in addition to or instead of art-making. The materials in this instance are the museum collections and following this line of thinking, the best way to do this is not by providing photocopied images but being in the ‘galleries’ to experience the work first-hand.

The statement in Halpin-Healy’s report relating to complexity is at the heart of what makes successful art programmes for older people stand out. Although this may seem a juxtaposition with ‘give me something I can achieve’ it actually contributes greatly to this idea and has been expanded on in the next section.

## **(ii) Tuition**

Until I embarked on my Fellowship I would have always argued that professional, practicing artists should lead sessions. These artists should have experience with teaching – preferably community groups. The reason for this is that artists have a good grasp on the capabilities and limitations of their materials. This expertise and knowledge is crucial to being able to guide a participant through the process of creating a piece of work they can feel proud of. Most important – is guiding them there through good leadership without actually doing any of the work. In addition, being tutored by a professional artist conveys a message to the participants about the way they are valued.

However, although artists did lead many of the programmes I encountered, I observed that there were valid methods used which were aimed at training teams to deliver equally professional and creatively challenging programmes. Both *Scripps OMA* and *Sweet Readers* train young volunteers to engage in art with older people. *Scripps OMA*'s methods were of particular interest to me as the programme is founded and directed by an artist. What was key to the long-term success and expansion of the programme was enabling creativity in students to be leaders of the programme even if they were not professional, practicing artists.

The introduction of 'playtime' in this programme, where leaders must create a session based on an objectives matrix, make the art work, then teach this to their peers and assess together, is a bold solution which taps into the creative sensibilities of the leaders and ensures, albeit on a much smaller more limited scale, that they (like a practicing artist) have the knowledge of the materials and confidence to deliver with authority.

In the *OMA* programme, training course leaders have made the 'mistakes' and in some cases have discovered 'the happy accident'. To this end, one might argue that they have limited the inevitable risk associated with 'creating art' to cater for a group of elders with dementia. However, recognising that creativity needs playfulness even when creating 'safe' sessions to be delivered by students, the focus on abstract art in these sessions can serve a dual purpose in maintaining the aim of 'achievable' art and retaining room for more 'risky' play and chance.

As mentioned previously, the choice of challenging work is entirely appropriate for people with dementia. In my training session with *Scripps OMA*, Director, Elizabeth Lokon explained "it is a common error of perception that something simple is easy to do and a complex activity is difficult." The aim of the art work is to create a complex product that is easy to do – something many programmes do not manage to achieve.

Ensuring professional quality tuition for older adults to be creative is inextricably linked to 'layering'. The simplicity of each layer is built one on-top of the other until the final product appears complex. This process was discussed at length in the *OMA* training. I have also seen the strength of this method in other art forms, notably at McPhail Center for Music where I met Jeannie Brindley-Barnett and Tamra Brun running the *MacPhail Music for Life* Programme.

Creative facilitation is just as important as drawing out creativity in participants. 'Fun' has to be central to all these programmes. This fellowship was such a privilege because I was given the chance to participate in workshops that were, fundamentally, extremely enjoyable. Can one build in fun to a session? I believe so. Just look at *MacPhail Music for Life*, *Giving Voice Chorus*, or *Sweet Readers* (inspiring middle school students to explore how they might connect with people through language and the Arts).

Having professional quality tuition does not equate to an uncompromising, staid experience. Facilitating sessions for this audience should be fun and joyful.

### **(iii) Training**

At the Northern Clay Center (NCC) in Minneapolis, Director, Sarah Millfelt expressed to me that investing in artists ensures the programme runs at its optimum. The NCC treat and train their artists well. On the *ART@HAND* programme artists need to be able to work with older adults with varying needs and their community partners help with training so that artists can adapt their sessions and delivery. Artists must shadow sessions to get a feel for what they will be doing before they become teachers too, "there are no assumptions that because you can teach school kids you can tutor older adults in the same way".

