

The Baring Foundation

‘QUITE AN ADVENTURE’

Some lessons from digital arts
projects with older people

*by Imogen Blood, Lorna Easterbrook and Mark Robinson
for The Baring Foundation and Social Tech Trust*



About this report

This short report summarises the findings of an evaluation of the Digital Arts and Creative Ageing (DACA) Programme, funded by the Baring Foundation and the Nominet Trust (now 'Social Tech Trust'). The evaluation was carried out by Imogen Blood, Lorna Easterbrook, and Mark Robinson, of Imogen Blood & Associates and focused on how the use of digital technology in five arts projects impacted on older people, creative engagement, business models, partnerships, and attitudes towards ageing.

‘Quite an adventure’

SOME LESSONS FROM DIGITAL ARTS PROJECTS WITH OLDER PEOPLE

*by Imogen Blood, Lorna Easterbrook and Mark Robinson
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*“ I have always embraced
the computer age as much as I possibly can,
not wishing to be ‘left behind’ but have never
actually interacted with digital images before.*

*Quite an adventure and keen to embrace
something new. Although I have played with my
granddaughter on WE [Wii].”*

(Online survey respondent aged in their 70s)

'Digital Doris' session, Moving Memory project, Kent.



Introduction

THE FIVE PROJECTS USED DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY IN DIFFERENT WAYS TO ENGAGE, PROMOTE, CREATE, AND SHARE ARTS AND CULTURAL EXPERIENCES WITH AND BY OLDER PEOPLE

Through the Digital Arts and Creative Ageing (DACA) Programme, Nominet Trust (now 'Social Tech Trust') and The Baring Foundation jointly funded five projects to a maximum of £90,000 each.

The DACA programme built on and set out to explore the findings of two previous reports exploring this topic which were produced by the Baring Foundation: *Digital arts and older people* (2012)¹ and *Technically older* (2015).² For the Baring Foundation, the DACA project is part of a decade-long arts and older people programme.

The projects took place between December 2016 and October 2018 and used digital technology in different ways to engage, promote, create, and share arts and cultural experiences with and by older people (for funding purposes, defined at application as those aged 65 and over). They were:

64 Million Artists (see page 6)

Using existing digital platforms to facilitate and share 'everyday creativity.'

FabLab Belfast: Digital Makers (see page 9)

Hosting designated sessions for older people at the FabLab Belfast, based at Ashton Community Trust.

City Arts (see page 10)

Developing an app to promote virtual access to arts and cultural venues.

Ladder to the Moon (see page 12)

Developing an online tool to promote and record creative engagement in care homes.

Moving Memory (see page 13)

Refining a portable digital kit that facilitates movement-based performance projects.

¹ *Digital arts and older people*, Joe Randall/Baring Foundation, 2012.

² *Technically older: an update on digital arts and creating ageing*, Joe Randall/Baring Foundation, 2015.

64 Million Artists

64 MILLION ARTISTS (64MA) WORK NATIONALLY TO PROMOTE 'EVERYDAY CREATIVITY' FOR ALL, USING THE APPROACH OF "DO, THINK, SHARE"

With DACA funding, they were able to reach larger numbers and different groups of older people, with the aim of reducing isolation by expanding digital knowledge, use, and skills.

It took longer than expected to build the right relationships within Leicester Ageing Together (LAT) – a local consortium of 16 partners working with older people. LAT provided access to older people at risk of marginalisation but access to the internet and affordability were key barriers for many of them. 64MA ran creative sessions with already existing groups of older people, and also provided staff and volunteers with training and simple ideas of creative activities they could then run themselves.

These face-to-face sessions built interest, skills and confidence around digital possibilities such as making and sharing how-to video tutorials and online galleries, and establishing Facebook communities and WhatsApp groups. They also made a dedicated website. Using existing digital platforms to share creative prompts and challenges had the advantages of being inexpensive and adaptable, and also of building transferable skills for those who had previously been digitally excluded.

A number of events were also delivered online including a weekly creative challenge. This project was integrated with the wider 'January Challenge' running across Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, direct email, and on the DoThinkShare website in January 2018. Those who signed-up were sent a daily creative challenge and encouraged to share their outputs and reflections via social media. Although aimed at all ages, 40% (3,000) of the 7,500 who took part were aged 50 or older (with 20% aged 60+).

