



# Creativity Matters

Third Year Evaluation Report

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## **Creativity Matters - Third Year Evaluation Report: Executive Summary**

*Creativity Matters* is a five-year project, which was launched by Equal Arts in January 2012 and funded by the Big Lottery. Through the project, skilled artists are supported to train volunteers and residential care staff to use creative activity meaningfully to improve the quality of care given to, and quality of life of, older people living with dementia. This report outlines the evaluation findings of the operation of, and impacts arising from, the third year of the project. The key findings of this are summarised below:

- The project infrastructure, established in January 2012, has continued to operate effectively during the third year of the project, with the operational manager and two artists appointed remaining in post and continuing to develop the project beyond its stated aims. The project steering group continues to meet quarterly and make an important contribution to the effective development of the project. The two volunteer groups – Grand Gestures and the Sand-Timers – established in January 2012 also continue to meet regularly with the artists to develop their creative interests and skills.
- Grand Gestures is the Gateshead-based volunteer group. It is comprised of a dedicated cohort of ~12 members, aged between 60 and 90. The group meet weekly to develop their creativity, skills and confidence with regards movement and dance. The group continue to be challenged technically and to develop their understanding of dance and its relationship to the 'body-mind'. The joy which the group derive from dance is clearly apparent and their confidence in performing has grown exponentially. Their blog has received over almost 20,000 hits to date. The premise that older people can maintain their health and wellbeing through dance is highly evident in their work, with benefits cited in respect of mobility, energy, stamina, concentration, focus and identity.
- The Sand-Timers Group is the South Shields-based volunteer group, which has ~10 core members and a focus on music. Year Three has been challenging for the group, with all but one member having experienced serious illness. As such, they have maintained contact, but met on a slightly less frequent basis than in previous years; and while they endeavour to continue to develop their ukulele-playing and performance skills, the main focus of their efforts has been the development of exhibition about the history of South Shields. The exhibition attracted ~150 visitors and was very well-received. The group have also strengthened their links with South Shields library, where they now attend a monthly ukulele and sing-along session, targeted at both established ukulele players and more isolated older people living in the community. The artist is exploring the recruitment of additional volunteers to the project through this route. The group have unassuming creative talent, but maintain that their primary motivation for engagement in the project is to support the wellbeing of older people living in residential care homes.
- During Year Three, new approaches to engagement with care homes have been trialled by both artists. In order to encourage more positive feelings about volunteering in care homes and in response to a context in which staff shortages make it difficult for care homes to free up a group of staff each week for a sustained period of time, the movement group have adopted a model of 'Happenings' (one-off improvised performances) with residential care homes. The Happenings aim are to provide residents with a positive experience and to highlight the potential benefits of the arts

to staff. Approx. 13 Happenings have taken place throughout the year. Due to volunteer illness, the music artist was conscious that a model of engagement with care homes was needed which would not ask too much of the volunteers. The new model works on a basis of engaging with three care homes; each for a period of six weeks, with the volunteers supporting just two of these sessions. The new music model has a greater emphasis on training staff to play the ukulele and facilitate music sessions and a reduced focus on hosting sessions with large groups of residents.

- Both models of engagement have been highly beneficial to residents. During the sessions, residents with dementia appeared engaged, to experience high levels of enjoyment and to exhibit lower levels of anxiety and agitation. The sessions were also felt to have helped to build a sense of community between residents, staff and family members.
- In this context, culture change refers to positive developments in respect of staff awareness, knowledge, understanding and behaviour with regards the benefits and use of creative activity in support of the wellbeing of residents. The project has nurtured culture change in all of these areas; providing staff with a unique opportunity and space to enhance their understanding of the social impacts of the arts, develop their creative talents (particularly their musicianship) and improve their facilitation skills. Staff fed back to the artists that they could see the benefits of participatory approaches to creative activity as opposed to more passive forms of entertainment.
- The project has created an appetite for creativity activity to play a more central role in work of several care homes. Follow-up work has already taken place in some cases and further return visits are planned in the coming months. In one care home, a successful visual arts project has since been set up by Equal Arts and having witnessed the model in operation, the Chief Executive of one chain of care homes would like the model to be implemented in all of their homes. In January 2014, several volunteers and care staff attended the regional heat of the British Care Awards, following two members of staff being nominated for an award as a result of their contribution to the project. Having won the North East award, one care staff member was then invited to compete in the National British Care Awards in London. The experience was important in terms of motivating staff to continue to drive forward culture change within the homes. The annual project celebration day, held in March 2014, was also felt to have had a similar effect among all of the project stakeholder groups.
- However, there is concern about the extent and sustainability of any culture change that results from the project. Only a small number of staff in each care home have engaged with the project. From a music perspective, six weeks is insufficient for staff to learn to play the ukulele. Similarly, the 'Happenings' model is unable to provide staff with the level of skill required to facilitate dance improvisation. Model aside, creating culture change in the residential care sector is notoriously difficult, linked to a range of factors (including staff shortages; government policy and care standards; staff training and morale), which are beyond the control of the project team.
- A key factor underpinning culture change to date, however, is care home management support, with management enthusiasm for the project filtering down to staff and staff being given 'protected time' to engage in the project. It is also clear that care staff having a personal interest in creative activity is critical in combatting barriers to culture change.

- Both volunteer groups appreciated the re-modelling of the artists' approaches to engagement with care homes in Year Three and the number of Grand Gestures member who now volunteer in the care homes has doubled (from 4 to 11) during the year. Both volunteer groups gain a sense of enjoyment, purpose and reward from the sessions and have experienced an enhanced feeling of resilience in respect of the ageing process as a result. They have become even more skilled in their approach to engaging with residents as the project has progressed – supported by 'dementia friends' training – and their contribution to the sessions in terms of staff development and the wellbeing of residents is clearly evident. Both groups remain committed to volunteering in Year Four.
- The artists' input to the project has been instrumental to its success in Year Three. Their interpersonal, empathetic and reflexive skills have been crucial in maintaining the volunteers' enthusiasm for the project, protecting their wellbeing and maximising the project outcomes and impacts. In turn, the project has been instrumental to the development of their practice. This is largely due to the longitudinal nature of the project which has provided them with a rare opportunity to learn more about the relationship between their practice and the ageing process and given them a unique opportunity to experiment with different approaches to the achievement of outcomes. Both artists suggested that the project has developed their creativity and facilitation skills, particularly due to the skills and aspirations of the volunteer groups. Throughout the year, the two artists have worked collaboratively to deliver volunteer workshops and public events and are considering delivering joint training sessions for care staff in the future. Learning more about each other's practice through this process of collaboration has also been useful to their professional development. Finally, the positive impacts of the project in relation to the key beneficiary groups, as well as sustained discussion about the project with practitioners, has been critical in helping to affirm their practice.

In many respects, the third year of *Creativity Matters* can be considered the most successful year of the project to date, in terms of maximising project outcomes. Key project successes include: the development of two confident and skilled volunteer groups, the building of capacity within the arts sector, the development of several effective models of engagement with residential care homes, positive signs of culture change and the identification of a number of key learning points of benefit to the arts, health and adult social care sectors. However, as the project enters Year Four, it would be beneficial for the core team to revisit a number of fundamental questions about the future operation of the project. These relate to: the wellbeing of the volunteer groups, volunteer recruitment, models of engagement with care homes, the sustainability of culture change, media support for the project, wider stakeholder engagement in the project, exit strategy and evaluation/dissemination efforts.

