

# *'Postcards from precious places'*

EVALUATION SUMMARY

An intergenerational project  
led by Age UK Canterbury



Funded by a Kent County  
Council Innovation Award

**DAA**

Kent Dementia  
Action Alliance

**Fay Blair, Project Evaluator**  
**October 2017**

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## **'Postcards from Precious Places' led by Age UK Canterbury 2016-2017**

**Postcards from Precious Places** was a project that showed the benefits of intergenerational working, creating a community between groups of students from Simon Langton Girls' Grammar (Year 9) and Simon Langton Boys' Grammar co-ed 6th form with older people, some of whom live with dementia.

- The focus on creative writing and crafting activities offered a way of meeting people and having a fun, social afternoon out; doing something a bit different. It was an opportunity to overcome the loneliness and isolation that many older people experience.
- The project was an 'eye-opener' for the young people that changed their life perspective, in realising how simple acts of kindness and patience can make a big positive difference to older people, lifting their mood and contributing to an enjoyable and rewarding experience.
- The initial 'Dementia Friends' sessions delivered by the project team - as awareness-raising and recruitment sessions in school (for 15 students) - were followed by two student training sessions. These were to prepare a team of (9) committed students to understand the needs of older people and the challenges that those who live with dementia face day-to-day.
- Students also supported the Westgate Parks activity day for the Mayoral launch of the tree trail, designed 'with older people in mind', on 21 May 2017, and attended the earlier after-school briefing (9<sup>th</sup> May). They found it highly enjoyable and rewarding.
- The general public (over 200 visitors), students and the (25) older people from AgeUK Canterbury and Cranmer House Sheltered Housing Scheme, enjoyed being escorted round the trail with the newly published leaflet. Many joined in the outdoor creative activities led by *Pebble Poetry* and *Espression Arts* (hands-on, including clay work) and staged on the terrace of Tower House overlooking the wonderful heritage park's Westgate Gardens.
- These practical sessions were sound preparation for the three Age UK Canterbury Saturday 'afternoon tea', creative writing and crafting sessions (15<sup>th</sup>, 22<sup>nd</sup>, 29<sup>th</sup> July 2017). Older people came with friends and carers; some on their own, and worked in small groups round tables supported by student volunteers and made friends. 33 people attended on 29<sup>th</sup>.

### **The student and participant feedback: learning from the evaluation for the future**

- All the students found the training sessions 'very' or 'extremely' useful. It extended their knowledge of dementia and helped to build their self confidence in dealing with older people, especially in what to expect and how to best help and what qualities and skills they need for this. They realised the importance of patience, empathy, confidence, speaking loudly and listening skills. Students' social, dementia 'caring' and team skills were developed.
- The vast majority of participants (90%) enjoyed the sessions, 'very' much or 'excellently'. They remarked on the 'warmth and 'friendliness' and how well people got along together and had fun, achieving things that they didn't expect they could. They particularly loved poems being read out loud, working with their hands, especially clay, and making their own decorated and laminated postcards, whilst sharing stories and memories.
- Everyone relished talking, 'being together' and welcomed the tea and home-made cakes.
- At the end of the sessions, the evaluation showed participants felt 'less isolated' or lonely.
- Fixing session times that suit everyone over the summer was a challenge. Many students had exam and job commitments. 'Word of mouth' is the best way to get people to take part.

All (100%) the students said they would be interested in similar future projects giving peer support, realising the importance and value of this work. Several older people were motivated to take part in other creative activities as a result of this project. There is scope now to develop poetry and creative writing with crafts as an integrated programme, with the Kent-wide Age UK network for 2018/19 to increase the outreach and impact, galvanising more action for dementia friendly communities.

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The project invitation to participants to join in the creative writing and crafting sessions.

### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The project proposal was developed by Nicky Thompson, [Pebble Poetry](#) and Fay Blair, Arts & Wellbeing Project Manager and Evaluator and Catherine Arnell, [Espression Arts](#) with Age UK Canterbury leading the main local partners: Simon Langton Girls' Grammar, Simon Langton Grammar School for Boys. The work was funded by a KCC Kent Dementia Action Alliance 'innovation award', Simon Langton Girls' Grammar and Westgate Parks. We are very grateful for all the volunteer and extra 'in kind' support and the help of Christopher Stibbards for this project that has had a positive impact in brightening the lives of people in later life, especially those that live with dementia.

