

## Pilot project evaluation

Using museum artefacts and arts activities to improve the well being and quality of life of elders with mental health needs.



By Thanh-Giang Vo, Arts and Social Care Co-ordinator for Wolverhampton Arts and Heritage Service & Sharon Baker Co-ordinator of charity Sandwell Third Age Arts STAA.

## **Pilot background and aims.**

This project explored whether an arts organisation and a museums service working in partnership can provide quality wellbeing interventions to improve the lives of people in social care settings, people who might otherwise find it difficult to access museum services.

The delivery model explored in this pilot could be adapted for future use with elders living in residential care, sheltered accommodation, extra care housing, and nursing homes. The project's focus was on arts and cultural providers delivering an interesting, stimulating, accessible and person centred service, combating boredom and inactivity. The service's content and delivery could be tailored to the needs of different groups and could be used with elders with dementia, elders with functional mental illness, elders with other health and social care needs and elders experiencing healthy old age.

This pilot examined whether the partnership can deliver interventions which improve the wellbeing of older people with mental health needs including people with dementia through engagement with museum collections and arts activities. The pilot worked with a group of people with mental health needs living in a residential home in Sandwell and links to the Department of Health's 'Living Well with Dementia': the National Dementia Strategy (2009).

The project aimed to make peoples lives more enjoyable by providing opportunities for new, positive experiences which stimulate the senses, helping people to stay connected with their world and promote and protect people's well being. The pilot was part of a wider Arts and Social Care project. The activities were designed to help people re-engage with themselves and others through the experiences of reminiscence and being creative. It aimed to re-able people through confidence building and social interaction, minimising disability or deterioration from established health conditions (such as dementia) for as long as possible by improving people's wellbeing.

## **The partner organisations involved:**

- Wolverhampton Arts and Heritage Service.
- Sandwell Third Age Arts STAA Charity number 1094820.
- Fountain Court Residential Centre managed and run by Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council.



## Overall Approach

- Wolverhampton Arts and Heritage Service identified objects that could be themed for reminiscence sessions. The artefacts were taken to Fountain Court residential centre. The object handling sessions were the focus and catalyst of reminiscence sessions.
- The object handling was facilitated by a member of the museum staff and the creative element was facilitated by a STAA artist using appropriate creative media (visual arts: drawing painting, crafts, textiles, sculpture, photography etc).
- STAA offered its expertise and track record in delivering creative interventions with elders with mental health needs including dementia to achieve health and wellbeing outcomes.
- Anecdotal evidence about the impact of interventions was recorded. Prior to the start of the project an informal assessment of participant's starting points for engaging in the activity was made. An observer recorded the behaviour and responses of participants during the sessions to plot any perceived changes in health and wellbeing that may have taken place.
- In total there were 7 sessions delivered with the participants at Fountain Court including a visit to Haden Hill House Museum.

### The key people involved:

This project was made possible by the willingness of the eight people who chose to engage and allow their responses to be shared with others.

Thanh-Giang Vo, Arts and Social Care Co-ordinator for Wolverhampton Arts and Heritage Service, worked with Sharon Baker, Co-ordinator of Sandwell Third Age Arts, to design the project. They worked closely with Michaela Wilson, Manager at Fountain Court and her deputy Sharon Billinge, to establish which of the residents at Fountain Court could be involved in the project and to gain important information about different residents prior to working with them. Thanh led on the reminiscence and object handling element of the project. Sharon commissioned one of STAA's professional artists Trish Crummay, a visual artist with many years experience at working with elders with mental health needs and dementia to deliver the project's creative element using a number of different creative processes. Sharon took the role of observing and documenting the interactions that took place for each individual in each session. Sessions were supported by the staff at Fountain Court and two relatives of participants who attended for a number of sessions.

## **Project Outcomes**

The project demonstrated that an arts organisation working with a museums service was successful in delivering a service that improved the wellbeing and quality of life of elders with mental health needs living in a care home. The interactions and creative experiences that took place suggested that positive health and wellbeing outcomes were achieved by participants.