Some of the training methods NCC employs are unconventional. Mandatory Alexander Technique and movement lessons have been given to artists to think about the constant strain on the body – lifting, as well as the physical

nature of working with clay. Millfelt is always open to ideas for the development of her team and will train alongside them. A clear example of the significance placed on this training.

NCC know that artists bridge partnerships and sometimes even broker them. They know that each artist is an ambassador for the Centre and respect for the teaching team ensures that they get the best – long-term. I was impressed by the way artists and partner originations were considered, “co-producers of events”. An investment in people, as seen here by the NCC (and the reason many are hesitant to provide support in this way) takes a huge amount of time and funding and it relies on commitment from the top.

A well-researched programme can lead to effective training as *Meet Me at MoMA*, *Scripps OMA*, *Sweet Readers* and *Art and Alzheimer’s* at NGA all prove. Training should ensure quality control and effective delivery so that the programme ideology is clear and all activity is designed and evaluated around this.

#### **(iv) Physical Space**

When investigating the value of museums for health and wellbeing, practitioners and researchers often concentrate on the impact of collections, objects, art works and their use for art-making. Evaluators have more recently started to reference the influence of the physical space where a programme takes place. However, this factor is rarely documented in programme evaluation or training.

In the UK, Jocelyn Dodd and Ceri Jones’ assessment, *Mind, Body, Spirit: How museums impact health and wellbeing* (2014), states,

“There is an increasing understanding of how taking part in a cultural or creative activity can have a demonstrative and measurable impact on mental and physical health and wellbeing, or how regular cultural attendance (visiting a museum, art gallery or attending a concert) provides ‘a distinct stimulus to human beings that has an impact on their wellbeing to such a degree that it prolongs their lives.’”

Practitioners working in this field understand that programmes for this audience often attract a population who have never been to their museum, or in many cases, any museum. A warm welcome to a beautiful place, a place of intrigue and stature, has an impact on participants. *Arts & Minds* Director, Carolyn Halpin-Healy, who works across museums facilitating activities for people with dementia expressed to me that there are longstanding barriers that exist between people and museums - barriers to do with levels of education, class and race. The physical surroundings can be intimidating and one of the key objectives of this work is to breakdown these barriers, especially considering how large this audience is going to become.

It therefore can be argued that a place itself can be emotionally uplifting. A professional environment, such as a place of culture, a museum, concert hall, university or artist’s studio can be a contributing factor to enhancing confidence, improving self-esteem, increasing concentration and challenging stereotypes.

## **6. Accommodate individual creativity**

*‘Art enables us to find ourselves and lose ourselves at the same time.’* – Thomas Merton

It was by chance that I met Tinia Clark. An artist in Florida, Clark had just started tours for people with dementia and their carers at the Polk Museum in Lakeland. The tours were very much a reflection of the MoMA model but what I was really intrigued by was her studio practice which included working with people with dementia. Working with individuals, Clark had begun exploring ways to unlock creativity in people with memory loss. The way she described



it to me, she almost 'served' them, enabling each person she worked with to grow creatively. While their cognitive impairment progressed, their portfolio of work grew.

Clark is inspirational because she uses her creative prowess to competently adapt to the needs of her participants as their verbal communication fade and their mobility and fine motor-skills decline. I pictured her like an extension of her students' canvases and paintbrushes, especially those with whom she was, or had worked with one-to-one. She not only accommodates creativity but expands and intensifies a participant's vision. The way Clark talked about the work was humbling and probably the purest form of this notion of accommodating individual creativity.

Similarly, *MacPhail Music for Life* Programmes Manager Tamra Brun explained that working with people over 55 requires the opposite of a "cookie-cutter approach" - where everyone must be the same. Rather, they tailor music sessions for all older people who want to learn.

Karen Young, director of *Sweet Readers* in New York, emphasises something similar - "*Sweet Readers* are trained to find the person behind the disease."