## Introduction

There is growing recognition with the health and adult social care sectors that essential elements of a 'quality' residential care service are personalisation, choice and spending time 'purposefully and enjoyably' (SCIE, 2010; CQC, 2013). The arts are an integral part of this (Baring Foundation 2011). While an increasing range of creative activities are available to older people living with dementia in residential care homes, further knowledge and understanding of the power of the arts as a rewarding means of offering excellence in care and the ways in which this can be achieved is needed among staff (Cage, 2014). Most activities are delivered by untrained staff, with little input from professional artists, arts organisations and skilled volunteers (Baring Foundation, 2011).

The Big-Lottery funded project, *Creativity Matters*, aims to respond to this. Through the project, skilled artists are supported to train volunteers and care staff to use creative activity as a means of improving quality of care and quality of life in the residential care sector. Specifically, the objectives of the project are to:

- Provide active older people living in the community with opportunities to develop their own creative interests and skills and to contribute to their communities.
- Through the use of creative activity, develop the capacities of care staff to offer a more person-centred approach to the care of older people living in residential care.
- Combat isolation and improve the quality of life of older people with dementia, living in residential care homes.
- Support the professional development of artist facilitators in arts practice with older people and communities.

The project was funded under the Big Lottery's 'Reaching Communities' funding stream for a period of five years. This report outlines the evaluation findings of the third year of operation of the project.

Employing a primarily qualitative approach to study, the evaluation sought to develop a nuanced understanding of the processes through which resources, activities, outcomes and impacts are linked, and the ways in which these are affected by the strategic and operational context of the project. The evaluation involved eight discrete phases.

- A Rapid Assessment Evaluation (RAE) of the policy and research literature relating to the social impact of the arts, volunteering, the policy, regulatory and operational context of the health and adult social care sectors and the concept of person-centred care.
- Attendance at quarterly project steering group meetings.
- Go-along's (which include both observation and informal interviews) to eight volunteer workshops and 'Happenings'.
- Formal, semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders and beneficiaries (two project managers, two artists and four volunteers).

- The review of ~70 artist feedback forms from volunteer workshops and care home sessions, the movement artist's Winston Churchill Fellowship report (Turner, 2013) and the findings of an ethnographic study of Grand Gestures (Winters, 2014).

The evaluation is intended to be both formative and summative. In addition to documenting project progress and capturing evidence of outcomes and impact, the evaluation is underpinned by an on-going process of dialogue between the evaluator and project stakeholders, with the findings being used to inform the development of the project each year.

### Evaluation Findings

#### **Project Infrastructure**

The project infrastructure established in January 2012 has continued to operate effectively during the third year of the project, with the operational manager and two artists appointed remaining in post and continuing to develop the project beyond its stated aims.

The role of the project manager has been critical to the effective development and operation of the project, in respect of: organising venues, hospitality and transportation; recruiting care homes to the project; liaising with care staff; administering the project steering group; and reviewing and facilitating the development of the project. Of equal importance, however, has been the emotional support which they have given to the project artists. The third year of the project has been emotionally demanding for the artists due to a spate of serious illnesses among the volunteers and the deteriorating health of some of the residents in care homes. Both artists commented on the invaluable support provided by the project manager in this regard. Feedback included:

*'[Her] role has been invaluable. She organises, she's very thorough, she very fair and I think her values are sound. What you will get with [name] is honesty and she has a great ability not to get hooked up in the emotion. She makes time, listens, understands, she makes sure that I know she is around and that's I need. I think the project would have been a very different project without her.'*

The two volunteer groups established in January 2012 – 'Grand Gestures' and 'the Sand-Timers' (formerly referred to as the Ukulele Group) – continue to meet regularly to develop their creative skills and talents and to share these with residential care staff and older people living with dementia in a range of settings.

Finally, the project steering group established in September 2012 continues to meet on a quarterly basis. The steering group is comprised of the strategic and operational project managers, relevant strategic contacts, the artists, active older volunteers and the project evaluator. Due to several care professionals moving on to different forms of employment or care homes during the year, no care staff currently attend this group. The recruitment of new care staff, therefore, could be considered in Year Four. Nonetheless, the meetings have helped foster a sense of ownership of the project among the

various stakeholder groups and it makes a useful contribution to the democratic and effective on-going development of the project.

## **The Volunteer Groups**

### **Grand Gestures**

Grand Gestures is the Gateshead-based volunteer group. Throughout Year Three, the group – a cohort of ~12 members, aged between 60 and 90 – continue to meet weekly and maintain a focus on dance improvisation. While there has been a small shift in membership over the past three years due to illness and personal commitments, a core subset of members from years one and two remain.

Grand Gestures have continued to grow beyond the expectations of project stakeholders, with the lead artist describing their on-going development as *'pure joy'*. Their work can be considered as consisting of three complementary strands of activity: experiential dance workshops, 'Happenings' and public performances.

The group meet on a weekly basis to develop their creativity, skills and confidence with regards dance music practice. Under the strong leadership of the artist, the group have developed a very distinct way of working and engage with a range of dance and movement techniques, drawn from a range of disciplines. The sessions emphasise the somatic experience of dance, as well as a focus on timing, coordination and memory. During the year, the group have engaged with a live musician on several occasions and found this to be thrilling. The musician similarly reported being *'inspired'* by the group and described them as *'the most energetic group' that they engage with*.

Each session is typically comprised of a number of key rituals, which have helped to engender high levels of trust within the group. Nonetheless, the scores and techniques used continually evolve. The volunteers commented: *'It changes all of the time, she keeps it fresh, it's not predictable, there's always something now'*. The expertise and energy invested by the artist in planning and facilitating the sessions underpins the group's ongoing enthusiasm and commitment to the project.

The artist continues to challenge the group technically – with their movements described as *'aesthetically wonderful'* by an external academic – and to develop their understanding of dance and the relationship between dance and the 'body-mind'. The artist described their discussions with the group as akin to those had with professional dancers.

The community arts movement stresses the importance of approaches that increase confidence to participate and allow everyone to take part whatever their level of personal and artistic competence (Baring Foundation, 2011). This ethos underpins the artist's approach to the project. The confidence with which the group engage in improvised dance has improved dramatically over time. Their reflections included:



*'I've been testing myself, saying 'get up in my head', 'you've got nothing to lose, just do it' and I've been listening to it...my confidence has definitely got better'*

*'Over three years, thanks to [the artist], we have become skilled, confident and happy improvised dancers'.*

Discussing the development of one member, the artist stated: *'What a revelation, [they] danced solo five times during one session. It was incredible to see [them] shift into the confident state'.*

A key feature of the group is inclusivity. Several members of the group have physical limitations and/or experienced illness during the year, but adaptations to movements are always offered, enabling them to sustain their engagement with the project. One of the volunteers commented: *'[She] never leaves anyone out...but if you want to sit and watch, that's permissible as well. You don't have to do anything you don't want to do'.* Commenting on the value of dance as a form of self-expression in respect to one volunteer's physical limitations, the artist stated: *'He can hardly hear, he doesn't see well...so this experience of being in the body is really profound'.* Another volunteer who has experienced back problems during the year commented that while their mobility has been limited during the year, they *'can still move inside'* and the sessions support this.

During Year Three, the focus of the sessions has been more closely aligned to supporting the group's engagement with care homes and public performances. The artist explained that the refining of their dance and performance skills, developing their awareness of themselves and their connectedness and responsiveness to others are essential when undertaking improvised performances where they may be confronted by various challenges and unfamiliar experiences (Turner, 2013).