### **Health and Wellbeing Outcomes for the individuals who took part – peoples' names have been shortened to initials.**

#### **A**

**A's starting point prior to participating in the sessions:** A's mental health is deteriorating; she is less aggressive in her opinions, less forceful in expressing her thoughts. She is more amenable and will be persuaded to take part if she chooses. She has to take a lot of pain killers for pain in her leg. This is affecting her mobility (she uses a stick or walker) and her alertness: she falls asleep a lot. A has the capacity to give verbal consent to having her photograph taken will be able to complete a feedback form.

The health and wellbeing outcomes identified for A were:

- To become more engaged, alert, stay awake, concentrate for longer
- To express memories, share stories, thoughts, feelings, opinions
- To be creative, self expression through different media
- To experience pleasure

From all of A's responses and through staff observation the outcomes above were seen to be met, though A did actively opt out of two sessions due to feeling too tired and not wanting to 'make' things. She however, enjoyed the talking and reminiscing. Below is an extract from one of the session feedback forms that A completed.

**Feedback comments from feedback forms or comments recorded during the session.**

"I enjoyed it"- tick ("very much")

"I felt happy" – tick

I was interested- tick

"I felt relaxed" tick ("A bit tiring too")

What was your favourite part?

"Different types of photographs produced. I was a bit tired because I was doing a lot of thinking and got a bit confused".

"I don't bother with anything I don't like so I quite enjoyed this session because I took part. I was hoping there would be more photography, spontaneous ones."

**AD**

**AD's starting point prior to participating in the sessions:** AD is the newest person to join Fountain Court. She has settled in well. Her behaviour is sometimes a little erratic or unpredictable. She talks sensibly and presents very well but can change her mind and mood very quickly. She sometimes throws things on the floor when she is fed up or exasperated. However she is easy to jolly along and does not stay in a bad mood for long. She is interested in art and went to West Bromwich Art School when she was young. She is good at drawing and treasures a small drawing she did of a dog. She enjoys having pictures to colour and likes quizzes. She is clever and has a good sense of humour. She likes to be in charge and is often in charge of the TV remote control. She can choose programmes to watch and can exercise choices. She has capacity to give her own consent to having her photograph taken and will be able to complete a feedback form.

The health and wellbeing outcomes identified for AD were:

- To express memories, share stories, thoughts, feelings, opinions
- To be creative, self expression through different media
- To experience pleasure

- To be stimulated more intellectually and socially

AD had a higher level of mental functioning and engagement compared to some of the other residents at Fountain Court. AD took part in every session including a visit to Haden Hill House museum. AD could have been challenged further with intellectual and social activities if she was supported in a 1:1 intervention. As the level of activity needed to be pitched at an accessible level for all the participants it was observed that sometimes when AD did not have her daughter in law with her, and when staff could not pay her one to one attention, she withdrew more into herself. In one session when her daughter in law could not attend, Trish was explaining and encouraging another participant to try the activity; AD appeared to lose interest and left the session. We have found when she has had one to one support she remains with the activity to the very end. Overall her outcomes were met and apart from the odd session she enjoyed taking part in the activities. Below is a record of AD's responses and participation observed in a session.

<p><b>Behaviour &amp; mood at the beginning of the session:</b> AD was observed by a member of staff: "She almost ran into the room", she was keen to take part but sitting quietly waiting. Her daughter-in-law joined her.</p>
<p><b>Behaviour, interactions, activities &amp; mood during session:</b> AD enjoyed looking at the objects, particularly the book, and sang 'robin hood' prompted by seeing an extract from that story in the book. She was very engaged with the practical part of the session supported by her daughter in law. She also remembered E as being a neighbour in the flats she used to live in. She played with and made a spinning toy and also made a boat, choosing to decorate it using pencils and felt tips, colouring it in carefully. She laughed and joked and was very absorbed in the colouring activity</p>
<p><b>Behaviour &amp; mood at the end of the session:</b> Still alert and aware of what was going on around her</p>
<p>Feedback comments from feedback forms or comments record during the session.</p> <p>I enjoyed it-tick</p> <p>I felt happy-tick</p> <p>I was interested -tick</p> <p>I felt relaxed-tick</p>

What was your favourite part? "Making the boat toy".