Neil Brown, Chief Officer, Age UK Canterbury, October 2017

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### **The student training sessions at Age UK Canterbury**

**Some of the student team from Simon Langton Boys' Grammar and Simon Langton Girls' Grammar**

**Nicky Thompson, Pebble Poetry Creative Writer & Facilitator**



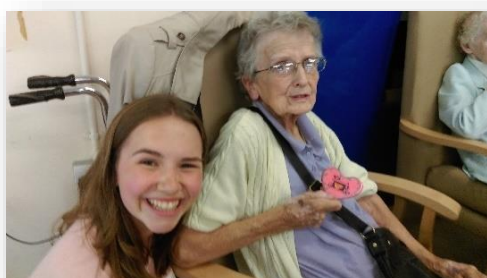
**Interactive training sessions about dementia and supporting older people**



**The volunteer & facilitator team for the July 2017 creative writing & crafting sessions at Age UK Canterbury**

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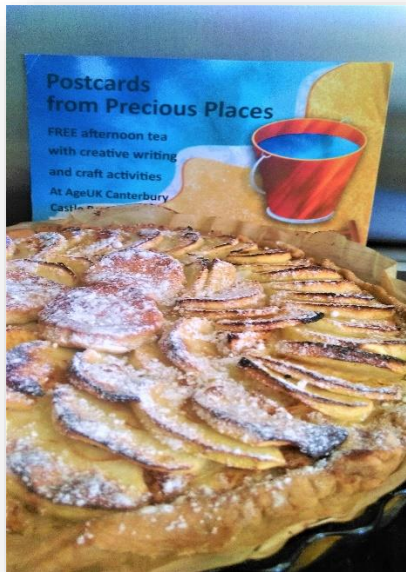
The Postcards from Precious Places participant sessions 15<sup>th</sup>, 22<sup>nd</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup> July 2017



One-to-one support with young people volunteers listening and supporting

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**Celebrating: Postcards from Precious Places was a great social gathering for all ages**



Catherine Arnell, creative and ceramicist from *Espression Arts* attracted the interest of one of the Canterbury BID Embassadors at Age UK Canterbury



Tea and glorious cake was welcomed by all



Creating a ceramic momento as a souvenir



A very young volunteer participant on the creative (*Espression Arts*) team also engaged with the older guests

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### KEY FINDINGS

- **The older people** welcomed the interest the students showed in them and the confidence and enthusiasm they generated working together, doing something new.
- **The creative writing activity** benefits from much smaller group working and ideally having dedicated one-to-one volunteer support. It also really needs peace and quiet for concentration and for people not to feel overwhelmed. The biggest barrier to participant engagement appeared to be hearing; a few participants found it difficult and struggled.
- **The reading of poems aloud**, with people reading parts of sections of their own work, was very powerful and enjoyed by all. 'Being read to' appeared to have a mesmeric effect on people which they loved, with the repetition, and in some cases people 'basking in personal pride' at hearing their group poem or their personal piece, or short prose, being shared aloud to the audience as a whole group.
- **An eye-opener for many participants** was the creative writing techniques, especially those who did not expect that they would have anything to contribute, and those that have lost the ability to write easily and have difficulty spelling and remembering words for things
- **Having volunteers** to scribe made all the difference. People realised they still had something creative to give. The overall sense of a 'friendly community' was very marked.
- **The crafting activities** and the conditions for 'success' seemed less demanding. This free flow element is open for people to chat informally, in an unstructured way, which many of the students found much easier to support.
- **Innovatory craft activity ideas were welcomed** by many of the older people who had not done these type of crafting activities before with the benefit of a professional arts facilitator. Offering the crafting activities was consciously introduced as a means 'to entice people to have a go' at the creative writing too especially for those who might have otherwise thought they would not be able to cope. Having a senior volunteer (Heather Roblin) really helped.
- **The qualities** that students realised are essential for this work to be successful are patience (above all) friendliness, compassion, empathy. A few students clearly had natural, innate facilitation and social skills. These students were able to very quickly help the participants feel comfortable and help them feel at ease during the sessions. Others took time to overcome their shyness which they felt, at the end, was a personal achievement.
- **Students appreciated the importance of tone**, and not sounding patronising when talking with older people. Sadly one participant found things a little bit too 'childish' for her liking.
- **Promotional work** despite a lot of social media and e-marketing via 'health and wellbeing networks' of practitioners, GP surgeries, and via *facebook*, with distribution and display of printed leaflets, generated few bookings. It is the personal power of recommendation that appears to work in getting people to attend.
- **The timing** and what is the best time to run events - week or weekend - and the time of day, is an issue. Running the sessions during the Age UK 'lunch club' days, means time is too compressed with too much background noise. Hence the decision to run Saturday sessions.
- **Signposting participants** to other activities, appropriate for people living with dementia, was important in offering some kind of future opportunity. The project team was able to refer people on to other local project work of potential interest to them. Several were interested in a new project 'A few words about me' (led by *Funder Films* developed with *Nicky Thompson*) and some participants have since engaged with *Espression Arts*, joining in with hands-on activities at their interactive art café in Canterbury.

