

Tell Me More

Report on the care home resident engagement project

The aim of the Tell Me More project funded by Welsh Government in line with the Care Home Action Plan [Care homes action plan: final update \[HTML\] | GOV.WALES](#) is to discover what life has been like for older people living in care homes during the Covid Pandemic. The outcome will be a written report and short animated film featuring the voices of care home residents.

Initially, we worked closely with two care homes, one in South Wales and one in North Wales, to discover what worked well for them in terms of how to connect virtually with residents, how to time our approach and how to invite conversations about well-being.

Age Cymru cARTrefu artists, Emma Prentice and Jon Ratigan held conversations with the residents and drew their portraits for an animated film. The portraits were subsequently offered as a gift of thanks.

Following the success of the first few conversations, we were able to invite three other homes to the project.

We have to date, gained insights from 15 care home residents in Anglesey, Bridgend, Flintshire, Pembrokeshire, and Port Talbot.

What we've learnt so far:

Timing

- The care home managers felt ready to engage with us. They stated that they were starting to relax, look for connections outside of the home and engage more confidently with technology.

Connection

- The care homes chose Zoom as their preferred method of connection. They felt it was accessible and easy to use. The homes said that seeing the person on-screen was important and preferred this to a phone call
- The Activity workers in the care homes supported their residents to use an iPad or tablet, to connect and to introduce us. On occasions, it was necessary for a member of staff to repeat some questions to the resident but generally once set up; the residents entered free flowing conversations with us.

Conversations

- We initially piloted using a list of questions by asking them in order but what we soon found was that the residents just wanted to chat. We used the questions as conversation starters rather than as a list, enabling better connection and flow
- Conversations gave us a great insight into the lives and well-being of the residents; it's also been, at times, very moving. Some residents have lost friends in the care home due to the pandemic and the loss of not seeing loved ones is very evident
- Residents and staff have been very grateful for our time. They have felt acknowledged and heard
- Residents were offered a portrait of themselves by the artist having the conversation, this was very well received by all residents.

Themes emerging

Conversations with care home residents have provided us with these themes.

Residents are missing visits: Residents are really missing visits from relatives and can't wait to be taken out again by their families. Residents are looking forward to contact with their loves ones. A resident said, I'm looking forward to hugging my husband, 'Humans need social contact.' Interestingly, one resident commented that she thought residents with Alzheimer's were missing visits from relatives most.

Screened rooms for communication A care home was pleased to report they had no cases of Coronavirus. They talked about a screened room, with a Perspex divide and stringent cleaning procedures. One resident said, 'it was nice to see family but not being able to touch them has been very soul destroying.'

Visitor and volunteer support has been missed: Visitors play an important part in the care home community so the absence of someone who would have visited regularly has been very difficult for residents and staff. One activity coordinator said about a regular visitor, 'He's such a big part of our community here at the care home; he's a big support for us'.

Losing close friends in the care homes: The effect of the deaths in care homes has

been very tough for both residents and staff. One resident said, the worse thing was seeing all the empty chairs. A staff member said, 'It was a horrendous time'. Often, when fellow residents have died during this period, due to Covid restrictions, homes have been unable to fill empty rooms; some residents commented that there were less people to have conversations with now.

Spirits have been eroded: There is a definite sense that residents' spirits are being eroded by the length and severity of the changes that have necessarily been made in homes at this time, one resident (aged 99) said that, 'if people were truthful, they would admit that it's getting them down'. The mental effects of Covid have taken its toll on residents and staff, 'People don't understand the emotional side of what we've been through this year'. One resident said, 'It's been a very difficult time for me. More recently I have lost some optimism'.

Residents are scared: One resident feared reports on her mobile phone about an 'even worse virus' on its way. Another wondered if the world would ever be the same again. Also, there is a worry that the virus has not gone away, one lady said, 'We just can't relax'.

Resident's usual wellbeing routines have been broken: Access to regular outdoor walks, church services and outlets for creative productivity e.g. selling handmade cards and knitted items to visitors, have largely stopped. Wellbeing and sense of self have been eroded.

Technology has helped: Those residents who are a little tech savvy have found their devices to bring some benefits to wellbeing during this period. One reported being able to live-stream church services and talk to relatives via Zoom. Another resident said, it was strange using zoom to start with, but she was getting used to it now.

Sense of purpose has helped: Those who have a sense of purpose have found it easier to weather the pandemic storm: One resident said 'I make myself content', she organises a prayer meeting every Sunday with another resident, her activities coordinator said 'I'd be lost without her'.

Strengthened staff and resident relationships: Staff and residents have relied on each other for support and have created stronger bonds. One staff member said, 'the support goes both ways, we're all friends in here. In some ways, life is ok for us because we have this support network for each other, like a family... It's definitely pulled us tight together'.