**Interpretation of observations, any outcomes achieved?** The session has been very stimulating for AD intellectually and also in practicing her motor skills and making skills. She was cheerful and in a good mood.

## B

**B's starting point prior to participating in the sessions:** B is alert and usually interested in things around him. He loves reading things and can stay occupied all day reading a book (he does read it). He enjoys handling objects and puzzles, if he does a jig saw he will spend ages making the pieces fit. He enjoys reminiscence and quizzes such as talking about the lives of famous people. He is interested in any objects; he was in the merchant navy and a communications expert, being knowledgeable in the Morse code.

The health and wellbeing outcomes identified for B were:

- To become more engaged, alert, stay awake, concentrate for longer
- To express memories, share stories, thoughts, feelings, opinions
- To be creative, self expression through different media

B didn't always take part in every session but when he did he'd stay for the entire activity. He seemed to like solving problems and was interested in handling things and working out how things work. For the session making the Christmas decorations he spent the whole time tying knots to secure the decorations, a challenge that he enjoyed and repeated over again. B's verbal conversation was difficult to understand but he was able to communicate his wishes to engage in activities. He liked being part of the session even if sometimes it was just observing what was happening around him. Below is a record of B's responses and participation observed in a session.

**Behaviour & mood at the beginning of the session:** He was not too happy about moving seats, but once seated and settled he was okay.

**Behaviour, interactions, activities & mood during session:** He looked at objects when prompted with Trish, Sharon and Thanh. He became absorbed in looking at the children's story book and spend a long time (over an hour) looking through it and

reading passages.

His conversation was difficult to understand at times but he seemed absorbed in the book and hugged it to him a few times. When he had enough of looking at the book he asked Sharon to take it. He took an interest in the ship balancing toy but did not take part in any of the practical activity.

**Behaviour & mood at the end of the session:** He was relaxed, calm and quiet but quite alert- watching what was going on around him and watching boxing on the TV.

**Interpretation of observations, any outcomes achieved?** B seemed to get a lot out of the activity; he was content and engaged for virtually the entire session.

## C

**C's starting point prior to participating in the sessions:** C will either be the life and soul of the group or he won't do anything, it just depends on how he is feeling on the day. He may have wandering hands and try to grope (his illness).

The health and wellbeing outcomes identified for C were:

- To be distracted from/ forget established patterns of negative behaviour
- To express memories, share stories, thoughts, feelings, opinions
- To be creative, self expression through different media
- To experience pleasure

C was often present at each session although did not always take an active part. He would make comments and start singing and joking with the staff and did engage with objects when he was talked to directly. Throughout the project staff noticed no incidences of his negative behaviour patterns. He clearly expressed pleasure in being in the social environment and in response to the activities taking place but it did not draw him to be active in the creative process, or to engage in reminiscing fully, though at times he did talk about Jamaica.

### C's responses and participation observed in a session:

**Behaviour, interactions, activities & mood during session:** C came in just after the start of the session and ate his breakfast. We did not disturb him during this time so he could concentrate on eating. Once he finished he started to take notice of what was going on around him, he was in a jolly mood, singing, laughing and joking. He engaged in the activity at the table Sharon showed him the spinning toy which made him laugh. He said his eyes were going funny watching it. She showed him other objects and then showed him the fuzzy felt- he joked saying his fingers would drop off if he touched it. Then he spent time with one of Fountain Court's staff looking at the fuzzy felt shapes and talking about the farm he lived on in Jamaica.

**Behaviour & mood at the end of the session:** calm, relaxed, sitting quietly watching the TV.

**Interpretation of observations, any outcomes achieved?** C appeared to experience pleasure in his interactions with others and did not exhibit his usual behaviour while he was in the room, he reminisced and seemed to enjoy this time in the session.

### D

**D's starting point prior to participating in the sessions:** She is a chatty lady but may refuse to take part, saying she doesn't want to do it. She may want to stay in the lounge or in her seat and not move to go into another room. If we can draw her in and get her interested she will be very forthcoming expressing sensible opinions.

