



**BRISTOL
AGEING
BETTER**



LOTTERY FUNDED

Wyldwood Arts Learning for Life Together Pilot

September 2016 - August 2017

Wyldwood Arts - Learning for Life Together Pilot

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Bristol Ageing Better (BAB) is a partnership of organisations working to reduce social isolation and loneliness among older people and help them to live fulfilling lives. It is funded by the Big Lottery Fund. In September 2016, BAB commissioned three projects as part of the Learning for Life Together pilot.

Learning for Life Together aims to empower older people who are isolated and who have lost confidence by encouraging and supporting them to share their stories, skills or experiences with younger people within a learning environment. There are a number of intergenerational initiatives which already exist in Bristol aiming to bring together younger and older people in order to improve respect and understanding between generations. Learning for Life Together builds on this great work by offering specific support to those older people who may initially not feel ready to engage in this kind of activity, but with some support and encouragement can build their confidence by sharing their skills, experiences or stories.

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The three Learning for Life Together pilot projects all trialled different methods of activity to empower older people and reduce their isolation and loneliness.

This report provides an overview of the pilot project delivered by Wyldwood Arts, including their successes, challenges and learning. In line with BAB's 'test and learn' approach, this report will highlight key points of learning and advice which may be useful for other projects within Bristol Ageing Better or the other thirteen Ageing Better areas funded by the Big Lottery Fund through the Fulfilling Lives: Ageing Better Programme.



Project overview

Wyldwood Arts' 'Proud To Be Me' pilot project was based around individual storytelling. It aimed to challenge perceptions of ageing through showcasing individual stories and lives. Younger people worked with older people to draw out their stories and together co-create an imaginative way to express these stories within libraries, schools and care homes. By doing so it also aimed to build community relationships.

This pilot project was delivered in two areas of Bristol – a supported housing facility in Bedminster (Monica Wills House) and a nursing home in Hartcliffe (Hartcliffe Nursing Home). Younger people came from the University of Bristol, Bristol Old Vic Young Company and Fair Furlong Primary School. This project was an extension to Wyldwood Arts' existing project called 'Chat Back', enabling this work to continue with an intergenerational storytelling focus. In total, 16 sessions were held in each location.

Storytelling was facilitated through using a theme, photo, object or phrase as a stimulus for exchanging memories and stories between older people and younger people. This project produced a performance in Monica Wills House, which was then adapted into a smaller workshop for Bedminster library. A publication of stories, poems and narratives has also been produced alongside podcasts and a community rug. This rug was publically exhibited in the local library. Two cushions were made which were given to Hartcliffe Nursing Home along with framed drawings and poems made by the children. A film was also made for internal use.

Each session was attended by an average of 13 older people, some of whom attended regularly while others had one-off attendance. In total, 33 older people participated in the project.