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### **Observations and learning for the future**

- Strong interest in the student training sessions was generated at the 'Dementia Friends' and recruitment session run by the project facilitators at the Simon Langton Boys' Grammar. Some students who came were interested in taking up and studying medicine or the caring professions. In the end few boys took part in the project which was disappointing.
- Two students from the Simon Langton Girls' Grammar, involved in an earlier intergenerational project, 'Talking trees' were invaluable ambassadors for student recruitment, working with the support of the Deputy Head Girl at the Boys' School.
- It took a lot of rejigging of dates to find dates that worked for everyone, for planning the training sessions and then later the three participant sessions at AgeUK Canterbury.
- The Deputy Head Girl from the sixth form at the Boy's School was outstanding in co-ordinating, helping and supporting all the training sessions and the workshops led by Nicky Thompson (Pebble Poetry) Catherine Arnell (*Espression Arts*), supported by Fay Blair, 'arts & wellbeing' project manager and evaluator, on behalf of AgeUK Canterbury.
- A core of 9 students followed through on the two training sessions. The students really enjoyed and got a lot out of the sessions, building on the earlier 'Dementia Friends' session.
- The Sunday May 21 day in Westgate Parks, was a great opportunity for students, keen to take part in the project, to meet each other and to engage and support the older people who visited from AgeUK Canterbury. It provided students a chance to talk to and support older people, to get a sense of their needs. The Westgate Parks Development Officer and Friends of Westgate Parks volunteers were marvellous in supporting all to enjoy the day.
- Students were able to overcome their initial shyness and get conversations going.
- The 'tree trail' and the 'pebble poetry' and the 'clay crafting activities' helped offer a fun and rewarding focus to engage with the older people, especially on first arrival.
- This project has influenced (as demonstrated by the evaluation results below) the students' thinking and outlook on dementia and what this means for people, for those that live with the condition and those that care for them. They have greater empathy and insight.
- The tea, socialisation aspects at AgeUK Canterbury, chatting informally with other people was greatly appreciated. It was a key insight for the students in changing perceptions about older people and to understand how much people can still enjoy and can still achieve, creatively and socially, albeit, the simple things in life.
- The logistics and the need to liaise between two different schools to co-ordinate things was challenging. Having a lead student co-ordinator at the Langton Boys' School was invaluable and having the back-up of a teacher, as a project champion and mentor, helped greatly.
- More dedicated teacher time, as part of the project team, would be beneficial if this could be planned into future projects, to help with logistics and communication.
- Participant numbers varied over the three sessions. One of the July session dates coincided with a very hot day and other trips out to the seaside (eg with the Forget-Me-Nots group).
- Some students had Saturday jobs which meant not all could consistently attend the sessions.
- The simple reflective and interactive feedback methods used with the students worked well and are vital in helping them to realise the key ingredients that contribute to older people's enjoyment, feeling at ease, for their comfort and satisfaction.
- Creative writing needs a lot of one-to-one support, quiet and gentle pacing. Some students were more confident than others in doing this, even when guided and led by the facilitator.
- There is an opportunity to design future workshops integrating the poetry with the art/crafting activities rather than running as two separate parts, as mini-session activities.