The health and wellbeing outcomes identified for D were:

- To interact, join in, contribute
- To express memories, share stories, thoughts, feelings, opinions
- To be creative, self expression through different media
- To experience pleasure

D participated in every session and always seems interested in what people were doing or saying. She liked to sit quietly and observe others, only speaking when talked to directly by staff. She expressed her memories, shared stories and took great pleasure in being part of

the social process of the project. D was very unwilling to do anything practical and insisted that she just like to observe others. However, on the last session, when everyone was making Christmas decorations, D also made one and seemed very happy. D always appeared happy and contented at the end of every session when staff said goodbye. She had a good friendship with DD which was further facilitated by the social element of the sessions.

**D’s responses and participation observed in a session:**

<p><b>Behaviour &amp; mood at the beginning of the session:</b> She was sitting in the room, quietly.</p>
<p><b>Behaviour, interactions, activities &amp; mood during session:</b> D appeared to enjoy the object handling session a lot- she was able to demonstrate how a brownie camera worked and she talked with pride about her grand daughter whose photograph she had brought to the session. She chose not to have her photograph taken.</p>
<p><b>Behaviour &amp; mood at the end of the session:</b> Sitting quietly, but when asked said she did not know if she enjoyed the activity or not</p>
<p>Feedback comments from feedback forms or comments record during the session.</p> <p>“I was interested” – tick (yes I’m nosy!).</p> <p>“I liked watching the others” (have their photos taken) “but I didn’t want to be in it.”</p>
<p><b>Interpretation of observations, any outcomes achieved?</b> D chose to stay in the room when the activity took place and seemed to observe and enjoy what was going on, she did contribute to the activity and expressed pleasure at handling the cameras, especially the box brownie.</p>

**E**

**E’s starting point prior to participating in the sessions:** E is aged in her 90s. She is witty and knows what is going on. If she does not like an activity she will let you know. We will need to get her motivated to join in, she often nods off to sleep – and will say with her eyes closed ‘in a minute’.

The health and wellbeing outcomes identified for E were:

- To become more engaged, alert, stay awake, concentrate for longer

- To interact, join in, contribute
- To be creative, self expression through different media
- To experience pleasure

E always came to join in with the sessions and always wanted to take part. She struggled to stay awake and, when not spoken to on one a one to one basis, she often fell asleep. Some of the activities kept her awake and kept her concentration for longer. She looked at patterns in one of the sessions and picked a pattern on green paper to use to decorate her walking frame. Staff at Fountain Court have since reported that she recognises her walking frame. She clearly benefited from the creative reminiscence sessions but requires more direct attention to concentrate for longer.

E's responses and participation observed in a session.

<b>Behaviour &amp; mood at the beginning of the session:</b> She was sitting on the sofa quietly
<b>Behaviour, interactions, activities &amp; mood during session:</b> As soon as she was handed the Eskimo doll she said "Can I keep it to cuddle?" and she held onto it for part of the session and then swapped it for another doll. E did start to close her eyes, and doze off; if someone was talking to her she would rouse herself. She seemed very comforted by holding the doll. She woke up to drink her tea and asked for more biscuits a number of times.
<b>Behaviour &amp; mood at the end of the session:</b> E was awake and was able to give feedback.
Feedback comments from feedback forms or comments record during the session.  I enjoyed it – tick  I felt happy – tick  I was interested – tick  I felt relaxed- tick  What was your favourite part?

“Hugging the dolls made me feel good. I was comforting, I don’t know why”

**Interpretation of observations, any outcomes achieved?** E stayed awake for part of the session and engaged for parts, although she could not help falling asleep. She really responded positively to the dolls and held one or other for virtually all of the session (even when she was dozing).

## S

**S’s starting point prior to participating in the sessions:** She will either love or hate the activity and expresses extremes of emotions. She can get upset and weepy easily but equally she can be ‘brought round’ and cheered up. At first it may be worth while getting a member of staff to engage with her and persuade her to take part. She can be very blunt and insulting .She was very interested in ballroom dancing in her younger days.