***'When I think of Grand Gestures', a poem by Norma about the spirit of Grand Gestures***

*When I think of Grand Gestures, I look forward to fun, and to freedom to move, with the mood of the music. I love how we may be given a score, as a basis to build on, to change and to grow, to take something out or add on some more. Each session is different, though the structure's the same, first toning our bodies, as we warm up our joints (Though it isn't the dancing where you end up on points). Just move as you can, and as far as you wish, happy to know no offering is wrong. There's no 'right' way or wrong. How we move may depend on the song, or the pattern of moves we get for a start. It can be quite serious, but it's mostly a lark. At times on our own or in pairs or a group, we interact and improvise the dance, making space so each one gets a chance. We break for some water and time for a chat, exchanging views on this and that. Then back to the business, we're really here for, we're eager to know what next is in store. Will we glide, stomp, or skip as we take to the floor? Sometimes in a circle, sometimes in a row, watching each other with faces aglow. Some folk have a style that is all of their own, all of us know that each one has grown. The dancing has captured us and lightened our souls*

The premise that older people can maintain their health and wellbeing through dance is highly evident in the work of Grand Gestures. There has been much discussion about the physical health benefits of

dance in terms of mobility, energy and stamina throughout the project. The volunteers explained: *'A lot of the time, we are exercising, breathing exercise, physical exercises, we are doing that and we don't even know'*. However, the artist increasingly describes the sessions in terms of vibe, concentration, discipline and focus and the volunteers similarly talked in this way:

*'I feel like I've had a workout with my body and my brain'*

*'I always feel more alive and vibrant doing it...even the walk to the church hall I enjoy as I know I'm going somewhere that I like. But I do feel mentally healthier as well as physically fitter'*.

The evaluation data found the group's enjoyment of the sessions to be a dominant theme. Comments from the volunteers included: *'I love to dance', 'It's all about letting go and enjoying yourself'* and *'We laugh with each other but not in a bad way...its enjoyment, not embarrassment'*.

The art of improvisation emphasises the enjoyment of 'being in the moment' and indeed, the artist and volunteers frequently speak of the emotional benefits of this. A typical comment here was:

*'When you go there, you totally forget everything else and you are totally in the zone, you totally forget your worries'*

Several members of Grand Gestures report that dance has become a central part of their daily lives. But more profound than this, it has become integral to identity formation and maintenance. Some commented that dance has helped them to 'rediscover' who they are aside from being a wife or mother, for example, while others report that Grand Gestures has played an important role in identity maintenance following retirement. One volunteer reported that they use the confidence which they have gained through dance to enrich their lives. Prior to interview for the evaluation, one of the volunteers purchased some drinks and later explained: *'It's a big deal for me to get two coffees and a tea as I wouldn't normally have done that'*.

The arts, more broadly, have also become a bigger part of the volunteers' identity. They often speak of their experience of participation through creative writing, painting, drawing and photography and go on cultural excursions together. In addition, the artist and Grand Gestures have formed a dance 'collective', which emerged from the group's aspirations to be participants in artistic ventures which extend beyond the Creativity Matters remit. Some of these include:

- The 'Dwell' project, filmed on a demolition site in Bensham (Gateshead). It forms part of a large, ongoing body of work, led by the artist, focused on the relationship between the body and landscape and explores memory, place and the sense of belonging. Dwell was shown at Sadler's Wells as part of the Elixir Festival.
- The 'Seat of Reason' project, filmed at the University of Northumbria, saw the group engage in specific improvisation with choreographed and instructed phrases and suggestions from the artist.

- The 'Delving Deeper' project, invited members of Grand Gestures, as artists in their own right, to be part of an inter-generational project which culminated in an exhibition held at the Customs House, South Shields, in early November.

Building on the public performance 'Passing', which took place in Newcastle Central Station in 2012, the group have undertaken two public performances in 2014; one nearby a public sculpture in Newcastle-upon-Tyne and the other, 'Improvisation and Murmuration', in a Northumberland field. These ventures have been largely funded both financially and in-kind by the artist and external funding sources.

Grand Gestures dancers are also beginning to view themselves as part of a broader arts movement. The group contributed to an AHRC-funded ethnographic study into the cultural value of somatic experience (see Winters, 2014) and have showcased their practice at various conferences and symposia. They have hosted visits from interested practitioners, academics and dance groups, and have had exchanges with several groups and individuals in Australia and the USA. The Grand Gestures blog has received almost 20,000 hits to date. A Churchill Fellow, who visited the group in the summer, wrote on the blog:

*'I told [the artist] and the group that they had changed my life. It sounds dramatic and slightly cheesy but despite being relatively active all my life, it was watching their dance happening which changed how I viewed movement and made me more aware of how my own body inhabits its space. The Grand Gestures Gateshead Happening this summer was one of the defining moments of my retirement'.*

When asked how they feel about engaging in such activities, Grand Gestures were overwhelmingly positive, commenting, for example: *'The public performances show that older people can do things and enjoy themselves....in a way, it might be spread ping the word...people are very interested and enthused by what they see...I feel more than happy to be part of it because it feels part of what we 're about; spreading the word'.*

Central to the artist's approach to the project is the idea of dance as a means of building community. The artist commented:

*'it is more than an arts project. It is a profound way of building community. At a time when life can be represented particularly by the media to be about isolation and separateness, it is the dancing and improvisation which calls us home. The small rituals we have collectively evolved, the trust we have built and the confidence in who we are is all affirming of the fact that we are indeed better together'*

Observation of the weekly sessions and project discussions consistently evidence the connectedness of the group - a diverse group of individuals who have found a shared interest in dance – and high levels of trust exist between the artist and volunteers. The impact of illness on the group is testament to the level of friendship which they share. Speaking in relation to one case, the artist said: *'[He] had his operation....and he's always been there in the group. So, there was an empty seat and he's the eldest...it's a bit like a member of your family being ill. That stressed me quite a bit. You can't help but*

*get involved'*. Nonetheless, the group's weekly meetings have been a motivating factor for recovery from illness, providing a positive sense of focus and the group report that being *'engaged in dance together, going on trips, engaging in what it is to be creative and how they want to be'* is helping them to *'age well'* and remain independent. One volunteer said:

*'it's great to go to Grand Gestures because in lots of ways, it's equipping us with skills to age well, being a means by which to keep ourselves out of institutions by being engaged and purposeful'.*

The group has developed in such a way largely due to the leadership, hard work and commitment of the artist, who the group respect and trust. However, the group operates through a highly democratic process; members have a strong voice in the development of the group, activities undertaken and importantly, how the group is represented. With the group attracting increasingly high levels of public interest, the way in which the group is represented is an increasingly important issue. At times, the group have felt a sense of disconnect between the way in which they would like to be portrayed and understood and the ways in which media contacts would like to represent them. Some members of the group have had negative experiences with the media throughout the year. It is vital that Equal Arts discuss this with the group and establish a clear protocol around media and publicity for years four and five. Some media training for Grand Gestures may also be beneficial. Furthermore, if Grand Gestures continues to develop along the same trajectory in future years, the relationship between Grand Gestures as a collective, Creativity Matters and Equal Arts will need to be discussed, along with questions about the longer term financing and sustainability of these activities.