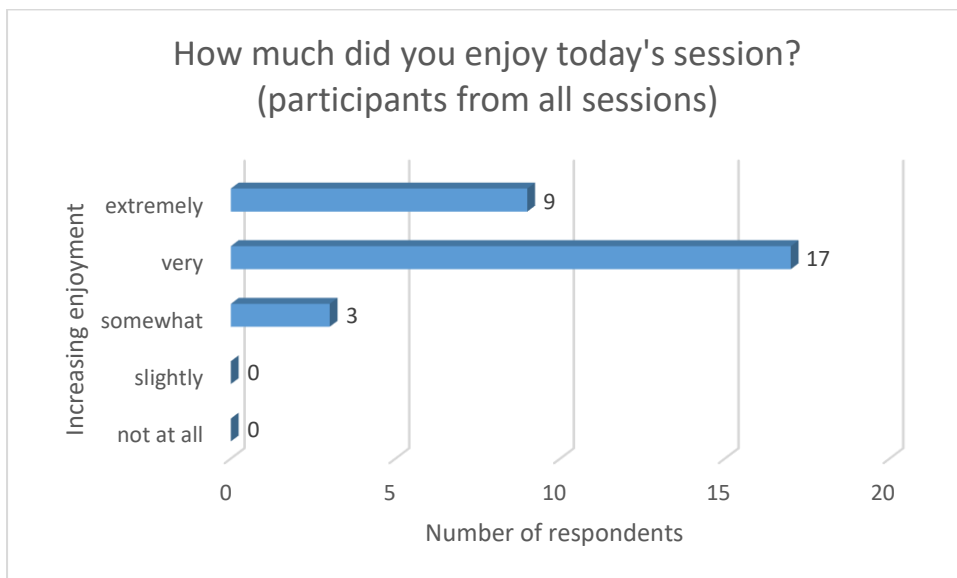


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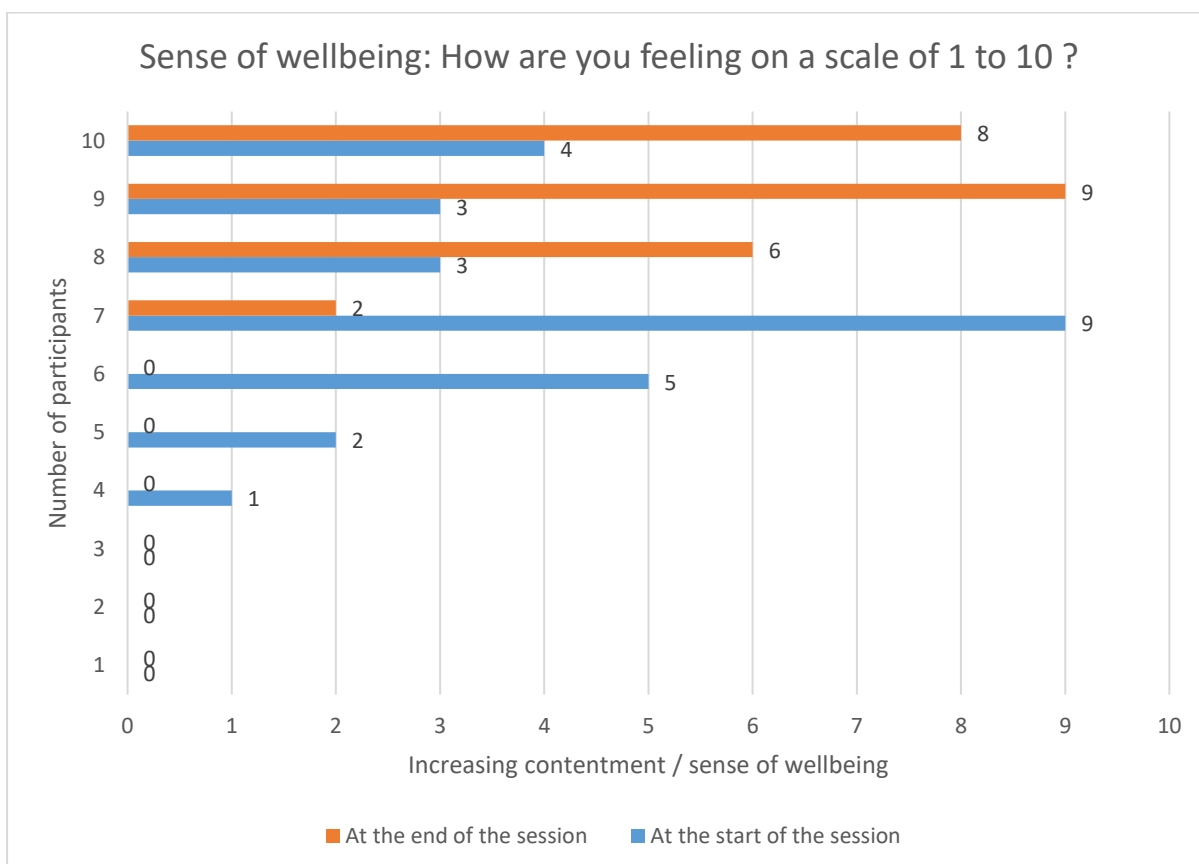
## THE EVALUATION RESULT HIGHLIGHTS

### Enhancing the wellbeing of older people

The vast majority (90%) enjoyed the sessions either 'very' much or 'extremely'. Nobody said that they did not enjoy the sessions 'not at all'.

