In November & December 2018, staff and volunteers from BAB-funded projects came together to learn how to use creative approaches to better reach and engage people aged 85 and older. Research tells us that those aged 85+ are at particular risk of loneliness and isolation, and as such this age group is a particular focus within the BAB programme.

The two workshops were run by Dr Helen Manchester (University of Bristol) and Stand + Stare from the Tangible Memories Project. This document shares the key learning from these workshops, with a particular focus on the use of storytelling and co-design.

Storytelling as an approach

Using a storytelling approach can be a valuable way to get to know an individual and to encourage them to open up and engage. Those aged 85+, in particular, may believe that their story is not very interesting and assume that nobody will want to know more about them. Feelings of loneliness and isolation may add to this perceived sense of inadequacy.

Individuals may also be used to talking about ailments and focusing on difficulties; using a storytelling approach enables them to connect with other people on a deeper level around topics they might not otherwise talk about such as personal memories and life experiences.

Storytelling using…

➢ **Objects:** If you are meeting in someone's home, try talking to them about why they have certain objects in their home, but not other objects. If your project is outside the home, ask them to bring along some objects that are important and meaningful to them as a starting point for engagement. Why did they bring that object? What does it mean for them?

➢ **Music:** Asking them to list their 8 favourite tracks and then playing these and listening together, discussing the story behind why they chose that song. What did they listen to as a teenager? What memories does this song bring back? If you are working in a group then each person could choose one song to share and have a discussion around it. Does the same song bring back different memories for other people?

➢ **Sensory:** Smell, touch and taste can be great ways to bring back memories and encourage someone to share their story, particularly if they are living with later stage dementia. Examples might include foods they used to eat in their childhood, or the smell of a distinctive soap that may spark a memory and lead to a story about their life experience.

➢ **Place:** Using place as a starting point of discussion. Where did they grow up? Where did they work? Where do their family live? Use maps to pinpoint locations and establish common links between people. You can also look up the location on Google and discuss the ways it looks similar or different now.

Remember that storytelling does not have to focus on memories. Life is still happening for people and stories are playing out every day – the objects, music or smells might be things that are still encountered by that individual on a daily basis.

Documenting stories through a 'Tangible Memories' book

Documenting stories allows these stories to be shared with others, for example family or friends, who may not know this aspect of the individual. They also provide a record to remind people what they have taken part in and to feel that their life experiences have value.

The Tangible Memories app was created by an interdisciplinary team of University of Bristol academics, artists, Alive Activities and older people. The app is another method of drawing out stories and documenting these. It aims to improve people's wellbeing and sense of community through the sharing of life histories and other stories.

These might be individual stories that have come to light through a storytelling approach, or it could be the journey of a project or community group over a set period of time. It has been designed particularly with older people and their carers and families in mind, but can be used by anyone for a whole variety of purposes.

It is a free app (currently only available on Apple) which allows you to tell stories using recorded sounds, images and text, and produce physical printed books based on this material.

More information: www.tangible-memories.com

@tangiblememory

The app can be downloaded from:
https://itunes.apple.com/gb/app/tangible-memories-story-

Creating a 'Parlour of Wonder'

A Parlour of Wonder is an idea developed by Stand + Stare, the University of Bristol and Alive Activities. It is a specially co-designed space, for example a room within a care home or a corner within a community centre or library, where individuals can creatively engage with their community. The space is co-designed by community members, who decide where they want the Parlour to be, what they want it to look like, what objects to put in it and how it will be used.

More information: https://aliveactivities.org/resources/create-your-parlour-of-wonder/

https://tangible-memories.com/parlours-of-wonder/

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