Going forward, members have signalled their on-going commitment to developing their artistry and creativity (this includes organising an exhibition about the group, to be showcased in 2015) and feel inspired to continue to engage with older people living with dementia in a range of settings. A typical comment from volunteers about the future of the group was: *'I wouldn't want it to end, it becomes part of your life...a nice part of life, I look forward to it'.*

### **The Sand-Timers Group**

The Sand-Timers Group – formerly referred to as the 'Ukulele Group' – is the South Shields-based volunteer group. The volunteers continue to meet regularly to develop their ukulele-playing and singing skills. The group has ~10 core members, having lost one member during the year due to personal commitments and just temporarily gaining two additional members for part of the year.

The group have endured a physically and emotionally challenging year, with all but one member of the group having experienced serious illness. So too has the artist. As such, the group have maintained contact with each other, but on a slightly less frequent basis than in previous years. Furthermore, while they have endeavoured to continue to develop their musicianship, the main focus of their efforts has been the development of an exhibition, reflecting on the history of South Shields. The music artist explained: *'We've had a period where [going into care homes] hasn't been possible due to illness, so we*

*have give them some space and allowed them to do something a bit different – so I think that’s been a key development’.*

The idea for the exhibition emerged following a discussion about the future direction of the group, where they all expressed an interest in reminiscence and local history. One member of the group came up with the phrase ‘the death of King Street’ (South Shields), reflecting a discussion about how the community of South Shields has changed over time. The exhibition was comprised of recycled boxes which were transformed into a sandcastle and covered in pages from Millennium Remembered booklets, which document the memories of local people. The group also produced seagulls using acetate which they and visitors used to document their own memories. The birds were then suspended from the ceiling of the venue.

As part of the exhibition process, the group collaborated with Grand Gestures to produce a short film, incorporating both music and movement. The two groups met at South Shields beach and the Sand-Timers were recorded performing the song ‘Follow the Heron Home’ - playing the ukulele and singing - while Grand Gestures (both artists and members of the Sand-Timers) performed an improvised dance. The resultant film was described as '*beautiful*' and '*very moving*' by core project stakeholders. Grand Gestures described the coming together of the two groups as '*an effortless and perfect day*'. The film was played on a loop during the exhibition, which was showcased at Cleadon Park Library, for four days in October 2014 as part of an International Older Peoples celebration.

The exhibition was attended by ~150 visitors, comprising a mix of school children, active older people in the community and more socially isolated older visitors. Two members of Grand Gestures also attended the exhibition, along with the local Mayor. The volunteers were delighted by the level of interaction from local people and found the experience to be enjoyable and rewarding. They were praised by the artist for their generosity; sharing their local knowledge with visitors and providing those who were socially isolated with companionship and comfort. The artist reflected: '*It was lovely, it became a part of people using the library...who just didn't really want to go home*'. Similarly, the artist - a former social worker - also commented that they felt they had engaged in more 'social work-type' work during the week than they had in years.

The exhibition was very well-received. One visitor went home, drew a picture and brought it back the following day as a contribution to the exhibition, while another attended the exhibition twice, bringing his wife the second time as he was so moved by the exhibition. A new volunteer was also recruited to the project as a result of the exhibition. No care staff or care home residents were able to attend the exhibition. However, much of the work of the group is about sharing their identities with older people living with dementia in care homes and connecting with them; as such, there may be scope for showcasing the exhibition in care homes or developing a resource pack for care staff, based on the exhibition, in Year Four.

Important to note is that the two volunteer groups have come together on several occasions throughout the year to share their creativity, including at the project's annual celebration event. The groups report

to enjoy spending time together. Furthermore, one member of the Sand-Timers reported to have danced before until they engaged with Grand Gestures at the beach. They thoroughly enjoyed the improvised dancing – finding a '*freedom*' in it – and quickly told their family and friends about their experience. They look forward to further interaction with the group. On the whole, however, the Sand-Timers reluctantly expressed feeling uncomfortable with engaging in this art form. Physically, some members of the group find dancing solo to be difficult due to mobility problems (preferring more structured dance with partners). One volunteer, for example, said: *We've met the group, we get on with them, but it's not the kind of dancing that any of us are really keen on, we are used to doing the ballroom, we find the Grand Gestures dancing quite difficult and we don't get a laugh out of it so much'.*

Linked to this, the artist is immensely proud of the creative development of the group. While one member, in particular, is an '*amazing*' sculptor, the artist commented that all of the volunteers' have creative vision and creative flair. The artist explained: *'[Name] is such a wonderful artist, but the rest of the group, they are so unassuming about their talent. They are very humble and there is something really lovely about that'.* However, the group maintain that their primary motivation for engagement in the project is to support the wellbeing of older people living in residential care homes, with the development of their creativity simply being instrumental to this. One of the volunteers said:

*'I don't mind the exhibition but for me, the care homes is the main thing, that's why we joined. The ukulele, I'll never be a good player and everyone tells me I have the worst voice, but I like doing it and having a bit carry on and the people in the care homes really enjoy it. I think I'm speaking for everyone in our group here, we are happier just doing the uke and the sing-alongs. It's the sing-alongs in the homes that we like best'.*

It is important that the feelings of the group are at the forefront when planning activities and where joint-working takes place, there is a clear sense of purpose and all parties feel comfortable with the process.

Another important element of the group's work in Year Three has been the development of closer links with South Shields library. One member of the group, who currently works full-time at the library in a community engagement role, has taken on a more central role within the group, with the artist describing them as a de-facto co-facilitator. The artist said: *'She's a pivotal link. She's very musical. I test things out on her and she is now bringing material for me to look at. So she's assuming a transitional role'.* This member of the group runs a monthly ukulele playing and sing-along workshop for active, as well as isolated, older people living in the community. The Sand-Timers have started attending and supporting these sessions. Staff and residents from care homes previously engaged with have been invited to the library sessions, but have been unable to attend to date. However, the sessions could be an effective means of supporting the on-going development of care staff, so this option could be explored further in Year Four.

While the group have been unable to engage in as many care home sessions as they would have liked during the year, they remain committed to this as far as possible in the coming year. The artist recalled a

conversation had with one of the volunteers, who said to her, *'We will do whatever you ask us to do ...we are here to go and support people in care homes and give them a good time...if we sing we sing, if we chat we chat'...and that is what they want'*. In the context of serious illness, their dedication to the project should be commended.

As discussed in previous years, recruitment to this group presents problems in respect of supporting newcomers to learn to play the ukulele, while continuing to progress the competencies of longer-standing members. One option currently being explored, however, is the recruitment of more established ukulele players from the library group to the project. This would support the sustainability of volunteer support for the care home element of the project. As one volunteer explained:

*'If we had more volunteers, that would be good as we could have a rota and share it out between us. I do think that it's really worthwhile what we do. It would be a shame if the funding rounds out and there aren't enough people proficient enough to keep going into the care homes'.*

The group have attracted a good level of interest from local press about their contribution to the local community and care homes. This has fostered a greater sense of pride among the volunteers about their work and they have enjoyed showing the coverage to their families and friends. While the group and artist would welcome the project having press support and a higher profile, there is a feeling that the group are reluctant to be the focus of this coverage. The artist agreed that this is something that must be respected.

### **Working within Care Homes**

During Year Three, a new approach to engagement with care homes has been trialled by both artists and volunteer groups.

