

Meeting the Aims and Objectives

"Most thought that it was a hoot doing art at their age" Project Assistant

The aims of this project were for older people to:

- socialise and have fun
- re-awaken their skills/learn new skills
- achieve confidence and give older people an opportunity to enjoy a challenge.

Certainly these aims have been very well met with older people both in care setting and in the wider community in Gloucestershire gaining opportunities to socialise while undertaking artistic pursuits (mainly, but not entirely visual arts based). Participants have had a variety of opportunities to display and even to sell their work and many participants and carers report increases in confidence and interest in their environment. Artists, care workers and participants have been surprised by the quality of work that they have achieved. The project effectiveness is in no mean part due to the quality of the action research which Art Shape carried out before designing this programme.

Art Shape have devised and run an effective participative programme for a range of older people in Gloucestershire. The programmes which have worked best have, on the whole, run a series of sessions; although some tasters have also been effective. Programmes have worked better in established groups and care homes, although there are notable exceptions. However, where new groups have been formed specifically for the project, the results were often less impressive. The project has worked with a diverse age range including participants from age 50 to 104 in a wide variety of settings and with a wide variety of needs, including people with dementia, mental health issues learning and physical disabilities. The programme has engaged with many partners and it is mainly through these partnerships as well as through Art Shape's own training programmes for carers that there is potential for sustainability. Artshape continue to explore these partnerships.

To improve the social well-being and psychological health of older people:

"We all had a happy time" Participant

"It's all talk, very sociable, we laugh and help each other" Participant

Using a wide variety of mainly visual arts techniques, the project has certainly improved social well-being. Many of the participants appear happier as a result of involvement in the project; particularly those involved in the Art on Wheels, We're Here – Do It Again, Our Lives e-memory boxes and Doorstep Arts programmes. The project manager reported that the project "brought people together and gave them a laugh", both of which are a real achievement for participants who were often isolated or set in their ways. For many participants, the project took them outside of their usual comfort zone, which was challenging, but usually hugely beneficial in the longer term. Perhaps this is why the longer term projects, where there was an opportunity to gain confidence slowly, often worked better than the taster sessions. Certainly, most artists' feedback noted how much more receptive groups were after a few weeks with the artist.

The project also engaged many of the care workers and there are a number of instances of care workers who felt inspired by the workshops to organise more arts activities themselves and other instances of a turnaround in the attitude of carers towards creative work with older people. However, there are also a few examples of care homes who took the opportunity of an artist on site to use staff elsewhere in the building instead of with the group. This was shame both for the project, which required support for the artist from care workers, and for sustainability through new techniques learned by care workers.

Developing pool of artists

51 artists have worked on this programme and all of those interviewed feel that they have learned from the experience. All also proved popular with the participants. There was no formal training for artists, but plenty of on the job experience and some opportunities to feedback and discuss with the project manager and opportunities to share with other artists.

Volunteers

61 volunteers worked on this programme in a variety of roles, there was much interest from people wanting to volunteer in the arts but the nature of volunteering meant that they themselves often had support needs which this programme wasn't able to give. The programme originally intended to train older volunteers to assist and continue the work and where this did happen was a rare occurrence, although some volunteers did go on and use their experiences to help gain paid work.

The importance of the stimulation through engagement in creative activities in a group can not be over-estimated: one Social Services manager in the Inspirations project said that she believed that it was a lack of stimulation that led people to go from sheltered housing into residential care.

However for some older people, "cost, Irrelevance, Inaccessibility, unsuitable learning environments ... and not enough faith in one's own ability to engage" are well researched barriers to participation.

Vital to Art Shape's visions for the programme were:

- Participation
- Sustainability
- Diversity
- Partnerships

And these were addressed through the following programme of work;

- **Art On Wheels;** art activities over a number of sessions for independent older people meeting in groups
- **Out and About;** short creative experiences in everyday settings
- **On the Spot;** short creative sessions in various sessions, many of which were health related (originally intentions were for these to be benefits related)

- **We're Here; Do It Again;** opportunities for older people to express their lives, situations and aspirations through creative arts

- **Our Lives e-Memory Boxes;** opportunities for older people with learning difficulties in care settings, encouraging reminiscence

- **Our Lives drama group;** drama experiences for older people

- **Our Community;** intergenerational activities working with community organisations

- **Showing Ourselves;** supporting independent older people to show and perform work from the New Horizons programmes

- In addition, the project looked at ways of developing the skills of the facilitating artists, including a number of apprenticeships and opportunities for volunteering.

PHOTO: ARTS AND CULTURE FOR THE ELDERLY; PHOTO: ARTS AND CULTURE FOR THE ELDERLY; PHOTO: ARTS AND CULTURE FOR THE ELDERLY; PHOTO: ARTS AND CULTURE FOR THE ELDERLY