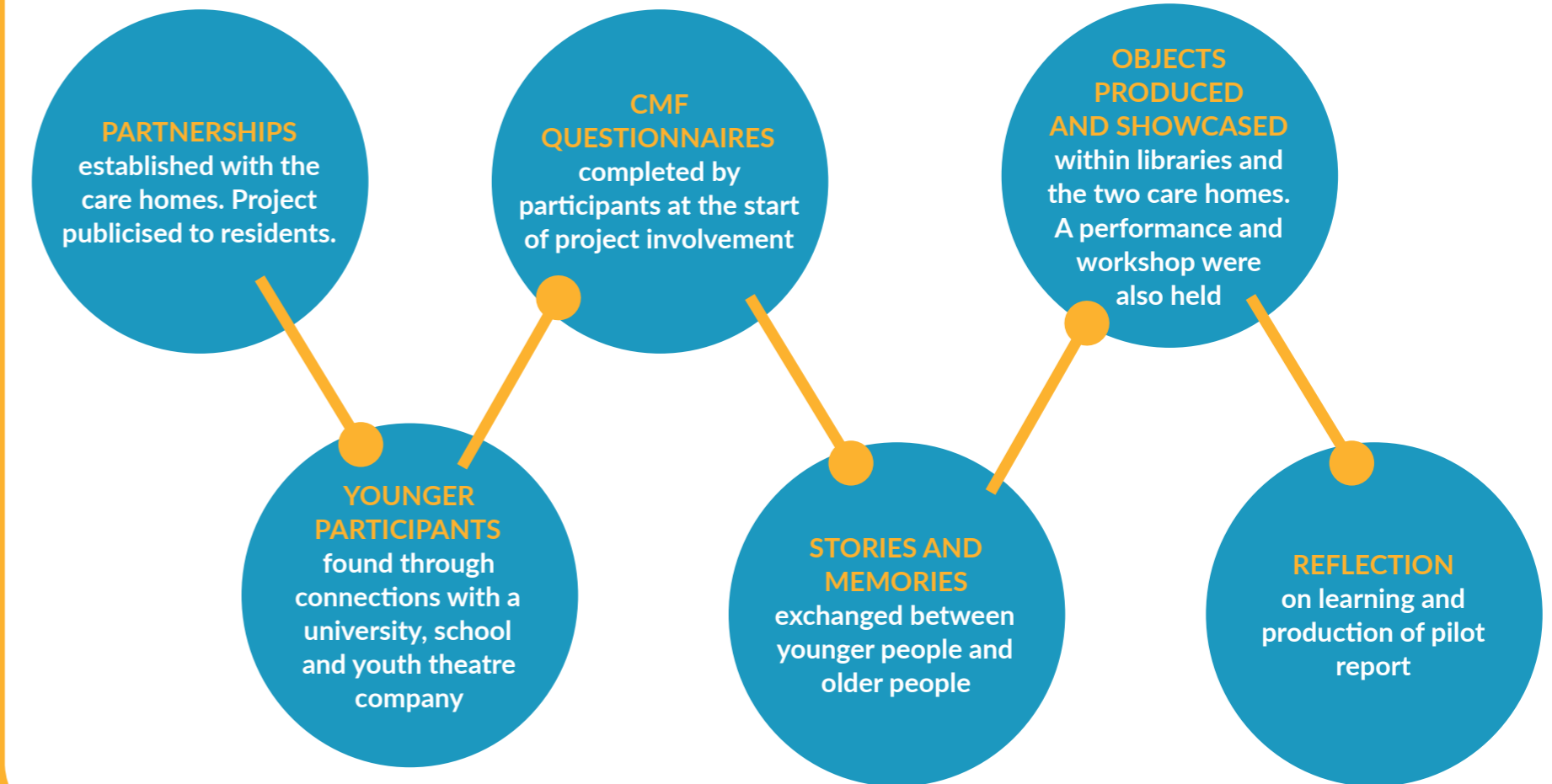
Participants

9 older people provided their demographic information and, of these, there was a fairly even split between male (45%) and female (55%) participants. Ages ranged from 68 to 94, with an average age of 79. 86% reported a long-standing physical/mental illness or disability.

100% of the 4 participants who completed forms at the start of the project reported high levels of social isolation and loneliness.

0% of the 5 participants who completed forms at the end of the project reported high levels of social isolation and loneliness. While this data comes from different individuals to those who completed forms at the start of the project, it indicates the potential impact this project may have had on participants' loneliness and isolation.

Project process



Case study: Jenny

Jenny is a resident at Monica Wills House. She uses a rollator, has restricted mobility and suffers with health generally. She isn't as comfortable in her movement as some of the other group members. Because of this, Jenny has struggled to access many of the offsite activities that Monica Wills House offers, meaning that the opportunity to get involved in this project, which is mostly onsite, was all the more important for her.

In the initial sessions, Jenny could be considered a very quiet and shy individual. She didn't enjoy games and exercises, felt uncomfortable when talking about herself and she was unsure about sharing personal experiences and thoughts. However she very quickly built up a strong relationship with the young artists and started to feel more comfortable in sharing memories and personal experiences as well as exploring new games and exercises which increased her mobility. Because her memories and stories are listened to, and validated through a creation and performance process, she has started to feel that her voice and story is important, heard and cherished.

This has resulted in a huge improvement in her ability to share and articulate her thoughts, ideas and stories. So much so that Wyldwood Arts took her to perform on the Bristol Old Vic's main stage, something many theatre professionals dream of doing! This was a huge achievement for everyone involved. Eventually, Jenny's confidence grew so much that she was able to perform to her scariest audience yet: her peers and fellow residents at Monica Wills House. Her belief in herself had grown so much that she was able to do this without concern about being embarrassed.

After this experience, Jenny says she is more confident when speaking in front of others and increasingly able to stand up for her ideas in group conversations. She has now become an individual who encourages others to speak up too and has become a champion of theatre, the arts and intergenerational work.