### **The Movement Work-stream Model**

In order to encourage more positive feelings towards volunteering in care homes and in response to a degree of anxiety by the movement artist about the expectation of creating 'culture change' within care homes, the artist and Grand Gesture have adopted a model of 'Happenings' within residential care homes. The model also responds to a context in which it is difficult for care homes to free up a group of staff every week for a sustained period. The Happenings model typically involves one-off engagements with care homes, where the volunteers undertake an improvised interactive performance for staff and residents. The focus of the sessions has shifted from 'training' staff to deliver movement workshops, to providing residents with a positive experience and showcasing the potential benefits of the arts to staff. Following engagement with a range of dance practitioners and groups as part of their Winston Churchill Fellowship, the artist reflected: *'My difficulty with lots of "trainings" is that they can become formulaic and disengaging when we fail to look at the skills needed to foster engagement and when the doing supersedes the being'* (Turner, 2013).

***A Reflection on a Happening, by a volunteer from Grand Gestures***

*Moving to the rhythm of my breathing. Tentatively, the first hand uncurls, fingers reaching out, to match my hand. As I breathe in and raise my arm, her hand follows, stretching up, pointing finger lifted high, following with her eyes, as I breathe out, and allow my arm to fall, hand first, diving down. Her eyes are focused now. She looks at me. At this moment, she really sees me, looks into my eyes. And now she has entered the dance. Chair bound, lower limbs immobile. Nevertheless ....she is dancing with me.*

As the title suggests, 'Happenings' aim to promote the 'practice of presence' and self-expression, as explained by the artist and volunteers below:

*'in the past there is always regret, in the future there is always fear and anticipation. Dwelling now...that's where you can be happy. For people with dementia, their release is in just being alright right now'*

*'In the care homes, they have seated exercises...it's boring and it's about following exactly what someone else is doing. That's not the same as what we do...because it's trying to encourage them to express themselves and trying to get them out of the mind-set of they can't do anything anymore'*

*'Dance can and does change the culture of accepted "norms" by building one that is based on participation and expressive appreciation'.*

Foldable chairs have been bought for the group and personalised by one of the volunteers, with designs agreed upon through a democratic process. The chairs give the group greater autonomy over where they sit and how they engage with residents. The artist explained:

*'Changing the seating is in itself empowering and it subtly shifts power, allowing us to form a mini community of dancing wherever we are.'*

Approx. 13 Happenings have taken places throughout the year; nine in care homes, two in a day centre and two at care staff conferences.

**The Music Work-stream Model**

Due to illness, the music artist was very conscious throughout the year that a model of engagement with care homes was needed which did not ask too much of the volunteers. They changed the model, therefore, from engaging with three care homes on a 12-week basis during the year (with all twelve sessions supported by volunteers), to engaging with three care homes on a six week basis (with the volunteers supporting just two of the sessions). In contrast to the movement model, the music model has had a greater focus on staff training in Year Three and reduced focus on facilitating music sessions with large groups of residents.



In two care homes, four sessions were dedicated to staff training, while two involved engagement with residents. Following these, the artist facilitated feedback discussions with staff regarding what they had observed. In the third care home, a slightly different approach was trialled. The artist had worked with this care home two years previously, on a project similar to *Creativity Matters*. The artist was keen to see how the activities co-ordinator and staff had continued to develop and how they could be supported further. The artist discovered that over the period, the activities co-ordinator had begun to learn to play the organ and had introduced some hymns into sessions. However, staff shortages had limited the opportunities available to them to engage with smaller group of residents as part of their day-to-day work and trial different approaches to engaging with them through creative activity. Following an initial session where the artist informally observed and assessed how music is used in the home, the remaining sessions were used to co-facilitate small group and one-to-one sessions with the activities co-ordinator and residents. One issue which arises with follow-up work is the deterioration of the health of residents over time. In this care home, dementia among the residents was much more acute and they exhibited a range of distressing behaviours. The artist was shocked and deeply upset by this. This, in turn, sparked concerns about the exposure of the volunteers to those with advanced dementia, especially when they are vulnerable themselves.

In all three care homes, staff were receptive to the idea of developing their musicianship and developing their confidence to facilitate 'music' – as opposed to 'entertainment' - sessions with residents. Staff were given various cues and demonstrations about how to do this, with the artist emphasising the importance of linking theory and practice. For example, staff were advised to engage with residents 'hand-under-hand', rather than 'hand-on-hand', as this is less intrusive and makes it easier for them to assess the extent to which residents are genuinely engaged. In response to this, one of the care staff said: *'I would never have thought to do that'*. Finally, through the sessions, the artist was keen to convey a number of important messages in pursuit of culture change. As summarised by Gage (2014):

- Activity is not just about organised, scheduled group sessions; it can be much more fluid and dynamic than that. It about engaging people with things that interest them throughout the day.
- For people living with dementia, there needs to be an emphasis on one-to-one and small group work. Large group work is only going to engage more able residents.
- The role of the activities coordinator should be an enabling one, with creative activity being seen as the job of all staff members.
- It is important that activities are co-produced, and structured in such a way that there are a range of opportunities for them to contribute and participate. Participation is far more engaging for people living with dementia than passive entertainment.

### **Engagement with Residents**

Both models of engagement with care homes were reported to be highly beneficial to residents. During the sessions, residents with dementia were clearly engaged and often maintained a good level of focus. One of the music artist feedback sheets stated:

*'It was nearly an hour that she had been in the session and engaged in everything we did and that was a massive achievement. During the session, we were able to give them all individual attention. We were present, they were present and Karen came out on top of the world'.*

Similarly, following a happening, the movement artist wrote:

*'Grand Gestures continue to bring delight, humour, a sense of curiosity and possibility wherever they go. Every member not only danced but found moments to share small dances with residents and ensured everyone was included' and 'It was really very moving in every way, beautiful moments of blossoming, opening, smiles, winks, finger wriggles, flowing breaths... feet tapping, hand clapping inclusive loveliness'.*

Residents were often reported to exhibit lower levels of anxiety and agitation when engaged with the music. Here, the music artist recalled:

*'I 'la'd' it and [the activities co-ordinator] played along to it had a really profound effect on the residents, a woman picked up with 'ee' sound and started singing along to it, people were tapping on the table, people were clapping and we had this whole improvised sound going on...which is amazing considering the level of dementia and [the activities co-ordinator] was really excited by it. I used the same tune and method later in the session when residents were struggling to remember words to once familiar songs and it had the same engaging effect then'.*

There was a sense of the sessions uplifting the residents' mood and providing them with an opportunity to enjoy themselves. One resident said that the singing had *'brightened her day'* and made her feel *'a thousand times better'*, while one of the volunteers stated: *'They know the songs -the rock and roll songs, the war time songs - they know a lot of them from when they were young and even if they can't read the book, they can still join in. A lady grabbed my arm and said 'it's just like a Saturday afternoon in the pubs' 'and I said yes, just without the booze!'. But they don't need that. they have a cup of tea and a reminisce and they really enjoy it'.* Feedback from staff following one of the Happenings was: *'Thank you so much for coming to see us with Grand Gestures, the residents can't stop talking about what a wonderful afternoon they had'.*

The sessions also often provided the residents with an opportunity to reminisce about their lives, prompted by a mix of the music played and conversation with the artists and volunteers.

## **Culture Change**

An overarching aim of the care home sessions is to create 'culture change' within care homes. It is important to understand what this means in order to manage expectations. Essentially, culture change in this context refers to positive developments in respect of staff awareness, knowledge, understanding and behaviour regarding the benefits and use of creative activity in supporting the wellbeing of residents. It is clear that the project has facilitated culture change in all of these areas.