It is possible to have everyone in the room following the same instruction and build in autonomy. By taking part in the same activity, people can find a common place to celebrate each other's achievements. However, in order to ensure that everyone achieves, choice must be built into the task and facilitators must get to know their participants in order to adapt and be reactive to individual needs.

I discussed this with the manager of Alzheimer's Australia's Social & Therapeutic Programmes, Denise Herman in some detail. She highlighted that the Arts can play a huge role in boosting self-esteem, her observation in the museum environment revealed that, "the Gallery is an opportunity for everyone to have an opinion and be heard." We discussed how this is so important at a time when life feels like it is shrinking and control over everyday activities can be, or feel like it is, diminishing.

Artistic skills are often seen as limited to 'those who can draw' and creativity is often dismissed as 'whacky'. However, the Arts encompass a whole toolkit of creative thinking which ensures that vital problem-solving can take place (in any field), obstacles are seen as opportunities and innovation can occur which transforms perspectives.

A great example of how the Arts can be expansive and offer far more skills than just 'the ability to draw' is the *Sweet Readers* programme started in New York. Recruiting young people of middle school age (approximately fourteen years old) to participate with adults with dementia, *Sweet Readers* has been thoughtfully designed to bring two (and sometimes three) generations together to build awareness, empathy, understanding and potential solutions, to the challenges associated with living a full life with dementia.

The key to the programme's success is that it trains facilitators to motivate young participants to embrace and manage the activities. *Sweet Readers* has also worked with The Metropolitan Museum of Art to train young leaders to facilitate sessions in their galleries.

The *Sweet Readers* programme taps into the notion that middle school age is when a child transitions from being a child to becoming a young adult. They are emotionally and intellectually more capable to tackle challenging philosophies. However, they are still defining what matters to them and who they are. Therefore, *Sweet Readers* are given the responsibility that they are crying out for and the space to utilise this in a mutually respectful environment. By learning to 'see beyond the masks of ageing' and explore people and the Arts in new ways they become better communicators, realise the power of compassion and understand how to actively listen to others and support them in their creative pursuits.

I would therefore suggest that, accommodating individual creativity, whether in an art-making session or in discussion, facilitators need to get to know the participants well and be ready to adapt to their creative needs.

Galleries can do this very effectively and see the best results after a number of visits. The NGA's research report highlights how accommodating the creative ideas of people with dementia can boosting independence, even if just in the Gallery environment:

“participant behaviour appeared different within the group than elsewhere. In the presence of carers, or away from the programme, participants seemed to lose confidence. When engaged with the artworks, the educators, and each other, they showed more capacity and positive affect than was normally apparent...under circumstances which promote independence, even people with moderate to severe dementia can achieve more than is typically observed in their daily interactions.”

It may be a challenge for a facilitator to accommodate the creative ideas of everyone in a group. However, I would offer that this is done best when participants are partnered up with a volunteer who can get to know what makes that person tick and unlock their creativity, as seen in the *Sweet Readers* programme, or *Scripps OMA*.

Finding the balance between structure and assistance, with choice and autonomy is a vital consideration in the context of accommodating the creative ideas of each individual. The task must be achievable for the older participant and must offer enough opportunities for a piece of work/discussion to be reflective of the individuals' choices and perspective. Therefore, the partner's role should be limited to a purely mechanical one (e.g. being asked to cut something to size by the artist). The independence of an artist to make decisions around their artwork is paramount.

## 7. Be equal

No facilitator sets out to exclude or alienate participants but in this work we need to consider how we can offer equal learning opportunities for this audience when abilities, experiences and skill levels are so different.

Pitching the right activity for a mixed-ability group is important bearing in mind the life experiences of the constituent individuals. It is entirely possible to have a range of abilities and artistic sensibilities to creative tasks within the one group. It is here, therefore, where the notion of introducing layers of different processes is vital so that everyone can be catered for. Art workshops that are broken down into parts that everyone can follow together offer a greater opportunity for final results to be assessed by the group and discussed on equal terms.