The health and wellbeing outcomes identified for S were:

- To interact, join in, contribute
- To appear/become happier, more cheerful
- To be distracted from/ forget established patterns of negative behaviour
- To express memories, share stories, thoughts, feelings, opinions
- To be creative, self expression through different media

S always came into each session to interact with staff and the activity but she rarely stayed or actually engaged in what we were doing. When she did, it was more for a social interaction rather than for reminiscence. In one session S looked through her life story book and talked about her dancing. Overall she did engage socially with members of the group but did not respond to the content of the sessions.

**S’s responses and participation observed in a session:**

**Behaviour & mood at the beginning of the session:** S was not in the room at the beginning

**Behaviour, interactions, activities & mood during session:** S came into the room during the session bringing her big fluffy toy that she was cuddling. She talked but it

was hard to understand her conversation, she appeared happy and calm and left to sit in the garden room on her own quite contentedly.

**Behaviour & mood at the end of the session:** Calm

**Interpretation of observations, any outcomes achieved?** Similar to previous week: S took part in her own way and on her own terms; she did not really contribute to the session but did engage in a similar activity when she saw other participants handling dolls in the 'childhood toys' themed session.

## J

**J's starting point prior to participating in the sessions:** J is a lady aged in her 90s. She gets tired quickly and is physically frail. She is sociable but needs to be drawn out a lot, she is a quiet lady and if others are talking she will sit quietly in the background. She does like to chat and has a wicked sense of humour. She has capacity to make a decision verbally about having her photograph taken and will be able to complete a feedback form.

The health and wellbeing outcomes identified for J were:

- To become more engaged, alert, stay awake, concentrate for longer
- To interact, join in, contribute
- To talk more, increase conversation, more attempts at communication- verbal & non verbal

J participated in every session from the beginning of the pilot to the end. She engaged very well with all the activities and enjoyed reminiscing with her daughter in law. She often had a smile on her face throughout each session except on a couple of occasions. At one session, when her daughter in law was not there, she was quieter and looked a little perplexed. On another occasion she started the session in a very bad mood and was quite hostile towards staff in what she was saying. However, she soon was distracted from her mood, and ended the session looking happy and smiling.

**J's responses and participation observed in a session:**

**Behaviour & mood at the beginning of the session:** Smiley and happy, her daughter

in law was encouraging and enthusiastic. They were both keen to start.

**Behaviour, interactions, activities & mood during session:** J engaged throughout the session, discussing the patterns, she said that her favourite pattern colours were red, white and blue. She designed her own patterns with her daughter in law encouraging her. She began decorating a box (she selected the shape of box she liked) and completed colouring a pre printed pattern.

**Behaviour & mood at the end of the session:** J seemed cheerful and jolly at the end of the session.

Feedback comments from feedback forms or comments record during the session.

“It’s been a good laugh; I’ve had a good time.” –verbal comment

“I enjoyed it” “I felt happy, quite a change” “I was interested” “I was relaxed –very”  
“What was your favourite part? - It’s all been good”.

**Interpretation of observations, any outcomes achieved?** The session stimulated J artistically and encouraged her to chat and make decisions. She laughed when making up her patterns. She seemed happy and pleased with her achievements and displayed her sense of fun.

There were others at Fountain Court who participated in the various sessions, their starting points were not assessed as it was not known whether they would take part.

#### **Fountain Court management feedback about the sessions:**

- Staff thought that the sessions went very well and they enjoyed the opportunity to work with the service users on a one to one basis.
- The different sessions attracted different service users who were interested in the subject of that session which gave choice.
- Two service users benefited by their relatives joining in which gave them quality time together.
- The boxes that were produced are being used by the service users e.g. for storing sweets in their bedrooms
- Service users are recognising their own walking frames following decoration.

- The sessions brought back lots of memories, and gave the staff working with them another insight into their past.
- Staff and service users both fed back that the leaders of the project, Sharon, Thanh, and Trisha interacted well with everyone and gave everyone equal amount of one to one time.
- Following the sessions some service users stayed in well being through the day this was demonstrated by talking about the session and being in receptive mood
- All enjoyed the sessions very much.