Key challenges and what would be done differently in the future

Completing the Common Measurement Framework (CMF) questionnaires:

- **Length of time:** Completing these forms took approximately one hour per participant, which was longer than expected.
- **Assistance from staff:** Staff needed to provide a large amount of assistance in completing these forms, for a variety of reasons. This included participants not wishing to complete them independently or not being able to do so due to sight loss or difficulties in the language used.
- **Separate meetings to complete CMFs:** The time needed to complete CMFs should be factored in from the very beginning of the project. This includes planning how this will be achieved, for example whether a separate meeting will be arranged with each participant outside of the project meetings in order to complete the form. Wyldwood Arts completed these forms in additional separate 1:1 sessions with each participant.

Participant attendance and engagement:

- **Attendance:** There are many things which can stop individuals from attending a session, even when they are in a residential home. This includes illness, mobility and family visits. Sometimes family do not understand how important a session can be; it is therefore useful to build trust and understanding with the family as well.
- **Engagement:** It can be difficult to articulate to participants what the project involves and why it is being undertaken. Projects should try to be as clear as possible, especially surrounding why it is a valuable activity to participate in.



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Case study: Freda

Freda lives in Hartcliffe nursing home. She has very limited mobility, which means she is unable to go out unassisted. When she first met with the children, she couldn't image that they would be interested in her stories, and felt worried that they might misbehave in her room. She says, 'I thought that it was a bit of an ordeal for them come and see old people who weren't up to date with a lot of today's news and technology.' But after meeting with the students, and beginning to make friendships, she remarked 'they were very well behaved'.

Freda says she doesn't get many visitors coming to see her, and even less young people.

'I'm not with a lot of young people now'. When I asked her how she enjoyed meeting with the young students, she said 'I enjoyed hearing about a different outlook on life. Because they are so much younger, makes me realise how things have changed.'

Through this project, we encourage the students to tell residents about themselves as well as asking residents about their life. This was an important part for Freda 'I liked meeting the children because they keep me ... up to date with things. Apart from that, I don't really see anybody.'

She told me of one of the student who after hearing Freda's story of playing five stones as a child, brought her in 5 stones he'd gathered for her. 'I thought it was very kind, one of the little boys ... brought me 5 stones. I've put them on the [window] ledge just there. I thought that was very kind. It's not the sort of thing I thought a youngster with their elaborate toys, easy come easy go things, would have done. But it was very thoughtful of him, very kind and they're still on my window ledge.'

The students use the conversations to find out about the residents' lives, weaving in colours gathered from the stories to create a community textile. Freda talks a lot about her time in school, mentioning she didn't really enjoy this time. Talking about the difference in schooling always interests and surprises the young students. Against Freda's initial fears of the students not being interested in her stories, and in the difficulties of meeting and welcoming strangers into her room, she tells me that she has enjoyed this project very much. 'I enjoyed them coming, I hope they come again!'

Learning, recommendations and advice for similar projects

Working with educational establishments:

- **Timescales:** When working with schools, colleges and universities, be aware that their time will be restricted by exams and term dates. Projects should plan around this in advance to ensure activities are not too disrupted.
- **Age of the children:** If primary school children are involved in the project, strong facilitation and a clear focus is key to activities being a success.

Project delivery:

- **A long lead-in time** for community engagement is crucial before activities fully begin in order to gradually build relationships and foster trust with potential participants. Wyldwood Arts did this by working with the local libraries.
- **Balance of having structure and flexibility:** Maintaining a loose session structure with an overall aim and objective ensures a person-centred approach which caters for individual needs.
- **Don't try to do too much** – scale activities back if needs be and don't be afraid to change your approach half way through if the session is not working.

Participant attendance and engagement:

- **Build the sense of a membership** of a special club – where everyone feels unique, special and empowered to do the activity.
- **Door knocking:** When the activity takes place within a residential care home, knocking on residents' doors can help to remind them to come. This can also help to reduce a barrier to attending if someone is feeling low that day.
- **Build on the activities** week by week rather than repeating the same activity each time.
- **Finding more participants:** Group members become ambassadors to help engage others to participate. This can also be a way for participants to get to know other residents they might not otherwise have met.
- **Rapport:** Individuals may be more likely to participate in a project if they are invited by somebody who they have already built a rapport with.
- **Activity focus:** Participants seemed to value having a focus to the sessions instead of an unstructured chat.



Notes



Bristol Ageing Better (BAB) is a partnership working to reduce social isolation and loneliness among older people and help them live fulfilling lives.

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