When viewing art, I observed that variety is key. Looking at a range of works – at least two or more – increases the opportunity for everyone to find a point of connection within a collection.

In some museums I visited, participants were given the opportunity to look around the galleries at their own pace. While this seems perfectly equal and enjoyable, it assumes that people are comfortable looking at works on their own without explanation. This also misses an opportunity for people to expand their knowledge in their connection with others.



Arts & Minds Workshop at The Studio Museum in Harlem

The Arts are a great leveller. Programme outcomes (such as opportunities for self-expression, autonomy, social interaction, increased confidence and improved communication) are often a result of this – there are no rights or wrongs, dos or don'ts, or goods and bad. Without absolute answers, everyone can be involved. Carers can participate in sessions - younger generations too.

One aspect of equality that became apparent throughout my travels was that the emphasis on self-expression and creativity transfers attention from a person's diagnosis to what makes them 'tick' as a human being – their tastes, viewpoint, skills, achievements and relationships. Being equal should mean that we do not define people within our programmes as solely, 'having dementia' or, 'suffering with Parkinson's Disease'. Rather, the Arts help us to understand what makes that person uniquely different – their true sense of self - reconnecting them with their identity.

As participants at the NGA reported, "they were treated as normal, rather than people with dementia". For this reason I strongly believe that where the programme and/or activity is designed and delivered by the Arts facilitators, the partnership of art galleries and museums with charities and government organisations should have clear boundaries. The role of the partner, for example the Alzheimer's Association, should be limited to aiding recruitment and bringing knowledge and training to assist the development of the creative programme.

I observed that programmes were hindered due to the distraction of a partner's agenda to discuss 'beneficial activities for people with Alzheimer's' or set 'homework', neither of which had anything to do with the session itself. The equal nature of the participants in the group therefore shifted as carers were asked about the capabilities of their partners and any domestic issues during the session.

For art to serve its purpose as a great leveller, the creative space and the conversations that are encouraged have to be neutral. Most importantly, the art has to take centre stage.

## 8. Celebrate creativity

“We are equally expressive and deserving of opportunities to be in a professional environment – a gorgeous concert hall – working with professionals and sharing removal of stereotype...”

Jeanie Brindley-Barnett, Co-Founder, Senior Teaching Artist MacPhail Music for Life

The use of artist grade materials can be considered right through to the presentation of finished work. The use of simple mounts to frame participants' work at the end of *Scripps OMA* sessions was a simple presentation method helping the artists to take a step back and reflect on their work.

The second part of celebrating the artwork in OMA sessions is offering authentic praise. This seemed difficult for so many members of staff. In museums especially, many volunteers or docents become accustomed to telling all participants in the room how 'beautiful' their work is or how 'clever' they are. Whilst this is important, meaningful praise also has to be characterised by specificity. In other words, explaining why you find something beautiful has a greater impact on an individual than a simple 'I love it' or 'well done'. The promotion of commending work with specific and genuine positivity is critical for boosted self-esteem and continued creative growth. Active listening and authentic praise in a gallery discussion should be a goal of facilitation too.

Although not built into many programmes, celebrating creative achievements is a method which can transport a person to a more professional level. The *OMA* techniques are achievable by facilitators on a small-scale, workshop by workshop basis aimed at reinforcing the achievement of participant into artist.

On a larger scale, exhibitions of work celebrate the artistic choices and ideas of older adults and can act as a powerful device to build awareness about the capacities of older artists. This is where the quality of what is produced, that is to say the quality of the leadership and the activity itself, needs to be extremely high. The presentation too must be of professional quality in order that a clear message is conveyed about what older people are able to achieve. In this way, we can challenge stereotypes of 'community' or 'social' art.

The *MacPhail Music for Life's, Giving Life Chorus* is a good example - people with dementia and their carers sing music that is important to them. The key goal is the emphasis on performance which is always in front of an invited audience.