### **Arts outcomes**

Participants created or contributed to the creation of art works ranging from making paper toys: such as a sky hook or a 'wonder turner', Christmas decorations and decorating cakes using different icing techniques. They engaged in arts techniques and used different artistic media such as block printing, photography, embossing paper, making rubbings and cutting out and colouring. They engaged in object handling and experienced sensory stimulation through touch, sight, smell, sound. Themes included cameras and photography, childhood toys and games and objects from the home. Participants demonstrated, through their responses and behaviour, that the sessions gave them a positive experience: benefits associated with the opportunity to be imaginative, experiencing new or different activities.

The project's aim was to engage residents in a creative and reflective way, using arts and cultural artefacts to tap into memory and draw out creativity and individual personal expression. In this project the priority for the participant was in the process of engaging rather than in creating an end product of a finished art piece and given the skills levels of the participants involved it was unrealistic to expect an artistic outcome in the form of a finished art piece. As well as reminiscing, some participants decorated their walking frames or decorated a memento box.

### **Health & wellbeing outcomes**

The overall approach of this project and the resources available made it unrealistic to attempt measure whether the interactions had any effect of minimising people's disability or deterioration from their established health conditions other than what could be observed anecdotally during sessions.

We believe the project contributed to maintaining the participant’s level of functioning for its duration: exercising memories, motor skills, dexterity, conversation, reasoning and decision making. We believe it contributed to maintaining people’s concentration and focus and maintaining alertness if people tended to be sleepy. Throughout the project all members of staff involved in supporting participation or delivery observed very positive engagement and a general atmosphere of excitement in the activity areas. We believe participation contributed to improving people’s cheerfulness. All the positive outcomes generated by the intervention contributed to people’s improved quality of life.

We may have been able to collect more evidence to support our assumptions about the health and wellbeing outcomes participants achieved if we had designed recording forms for the staff at Fountain Court to complete about the people who had participated. The forms could have asked about the behaviour and mood of participants in the hours after the session and in the days between sessions. We could have got more detailed feedback from the staff at the end of the project if we had conducted face to face interviews with prepared questions for each staff member who had participated.

**Summary of Outcomes.**

**The project was successful in helping to re-able people through confidence building and social interaction. Participation appeared to improve people’s well being for the time they participated in the activities, and, as reported anecdotally by staff at Fountain Court, this lasted for the remainder of the day.**

**Costs of the Pilot project:**

Item	Cost £
Artist delivery of 7 x half day contact sessions + 6 x half day preparation @ £200 per full day	£1,400.00
Artist x 2 half day meetings @£50 meeting rate	£100.00
Artist x 1 half day research & sourcing materials @£50 meeting rate	£50.00
Purchasing objects for object handling & art materials	£264.00
Travel costs for STAA co-ordinator/Arts in health co-ordinator	£43.00
Planning meetings for STAA co-ordinator, stationary ( letters, posters) , postage, project documentation ( photography) contingency	£228.00



Total

£2,085.00

The cost of the project was £2,085, of this £1, 550 was spent on artist's fees. The daily rate for the artist engaged in this project was concurrent to the fees charged by artists undertaking residencies in schools. If this project was priced to be purchased by an outside organisation, a fee would also be charged by the museums professional involved in delivering the object handling element of the sessions. This pilot was supported by the Arts in Health co-ordinator who facilitated the object handling element of the project. The STAA co-ordinator also supported the project by attending and observing all of the sessions to record any behaviour changes in participants during the sessions to make a case for this work. In any future service an observer would not be required to document interactions although it will be important to include an evaluation element in the work to check that what is being delivered is what is needed.

#### **Reflections on the Project from Sharon Baker for Sandwell Third Age Arts:**

Being involved in this project gave STAA an opportunity to fulfil its charitable purpose in promoting the use of the arts as a therapeutic tool for healing. It was another opportunity for STAA to deliver arts activities to elders with mental health needs and dementia knowing that participants would enjoy the experience. We 'proved' what STAA already believes: that people with dementia gain social and psychological benefits in participating in creative activities which enhances people's well being and improves their quality of life and in this respect the project met STAA's expectations.