Family Arts Conference

Intergenerational work for older family members

Insights from:
Age Cymru/Gwanwyn Festival
New Vic Stoke/Ages and Stages
Green Candle Dance Company
Magic Me

Emma Robinson – Age Cymru

Gwanwyn Festival is a month-long national festival held across each year celebrating creativity in older age. The focus is on growth and renewal, and 11,000 people took part last year. There is also a grant scheme enabling community groups and arts organisations across Wales to provide arts experiences for older people.

Emma quoted Kate Organ's reference to British socialist folk singer, Roy Bailey's comment: "it's good to look back but it's rude to stare"[1] and she tries to live by this mantra when programming the festival's projects.

Age Cymru are keen to challenge stereotypes of older people – eg. projects such as the tattoo photography exhibition 'No Regrets' and parkour workshops.

Jill Rezzano – New Vic Stoke

Ages and Stages started as a research project with Keele University called 'Our Age, Our Stage' exploring creativity in later life. Participants were encouraged to bring their own stories and initially there was no mention of acting – just "showing" and "sharing". However the team wanted to create a documentary telling those stories so asked the people they interviewed if they'd like to perform, and there was a great response.

After this, people wanted to carry on and do more, so the Ages and Stages company began to form and it became an intergenerational project which has made a number of touring pieces that toured and are performed in different venues.

The team collected stories from the participants and the insights were so mixed that it was often hard to distinguish whether comments came from a younger or older participant. The comments were formed into a play which was performed by what became the theatre company, and now exists as a mixture of professionals and non-professionals. Participants can help with development if they don't want to act.

The work has also led to the Live Age Festival which showcases the work and talents of local older people, arts organisations and practitioners across Stoke-on-Trent and North Staffordshire.

They have also received a Celebrating Age grant to commission work from older artists.

Two of the project participants discussed the benefits of the project: fun, social, opened up arts activity in Stoke on Trent, helps you to recognise your own value

[1] http://baringfoundation.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/AfterYAT.pdf

Fergus Early - Green Candle Dance Company
The company began from the philosophy that everybody has a right to dance. Initially work started with children and young people and those with disabilities, but the company then branched out into working with older people.

There is an older people's performing group, in addition to a range of project work such as dancers working in care homes, often involving school children too.

Fergus highlighted the current trend to work with particular groups of older people such as those with Dementia, as the specific floors of care homes are separated. However Green Candle would like to move past those boundaries if possible in their work.

Susan Langford – Magic Me

Magic Me aims to connect different generations, and aims to provide an antidote to the fact that it is difficult for people to meet their neighbours in the 21st Century – they offer a chance for people to meet strangers across boundaries.

Their work seeks to help the personal development of participants (eg. communication/social skills) and also help to build relationships between groups beyond the lifetime of the project.

Eg. The Tower of London crown jewels project working with pupils from St John the Divine Church of England Primary School and their grandparents

Susan advised that if organisations are able to work flexibly, age can become irrelevant.

Q&As

1.

Q. Does anybody have experience of live streaming activity for older adults e.g. Into care homes for people who are unable to travel.
A. Imagine Arts in Nottingham has done it for their Sunday morning concerts. Obviously important to ensure that the content is appropriate. Organisations should also bear in mind that care homes won't necessarily have digital infrastructure internal knowledge to make it happen so will need additional support.
Kate recommended the Baring Foundation digital report.

2.
Q. What are the safeguarding implications around intergenerational projects involving children and older adults?
A. DBS checks are required for all workshop leaders. Detailed risk assessments should be carried out with a framework of risk for both groups. There should be chaperones for the kids and project leads should ensure that no one is left unsupervised. There should also be no exchange of contact details at any point.

3.
Q. What is the panel's experience of local authorities? Are they helping and do they ever provide funding for these projects?
A. It usually ends up being more of a partnership than a funding arrangement. They can be helpful in finding people to work with, but are often looking for outcomes which are difficult to prove in an arts workshop.

4.
Q. Have you ever worked on projects with older adults that have failed?
A. Picking the right theme that everyone can access is often difficult. It's always more effective if you can work flexibly and be allowed time to work some things through before committing to a definite format/output. Take small incremental steps rather than jumping straight into a performance. Centre staff vary in terms of how helpful they are in these projects so it is beneficial to offer them training so that they can assist more in the sessions.

5.
Q. Do schools and young people need an incentive to work with older adults?
A. Usually the teacher can see that it will be beneficial for their pupils. However youth theatres are a good place to start too. The New Vic project saw were told by young people that they wanted to take part because of the influence of their families, and also because they saw it as another chance to perform.

6.
Q. How does this discussion link in with family work?
A. It's valid for every member of a family to want to take part in arts activity when together rather than family activity just being aimed at children. Grandparents often take on a caring role when with their grandchildren, but it's preferable for them to be their in their own right participating equally.