At the most fundamental level, engagement has played an instrumental role in raising awareness amongst care staff about the potential benefits of creativity to the wellbeing of residents. This is a vital first step in the nurturing of culture change. During the Happenings, the artist and volunteers spoke of the 'awakening' of care staff to the possibilities that can emerge through dance, as demonstrated by the following quotes:

*'It's like taking someone to the ballet who has never been to the ballet before....we are going in and showing them this new approach where they think 'what's that'...but it's still something, it's an offering....so something's changed, they've seen something they haven't seen before, done in a way they've not seen before. We forget that in order for change to happen you have to be brave enough to be different and that is exactly what Grand Gestures are doing'*

*'We've been in a couple of homes where the staff have been amazed at how people have joined in. There's been a very positive response from staff'*

*'We had care staff, loads of them came in in, they didn't join in but they were really noticing...they were blown away by Grand Gestures. They were genuinely thrilled by it. Essentially its older dancers taking centre stage, showing the way the power relationship shifts. I think that is why it is so engaging'*

*'Some stop and observe. Oh Mrs Smith, I didn't know shew could do that...so it is important for the staff to be there'.*

Similarly, the music artist pointed out that staff were at times 'very enthusiastic' and 'excited' about what they had witnessed. Following several sessions, they also commented on how impressed they were by the reflexive skills of staff in respect of observing and understanding the engagement of particular residents in the sessions and the positive effects of this. Commenting on one member staff in particular, the artist said: *'I normally observe a couple of wonderful things that happen during the sessions with people with dementia but the brilliant thing was that she had observed just as much and more'.*

The music artist felt that their model had been effective in conveying the 'key messages' outlined previously, by giving staff permission to spend dedicated time with a small number of residents (something which staff are generally unable to do), challenging the expectation that activities coordinators must try to work with as many residents as possible and giving staff permission to experiment with different approaches to interaction with residents. Staff fed back to the artist that they could see the benefits of participatory approaches to creative activities to the wellbeing of residents, as opposed to providing them with more passive forms of entertainment.

The sessions have been successful in supporting staff to develop their creativity; particularly their musicality. In the two care homes where staff were introduced to playing the ukulele, staff were said to have grasped the 'basics' within the six weeks and to have enjoyed the process. What's more, the artist said it was clear that staff had been practising outside of the sessions.

There was a clear sense among the artists of the sessions helping to build a sense of community between staff, residents and family members within the homes. In one care home, the music artist reported '*a great air of support*' for the staff learning to play the ukulele by residents. Residents would clap when the staff started to play and staff reported to be nervous about playing but managed to overcome this in order to benefit the residents. They said: '*we overcame the nerves as we were doing it for the residents and not for ourselves. It was helped because of the smiles*'. A sense of community could also be seen to have developed as a result of staff learning more about the personal histories of some of the residents. Indeed, best practice guidelines suggest that the arts can be a great source of motivation for staff where they can '*gain a deeper understanding of those in their care, by seeing beyond their basic needs and appreciating their accomplishments and emotional lives as well*' (Baring Foundation, 2011).

Similar to previous years, the project has created an appetite for creativity activity to play a more important role in several of the care homes engaged with. Several would like additional follow up work to take place. Following one happening, a member of care staff said, for example: '*We would love to learn how to do this and implement it here, please come back – have since gone back!*'. Indeed, both of the artists and volunteer groups have returned to some of the homes during the year to deliver additional sessions and intend to return again over the Christmas period.

To further support the legacy of the project, the music artist intends to compile a songbook and record an accompanying CD, in collaboration with the volunteers and care staff. This will act as an enduring resource which care staff can draw upon when facilitating music sessions in the future.

It is further important to note that the Sand-Timers continued to engage with one care home that they developed a particularly close relationship with in Year Two, throughout the third year of the project. They have stopped this temporarily due to illness and staff shortages within the home, but intend to contact the home again in the future.

In January 2014, several volunteers and care staff attended the regional heat of the British Care Awards, following two members of staff being nominated for an award as a result of their contribution to the project. Having won the North East award, one care staff member was then invited to compete in the National British Care Awards in London. The experience was important in terms of motivating staff to continue to drive forward culture change within the homes.

There remains a degree of concern, however, among project stakeholders about the scale of the culture change being created through the project and extent to which the changes are sustainable. This is, in part, linked to levels of staff engagement in the sessions. It remains the case that in most of the care homes engaged with, there have been poor levels of attendance from staff. Some of the feedback from the artists and volunteers included:

*'We had 3 care staff in with us, but as soon as we started with the music, the staff disappeared. I couldn't get them joined in'*

*'I can't understand why staff aren't engaged when it's a big session with lots of residents as that should free up staff'*

*'At one care home, I was really disappointed because the manager just said oh here they are and went off. And obviously just looked at us as an opportunity to go off and do something else. It's for the residents, but it's also for the staff'.*

A limitation of the current music and movement models is the extent to which staff have developed the skills needed to sustain the effective use of creative activity within the homes in the longer term. From a music perspective, six weeks is insufficient for staff to learn to play the ukulele. The artist agreed, saying: *A big piece of the puzzle for me is that they need regular support to learn to play. How do we support them to keep developing the skills?'. The feedback from staff is that they would like further support to deliver music sessions within the homes...they do not feel their musicality is developing without support'*. Similarly, the current Happenings model typically involves one-off engagements with care homes and facilitating meaningful arts sessions is a highly skilled practice. The volunteer group has been developing improvised dance skills for three years and would still be reluctant to lead sessions within care homes by themselves.

A review of the literature confirms that a range of project models are in operation in care homes across the UK. Some projects deliver intensive training courses to staff outside of the care homes, some engage with just one care home for a period of up to nine months (trailing various art forms in the home during that time) and others, following an intensive period of support, return to homes on a systematic basis to provide on-going support to staff. Reflecting upon this, the music artist suggested: *'It has made me think I'd rather go back and work more intensively with one care home rather than work with three. It would be a formal contact sustained over a long period of time'*. Furthermore, discussing the idea of follow-up, they said: *'I think that hasn't been built into the project but it's an essential part'*. The idea of delivering training outside of the care home environments and follow-up sessions within care homes should be considered ahead of the start of Year Four.

Irrespective of the models of engagement employed, creating culture change in the residential care sector is notoriously difficult and is linked to a range of factors which are beyond the control of the project team. These include: staff shortages, government policy and care standards, and staff training and morale. Having said this, best practice guidelines purport that *'the arts will flourish best in a care home where managers clearly show their interest and support by giving time and resources'* (Baring Foundation, 2011). Indeed, a key factor underpinning culture change to date, however, has been care home management support, with management enthusiasm for the project filtering down to staff and staff being given 'protected time' to engage in the project. In one care home, nonetheless, it was felt that several staff attended the sessions of their own accord and were keen to see if the project would support them in their jobs, as well as providing them with an opportunity to relax and have fun together. Over the project period, it has also become clear that care staff having a personal interest in creative activity is also critical in combatting barriers to culture change. Talking about one of the activities co-ordinators who have sustained music sessions with residents beyond the project sessions,

the music artist said: *'She's quite musical. She was a guitarist and was taught the uke and she uses her ukulele every single day...she used to sing in clubs and she uses music as a way of getting rid of negative energy'*. It is important to recognise that music or movement will not necessarily resonate with every member of care staff.

It is clear that a greater understanding is needed about the long-term impacts of the project on the culture of care within care homes that were engaged with in the first three years of the project. At the start of the fourth year, it is proposed that a detailed qualitative survey of all of the care homes engaged with is undertaken and interim report based on these reflections and key learning points is produced.