The role of the activity coordinator for raising moral: Staff have tried to help with the uncertainty and chaotic nature of this time by giving residents activities to look forward to. One resident said, 'If you're feeling a bit down you can occupy your mind with activities, quizzes and things'.

Residents often speak positively about being part of care home communities at this time: Quite a few residents reported being very glad that they were not living alone in isolation during this period like some of their friends still are. Even when forced to experience Christmas day isolated in her room, one resident said that, with the support of carers, she made the best of it and really enjoyed herself.

Next steps – April to December 2021

Engagement

We'll invite a broad geographical range of care homes across Wales, and work with at least 20 to engage with around five residents per home, 100 residents in total.

Portraits

Using these collected photographs and video recordings, Age Cymru cARTrefu artists will create portraits of residents using a variety media including clay, drawing and mixed media. These portraits will form the visual basis of the final animated film.

Film/animation

A bilingual animation / incorporating talking heads, text, stills and music will be produced to be shown online and possibly as part of an exhibition.

Creative pack

The care homes involved will each receive a certificate and bespoke pack. It will include creative activities (some portrait themed) as a 'thank you' for being involved and helping us collect valuable information about the well-being of their residents.

A resource for all care homes in Wales

We'll produce a brief and easy to use downloadable guide for care homes in how to 'Have a meaningful conversation' using the experience of this project, what has worked well and how creative tools can be used through this period of recovery time and into the future. This can be used by care home staff and volunteers. We'll also offer a Zoom training session as an accompaniment to the guide for potential care home volunteers to drop in to ask questions and build networks.

Written report based on feedback

A mix of quotes of the resident's responses and the artist's reflective journals will be produced to accompany the film and extend the reach of the project outcomes.

Influence and reach

Care Home Residents and Relatives

The last year has been heartbreaking for many care home residents. Their families and friends have had limited time to see them and they've been severely affected by the effects of Covid-19. Outside agencies have had limited access to care homes and the

voices of care home residents have not been heard as they might have been before. We'd like to offer care homes a conversation tool to enable residents to have their say in what's working well and how their quality of lives can be improved by even the smallest changes to their days.

At the heart of good relationships is good communication and we'd like to offer conversation triggers that will enable communication to flow and deeper personal relationships to grow. This can be between residents and care staff or resident-to-resident, building on friendships and communities of interest.

The tool we propose will be accessible to use in a one-to-one situation or as a group activity aiming to:

- Gather the thoughts and aspirations of the residents
- Influence their day-to-day lives by discovering what is important to them; their likes and dislikes, hopes and fears, their moments of joy and the sadness they may hold
- Support relationships with their loved ones who might not be able to visit.

Care Home Staff

How can you care for someone if you don't know who they are? The conversation tool will empower care staff to take the initiative to find out about their residents, to be curious about their life stories, current experiences and hopes for their future care, enabling a deeper understanding of the individual.

Using the guiding principles of My Home Life, the tool will focus on promoting positive relationships through meaningful conversations, deep listening and giving something of yourself. <http://myhomelife.org.uk/our-guiding-principles/focussing-on-relationships/#main>

Volunteers

Volunteers are going to play a pivotal role in supporting care homes to open their doors again when it is safe to do so. The proposed tool will support volunteers to build relationships with residents, relatives and staff through meaningful conversations. It can also help rebuild relationships that may have been affected by separation during Covid. Volunteers will be able to access the 'How to have a meaningful conversation' resource to assist them with their interactions with residents and relatives.

Care Home Manager and Responsible Individual

Care Home managers will benefit from open communication in the care home; finding out

about the resident's day-to-day experience can inform care planning and the smooth running of a home.

The meaningful conversation tool is a great way to seek resident feedback to inform the running of the home and to use to market the home to potential new residents and families.

Regulators and Commissioners

Regulators and Commissioners care very much about the resident's day-to-day experience of living in a care home. They will require evidence that the staff seek feedback regularly from their residents, this tool can help gather feedback in a meaningful way and can be used as an ongoing resource.

Policy Makers

How can social care policy makers shape policy without the voices of the people who live in Care Homes? This project encourages the voices of care home residents to be heard and provides an opportunity to influence the policies that affect them. What can we learn from the resident's experience of Covid? What mattered most when the care home doors closed? How can we all work together for a positive future?

The General Public

Standing up to the stigma of care homes being a last resort. Seeing care homes as part of our community, not islands for older people. Communicating to the general public that even when we're unable to visit care homes, we're still reaching in to hear from the people who live there. That life goes on after you move into a care home and for some people it can be a positive choice.

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