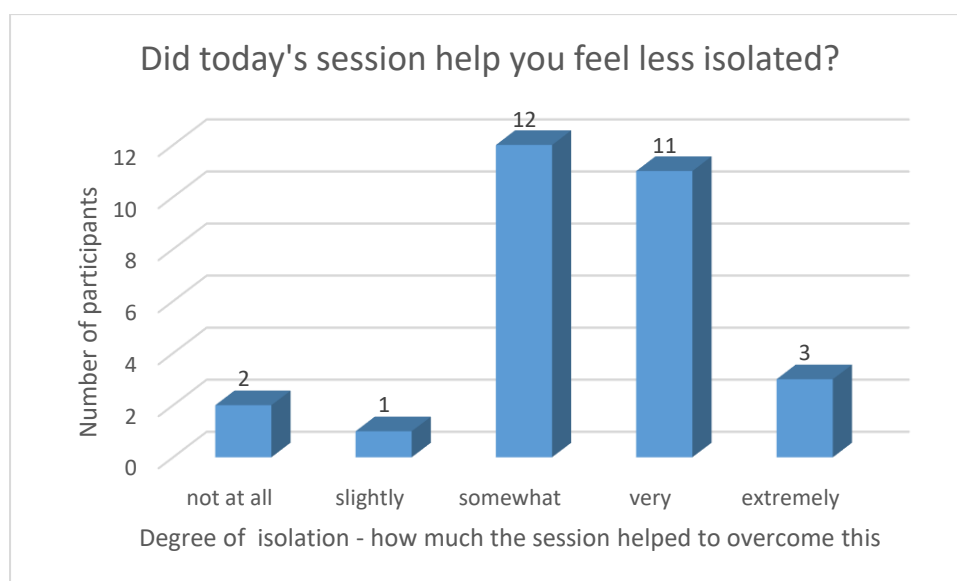


There was a clear shift in mood uplift, with more people recording a higher score at the end of the sessions. This suggests the sessions contributed to their sense of wellbeing, even if only transiently.



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**Overcoming feelings of isolation:** Over a third of the older people 39% who responded, said they feel isolated from other people (either 'somewhat', 'very' or 'extremely'). At the end of the sessions, participants did overall feel 'less isolated'.



### Student Training

Two, 2-hour sessions on 1<sup>st</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> July 2017 led by Nicky Thompson were well organised with handouts and run with interactive exercises involving the whole group at Age UK Canterbury.

The first training session was more focused on understanding dementia, and the second on how to engage with and support older people who live with dementia.

- All (100%) students found the two training sessions 'extremely' useful and they also found it interesting. The majority remarked that they liked talking to the older people and socialising with them and was one of the best things about the sessions for them.
- Students shared a strong appreciation that many elderly people get lonely and welcome being made to 'feel part of a community' and that they need help and support and company.
- They also felt that helping and including them in activities with people who understand their needs, makes them feel comfortable, included and 'wanted'.
- By the end of the second session all students had raised self-confidence in how to engage effectively with older people who live with dementia. Whilst everyone showed a marked positive shift in confidence, each student had different starting levels.
- The majority, 88%, said that the sessions had changed or broadened their 'life perspective on the need for communities to become more dementia friendly 'a lot' or 'extremely'.
- Some remarked how much they loved talking and listening to the older people's stories.
- Others mentioned how it built their self-confidence and helped them realise how much people need 'a friendly face' to offer some company and make them feel less isolated.
- Several students intending to study medicine found the insight to different types of dementia and also meeting someone with Aphasia helpful (this is impairment of language, affecting the production or comprehension of speech and the ability to read or write).
- Many were thankful for being able to be involved in this project and felt it was 'great' and 'successful' and urged that work is continued with more young people.

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