People do not create works of art (whether it be paintings, songs or choreography) to keep them hidden. They are to be shared and appreciated. In this way, artists continue to develop, express themselves and achieve. For some the celebration of creativity is just a pause in a journey and can act as an opportunity to reflect on how far they have come. However, for most, being appreciated by others is equally important.

## 9. Commitment

It is clear that the attainment of 'best practice' relies on the dedication of the facilitators. Throughout this report I have touched on the role of facilitator but I cannot express enough how deeply impressive the founders and producers of these programmes are.

Over the course of my travels I was struck by the time and commitment people pour into designing and delivering their programmes, as well as teaching and training others in their methods and discoveries. I see these individuals as key players in a 'movement' where the work they do in their role is much more than a 'job'. Examples of this type of commitment are:

- Founder and director of the OMA programme, Professor Elizabeth Lokon, immersed herself in a world that she did not understand - living in a care home to learn what dementia is and how best to work creatively with people living with cognitive impairment. Her findings led to her PhD and her dedicated and on-going research into the impact of the OMA methods on the wellbeing of people with dementia and the transformative effects of this work on participants, families, volunteers and the public in general.
- Jane Tygesson authored the manual, *Opening Doors to Memory & Imagination* designed to help museums create programs that engage people with dementia. She is the Program Director of the Opening Doors initiative, through which she offers the manual and her services free of charge in order to reach more people. Jane also co-founded the "Discover Your Story" program at the Minneapolis Institute of Arts (MIA) and believes in this work with such a passion that she has always delivered the programme free of charge and continues to grow the programme and train others through her partnership with the SPARK! Alliance.
- Sophie Young, the co-founder of *Sweet Readers Inc.*, was just thirteen when she discovered that she could energise and inspire not just her grandmother but a whole group of older adults at her grandmother's day programme. Before Sophie's mother had a chance to consider the activities of her daughter properly, define how they could use the outcomes in a pilot and research, Sophie had enlisted her classmates to join her. She had pioneered a programme – a new way of working. Sophie created a community. Based on her methods, this community continues today to enrich the lives of others, raises money and offers hope for the future.

It is very clear that what make long-term programmes stand out is the commitment by the staff to build empathy and understanding to progress arts for older adults.

Crucially, the commitment for sustainable programmes needs to come from the organisations themselves, which is not always the case. My concern is that the future success and development of these programmes fundamentally relies on those individuals who run them. Without these key individuals enthusiasm may diminish and experience might plateau. In this way, we might miss the opportunity to build the reputation of arts organisations in this innovative sphere.

In my experience, the USA seems to be making the greatest push for methodologies and results to be recorded, researched and disseminated. However, the risk of programmes being short-lived once institutions have used their funding and disseminated their findings seems ever present.

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# CONCLUSIONS

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The needs of adults with dementia appears to be of the greatest concern to museums and galleries in the context of my research. Few see the general goal of reaching isolated older adults as a necessity. However, there is limitless potential for the findings and best practice in art programmes for people living with dementia to be utilised across the older adult spectrum as communities become older and health declines.

Museums often choose to work with known and 'safe' communities, which can be unrepresentative of an area's diversity and less challenging for the organisation itself. There is enough empirical evidence, leadership and case studies, for more museums to play a pivotal role in the quality of life for older adults. This type of engagement has the potential to become core to the approach of museums - not just a 'fashion' within 'community work'. Embedded within the values of an institution, this social agenda will enable museums to not only contribute to social change but to instigate it; strengthening the museum's financial survival, professional status and expertise.

It is important to recognise that one size does not fit all. Each institution must address the needs of their participants as individuals and learn to use the indicators of best practice already researched - to adapt the environment, their communication style and session plans as they get to know their audience better. Even with similar medical diagnoses and issues, no two people are the same and it is important to look beyond medical labels to ensure each individual can harness their potential as a creative person.

While the older population increases, many still find it difficult to reach the audience they want. Partnering with organisations where referrals can be made is crucial. Care must be taken, however, not to lose the key artistic and creative goals.