### **The Volunteers' Experience**

Both volunteer groups appreciated the re-modelling of the project's engagement with care homes during Year Three. The movement work-stream's 'Happenings' model – as opposed to the 12 week training model that operate in Year Two – is much more appealing to Grand Gesture. It does not require such intensive periods of engagement from the volunteers (which can be challenging) and the concept of delivering improvised performances more closely aligns to the way in which they work in the weekly sessions. As a result, the number of volunteers who engage with this element of the project has more than doubled (from 4 to 11) and includes those who said they were unlikely to ever volunteer in care homes due to the memory of supporting partners and relatives living in residential care and their subsequent loss.

In light of volunteer illness, the music artist and volunteers felt that the way in which the music sessions in care homes have operated in Year Three was a responsible and effective response to changing circumstances. One of the volunteers said: *'[The artist] has been doing most of the sessions on her own. She has been sensible by saying to us 'leave it for a while until you get yourself sorted health-wise''*. The artist agreed: *'We owe it to look after our volunteers first and foremost and if we do that, the impact on the residents will be much more significant. Essential in this project are the volunteers...we are being very careful about not stretching the volunteers too much'*.

Both volunteer groups report to gain enjoyment from the sessions, with some of the feedback including:

*'Today was a sheer joy'*

*'I had a wonderful day, dancing was great, thank you so much for this'*

*'Today was a very happy happening'*

*'I love the fact that we get to do these things...I get so much pleasure from it...I go home every time and just relive every moment of it, it's just great'*

*'When a happening happens, a happening happens inside me...anticipation and excitement'*

The value and effectiveness of the volunteer role in supporting both residents and staff is evident from the artists feedback sheets and interview:

*'They had such confidence and joy and that worked its way through the room, bringing little smiles and small moments of engagement from resident... they could not have done more'*

*'Some residents are really shy but they found a way to bond and connect together. Tailoring their approach to the residents they are confronted with'*

*'The volunteers were critical in making sure the session was more than a singing session. [Volunteer] engaged with a resident who is 93, hearing difficulty but chatted and laughed throughout the session. [The volunteer's] local knowledge of night life and dance halls in South Shields really added to a conversation between several residents. He helped bring the conversation to life'*

*'He was so generous in giving feedback to the staff on their ukulele playing. It was really nice to have his input. He really built up the confidence of the care staff'*

The volunteers too feel that their work with people with advanced dementia is highly valuable. One volunteer described the Happenings as: *'bringing a sense of life and light to those whose days are filled with unreleased sameness'*. Another volunteer said:

*'Sometimes we go in there and it seems that nothings there, nothing happening but then they smile and you have some good conversations with them...we talk about where we used to live...they might say something about Gateshead high street...and we can relate to that, we can always talk about something about that. That's the value of having local people go into local care homes'*

The volunteer groups also derive a great sense of satisfaction and purpose from volunteering:

*'I want to be doing something useful. But also something that's rewarding to myself as well. Volunteering is part of that and I wanted to be part of something rather than just doing something'*

*'My mam had dementia and you don't know how we are going to finish up, so if there's something we can do to help them...'*

*'When you are there for half an hour or so, you feel as if you have brightened their day. You've done something for them. You feel as if you have given them a bit of joy'*

*'The bit I like is going to the old people's homes. I find that rewarding as everyone does. You can see on people's face, even if they have dementia, they do end up singing the songs, stomping their feet, twiddling their fingers to the music and they and I find that stimulating. I think it works...better than them being stuck in the lounge with the television on and being left'*

*'I'm 76 in a couple of weeks so I'm getting on a bit so to me to get on and do something, it's better than sitting in the house, waiting for god, worrying about the next day. I like getting involved in things. It passes the time. It's as much for my pleasure as anyone else'.*

The experience of volunteering in the care homes also reminds the volunteers of how fortunate they are to be active and engaged citizens. Following on happening, one of the volunteers upon leaving the care home turned to the artist and said:

*'Isn't it lovely to sit on the bench? I thank God every day that I'm able to come out here'.*

Both artists commented on the broad skill-set and professionalism of the volunteer groups in supporting staff and residents within the care homes. Over time, the volunteers too report being more comfortable in their volunteering role. Several members of Grand Gestures reported that as their experience of engaging with the care homes increases, they are assuming a greater role in facilitating the Happenings, saying: *'We don't need much coaching now. We know what to do'.* During interview, the volunteers discussed the skills involved in engaging with the care home residents. Extracts from the discussion are outlined below:

*'When you go to the day centre, they are going from their home, we are coming from our home, when we go to a care home, it's their home and we have to respect where they live. If they want to leave, then we have to respect that. We go in there and they don't know what to expect. You have to be respectful'*

*'You've got to learn how to approach them, in the way that you hold their hand and do the movements, you don't force it on them. You leave it up to them...what they want to do and what they are capable of'*

*'You have to go in there and quickly assess people's personalities, you have to observe them and see if you can get any clues...You can tell by their eyes...you get an intuition about it'.*

The volunteers have also completed 'dementia friends' training during the year, which has reinforced the regular guidance given to them by the artists and the skills which they have already developed.

In future years, Grand Gestures would like to work with a broader range of older people with dementia, including those with early onset dementia, still living in the community. This is the result of two highly-successful Happenings in a day centre, where the group were inspired by the opportunity to engage with more active older people living in the community. The artist explained: *'Even though the people from the day centre had dementia, they were more able to participate and interact and this meant a better sense of connection between them and Grand Gestures'.* The group pointed out: *'It's cheaper to keep people in the community...and it would be a more vibrant, joyful offering for us'.* It would be interesting to explore the possibility of doing more Happenings in day centres and how this relates to the funding in Year Four.



## The Artists Experience

Throughout the third year of the project, the value of the artists input to the project, as well as the value of the project to their personal and professional development, has become ever-more apparent.

During go-alongs and interview, both Grand Gestures and Sand-Timers were full of praise for the artists. Their interpersonal, empathetic and reflexive skills have been crucial in Year Three, in respect of maintaining the volunteers' enthusiasm for the project, protecting their wellbeing, ensuring the inclusivity of the project and enabling the project to continue. Highly sensitive to the emotional and physical impacts of illness among the volunteers, the artists have provided individual and group level support with this and adapted the volunteer workshops and re-modelled the processes of engagement with care homes, as required. Speaking in relation to just one individual, the movement artist explained during interview:

*'He's come back to the group but I'm having to be quite strict with him about not overdoing it which he doesn't like. He's suddenly not the tommy that always had the energy. He gets tired and out of puff. So, I've been trying to manage that'.*

This is just one of many examples of care discussed and exhibited by the artists. Where members of the volunteers groups haven't been able to participate in typical ways, other means of contributing have been found for them. For example, improvised dance has been substituted with creative writing in some cases, and ukulele playing was substituted with playing percussion.

Equally, however, the project has facilitated the development of the artists' practice. Both artists attributed this, in large part, to the longitudinal nature of the project. The movement artist wrote as part of their Churchill Fellowship report:

*'I have always felt least at home when I have been part of bigger projects where there has not been a sense of connection to people and which have been limited to short-term engagements with ambitious over reaching aims and objectives. I am enlivened by the building of connections and meanings and the organic realisation of outcomes as part of a negotiated process. This way of working has become part of my process and is made clear to me in two longer term projects I am presently privileged to participate in' (Turner, 2013).*

It has provided them with a rare opportunity to learn more about the ageing process and how to develop their practice accordingly. The movement artist stated: *'The deeper thinking about the group is teaching me all the time about the process of ageing, because I'm witnessing them and getting older myself.'* The project has given them a unique opportunity to experiment with different approaches to the achievement of outcomes and develop their confidence as facilitators of change. During interview, the music explained: *'I think over the five years, the project is going to constantly change and I don't think that at the end of it we are going to end up with something that says this is the model. I've given myself permission not to succeed and it's not about failing, it's about actually, if this doesn't work, it's good to know why'.*

Both artists suggested that the project has developed their creativity and facilitation skills, with the movement artist in particular commenting that the empowered, progressive and engaged nature of their volunteer group requires them to continually develop new ideas, scores and techniques. This was a recurring theme in the artist's feedback sheets: *'Each week, their expectations of me enable me to find something new and challenging for us...another way of exploring and expressing ourselves. It always feel reciprocal. We support each other to be the best we can'*. Meanwhile, the care home sessions have inspired the music artist to want to complete an accredited course in music improvisation, in order to develop their practice with people with limited communication skills.

Throughout the year, the two artists have worked collaboratively to deliver volunteer workshops and public events and are considering delivering joint training sessions for care staff in the future. Learning more about each other's practice through this process of collaboration has also been useful to their professional development.

The positive impacts of the project on the creative competence and health and wellbeing of the volunteers, care staff and older people living with dementia both in residential care homes and beyond, as well as sustained discussion about the project with practitioners, have been critical in helping to affirm their practice. Recalling a conversation had with a highly skilled practitioner, as part of their Winston Churchill Fellowship, the movement artist documented in their fellowship report:

*'[the practitioner] simply listened and said 'When you work with Grand Gestures and when you work in care homes something new happens. You facilitate a sense of agency in those who are marginalised. Not everyone notices in the way you notice, it's part of the skill set you have. It's a gift to facilitate change' (Turner, 2013).*

Both project artists are continually engaged in ongoing processes of reflection and evaluation as part of their artistic practice; as part of session planning, providing Equal Arts with written evaluation sheets following each volunteer-focused and care home session, reflecting upon their practice and experience of the sessions, having discussions with project managers on a regular basis and contributing to the university-led evaluation, for example. The quality of the artists' reflections is outstanding. On just one occasion during the year, one of the artist feedback sheets was shared with a stakeholder, beyond project managers without the permission of the artist. The artist found this to be concerning given the sensitive nature of the content. It is important that if feedback sheets are shared beyond the immediate project management team, permission is sought from the artists (and perhaps information is summarised).

The last point to note from the artists' perspective is the enjoyment which they have gained from being part of the project. Both artists have described Year Three as highly positive, in respect of both their relationship with the volunteer groups and the success of the care home sessions. For the movement artist in particular, the new model of engagement has helped them to deal more effectively with the concept of facilitating culture change in the care sector. The positive relationship which the music artist has with their volunteer group, however, has begun to prompt concern about how they are going to feel when the project comes to an end. They explained:

*'I've been quite concerned about the five years thing...it's a good thing...but within that, I've been really worried about exit strategy because of the relationship that's been built up. We've had a lot of time together. I have stepped over professional boundaries that I have set in the past, so they know roughly the area where I live, and that's because there is no agenda. There is such trust there that has developed over a period of time. I really don't want at the end of the five years to lose contact with that group. It's been a big journey for me so I need to think about what happens personally when we come to an end'.*

It is important that the core project stakeholder group (or project steering group) give careful consideration to the issue of exit strategy in Year Four and look to build effective plans to support this by Year Five.

## Conclusion

In many respects, the third year of *Creativity Matters* could be considered the most successful year of the project to date. Having dedicated three years of support to the project, the two volunteer groups have become skilled artists and facilitators and drawing upon this learning, work effectively within the residential care sector to support staff development and resident wellbeing; the already highly-skilled artists at the outset of the project have significantly enhanced their practice in their respective art forms, as facilitators of change and in working with older people (including those with dementia); and, care home models of engagement have been developed, which reflect the needs and aspirations of the artists and volunteers, and have proven to be beneficial to both residential care staff and older people with dementia. The core project team (project managers and the two artists), more broadly, have been engaged in an on-going process of reflection about the project for the past three years, generating a wealth of knowledge – or key learning points – of use to both them as they continue to develop the project and to the wider arts, health and adult social care sectors and funding bodies. These relate to, for example:

- The need for projects of this nature to be highly flexible and responsive, as it is likely that the operating environment of the project will be subject to constant change. It is unlikely that a ‘best practice’ model of engagement with volunteers and care homes will emerge from the project by the end of Year Five.
- Identifying ‘appropriate’ care homes – where there is care home management support for the project and some members of care staff have an interest in creative activity – to take part in the project is critical to the development of culture change within the residential care sector.
- The artists play a critical role in the achievement of project outcomes and impacts. The passion and interpersonal skills of the artists are of equal importance to levels of expertise in their art forms.
- Projects need to be clear and realistic about the concept of ‘culture change’ and be aware of the difficulties associated with achieving culture change in the residential care sector.
- Projects must also be realistic when applying for funding about the scale of projects (particularly in respect of ‘numbers’ in relation to project resources) and it is hoped that funders are open to the re-modelling of projects in order to maximise project outcomes as key learning points emerge.
- There are a number of advantages and challenges associated with longitudinal projects of this nature. A key benefit of longer-term projects is the opportunity to build capacity in the arts sector. However, when engaging in five year projects involving older people, project stakeholders have a strong duty of care towards volunteers and their wellbeing must be at the forefront of project planning and development.

In previous years, the evaluation report has ended with a series of recommendations, intended to inform the operational development of the project going forward. This year, however, the findings of the evaluation suggest that it would be more beneficial for the core project team to consider (or revisit) a number of fundamental questions about the operation of the project. These include:

- Can the music and movement models of engagement with care homes be further developed in Year Four to better support culture change?
  - How many care homes and care staff should be engaged with?
  - Should 'new' care homes be recruited to the project or should care homes previously engaged with be revisited?
  - To what extent should models focus on staff development versus supporting the wellbeing of older people living with dementia?
  - Where should the sessions take place (within or outside of care homes)?
  - For how long should care homes receive intensive/follow-up support through the project?
- How can culture change be sustained following an initial period of engagement?
- To what extent do current project processes reflect the needs and wellbeing of the volunteer groups?
  - What needs to be done to ensure their wellbeing in future years, especially if they experience illness?
- Do more volunteers need to be recruited to the project?
  - If so, how can this be achieved?
- Would the project benefit from media support?
  - What kind of media support?
  - How can effective working relationships be developed between the artists, volunteers, Equal Arts and the media?
  - Would the project team benefit from the development of a protocol to govern media activity?
  - Would the volunteers benefit from media training to support their understanding of media conventions, the reasons for this and how to negotiate the media?
- Are there any external stakeholders or networks with influence over the management and operation of the residential care sector whom it would be useful to engage in the project in support of culture change?
- Do the project team need to start thinking about an 'exit strategy'?
  - What will be the future of the volunteer groups following the project end (i.e. would Grand Gestures like to continue as a dance collective? What can be done in Year Four and Five to support this?)
- What should be the focus of evaluation in future years?<sup>1</sup>
  - What are the current gaps in knowledge?
  - What should the dissemination plan consist of?

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<sup>1</sup> A detailed qualitative survey of all of the care homes engaged with in order to capture evidence of longer-term impacts and inform thinking about sustainability is proposed, in the initial months of 2015.

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