Evaluation is vital in the ongoing development of arts programmes for older adults in museums. It must be recorded and used. In order to understand the results and evaluate how to replicate best practice, museums and galleries need to build-in deliverable evaluation and engage more researchers to widen the reach of their findings. Continued research will also promote the value of this work and define its impact. This will enable wider opportunities for funding and for institutional and community buy-in.

The majority of programmes rely heavily on facilitation; artists, programme managers, teachers and volunteer support. Training is a major contributing factor to programme sustainability and quality control. This should be updated and delivered regularly to maintain programme effectiveness. Training should be considered organisation-wide and not limited to the key players in a department in order have a greater impact. There is a strong case for making programming 'inter-generational' so that stereotypes continue to be challenged, attitudes towards ageing continue to change and we empower and equip the next generation with the knowledge and impetus to respect and care effectively for the older generation.

Unlike other fields of work, the Arts are meant to be risky. This is, in part, what makes participating worthwhile. Art programmes in galleries and museums are in a great position to challenge an audience to try new things and to push the complexity of what can be achieved even further. This aspect needs greater research and investigation.

This is not a call for museums to become social welfare agencies. However, there is an opportunity to heighten awareness and deliberately combine the capabilities and resources of museums to bring about change – both internally and externally. Delivered in the right way, arts activities are transformative for this audience and offer a long-term vision for galleries and museums to remain relevant and serve a central role in their communities for people to live purposeful lives through the expansion of art and ideas.

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# RECOMMENDATIONS

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This research fellowship was undertaken on behalf of the programme - *Good Times*: Art for Older People at Dulwich Picture Gallery. The recommendations are based on experience of directing an established Gallery programme offering professional artistic practice for older adults but are by no means limited to the Gallery and its programme. These recommendations can be goals for any scalable programme of this kind. It is important, however, that any appropriate recommendations are implemented with the report's best practice findings and guidelines. The following recommendations can also offer insight into a long-term vision for those undertaking a new programme to engage older people in the Arts:

1. Develop a training pack for *Good Times*, to include:
  - A clearly defined set of guiding principles that all sessions can follow
  - Strategies and techniques to engage and work with older adults (including people with dementia)
  - A presentation and handouts to communicate principles, methods, expectations and roles
  - An annual event to communicate best practice and strategic goals for *Good Times* sessions and to train new artists, volunteers and guides
  - More explicit criteria for artists working on the programme - introducing an 'activity evaluation matrix' for artists to assess and refine activities with coordinators before delivering sessions
  - Opportunities for artists and guides to share ideas and knowledge to promote a community of practice
  - Opportunities for workshops to improve areas of practice and develop new ideas
2. Develop an evaluation methodology (to be included in the training pack) for *Good Times* sessions that is easy for participants to use. With this, best practice can be monitored and unanticipated and new outcomes can be explored (the feedback can be used to commission new research projects enabling the Gallery to continue its leadership in this field)
3. Consider how *Good Times* participants can have more autonomy over sessions and be inspired to have more control over their experiences at the Gallery. This could include:
  - A panel or focus group which help shape the programme each year
  - Introducing 'emergent learning practices' for guided tours (this could also be an opportunity to work with young people)
  - Self-directed exhibitions/showcases of work
4. Consolidate research, learning, ideas, results and impact into a 'decade review' of the programme for wider dissemination. Areas for consideration are:
  - What is the *Good Times* programme today? How did it start and how has it evolved?
  - What has made the programme successful?
  - What does this success look like?
  - What do participants say?
  - What do our partners say?
  - How do you build these partnerships and sustain them?
  - What impact has the programme had so far?
  - How can other museums and galleries learn from and replicate this success?
  - Where next?
5. Define how *Good Times* can be expanded to empower our partners – care professionals and leaders of older people's groups. Pilot sessions for partners to learn how to design and evaluate their own creative arts workshops, to relieve some of the overwhelming demand for outreach sessions.

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