Across the various strands of the project, 64MA succeeded in engaging nearly 4,500 older people, including both: "digitally engaged older people that are already online, and facilitators, group leaders, carers and volunteers who are online and then can take the resources out to more socially isolated older people".



Confederation of Indian Organisations, Creativity workshop, Leicester.

Business model

The project operated a 'Freemium' model, with sessions and resources available free, but subsequent training charged-for. By the summer of 2018, a new contract worth £10,000 had already been secured from an organisation outside of Leicester, with further interest expressed by voluntary and arts organisations and libraries across the UK.

Website www.dothinkshare.com

Laser cut artwork created during a Digital Makers session at the Belfast FabLab, Ashton Community Trust, Belfast.



FabLab Belfast: Digital Makers

DURING THE SESSIONS, OLDER PEOPLE COULD ACCESS CUTTING EDGE TECHNOLOGY, SUCH AS 3-D PRINTERS AND LASER CUTTERS

Digital Makers used the Belfast FabLab, based at Ashton Community Trust, to host designated sessions for older people. Here, older people could access cutting edge technology (such as 3-D printers and laser cutters); technical support from the FabLab team to help them realise their personal art and design projects; and peer support from each other. The DACA funding has enabled the FabLab offer to be opened up to older people, who have traditionally been excluded from it.

This involved forging new strategic partnerships to both promote uptake and build the case for ongoing funding and expansion. Learning points have included how best to adapt FabLab practice to work more inclusively with older people and/or people with low levels of computer literacy; and how to work more artistically, often incorporating traditional practices such as hand drawing into the sessions and individuals' design processes alongside digital artforms.

By using cutting edge technology, the project has been able to create a sufficient 'buzz' to engage working class older men who would not normally engage in community arts. This has also helped cross deep historical, religious and political divides in this deprived part of North Belfast. During the funded period, the project engaged a total of 182 individuals, some through one-off and taster sessions, but with a core group receiving 50 sessions.

Business model

The business model is more akin to that of a traditional community arts project, with the hope that future activity with this age group will be wholly funded by charitable grants and/or statutory commissioning. Gathering evidence of the impact on the health, wellbeing and social isolation of participants has therefore been paramount.

Website fablabbelfast.org

City Arts: Armchair Gallery

ARMCHAIR GALLERY IS AN APP WHICH ENABLES PEOPLE TO SEE AND INTERACT WITH ARTWORKS AND ARTEFACTS FROM CULTURAL VENUES

City Arts has developed an app which can be downloaded from the website and which enables people to see and interact with the artworks and artefacts from seven of the UK's leading cultural venues, using a tablet. Users can enjoy bespoke video tours presented by gallery and museum staff, and take part in 18 activities. For instance, they can colour a Canaletto, design a Hepworth-inspired sculpture, and take a selfie with Lowry's 'Head of a Man'. The app comes with a full set of instructions for creative activities that family members and carers can do with the people they support.

To inform the design of the app and accompanying resources, City Arts delivered face-to-face sessions with older people in a range of settings including supported housing and memory cafés. This included the Newark Making Memories group of people living with dementia, which worked with artist Elaine Winter. They created their own artworks and reactions to the video tour of the National Trust's Mr Straw's House, and tested the app in development. They enjoyed a celebration and showcase event at the National Trust's Clumber Park, and City Arts was awarded a Nottinghamshire Heritage Award for New Audiences for this strand of the project.

The project invested a lot of time and energy in building the right partnerships with housing, social care, cultural and technical organisations. After some difficulties trying to find the right technical partner, City Arts decided to recruit an in-house developer and produce the app using open source tools. Since confirmation of their National Portfolio Organisation status for 2018-2022 from Arts Council England, they have decided to continue the digital post and are committed to embedding digital activity in their mainstream programme.

“People always assume that people with dementia can't or don't want to access technology, but they don't see it as 'technology'. They just see it as something fascinating that they want to interact with. They seem to interact really well with it.”

(Care professional working with City Arts)



Armchair Gallery session, Nottingham. © City Arts

The app was launched at an event in October 2018, and was accompanied by a series of five low-cost (£25 per delegate) training sessions for health providers, care staff and creative practitioners which were held in different parts of the country on the theme, *Armchair Gallery: Art, Technology & Older People*.

Business model

The app is free to download. This is partly because of potential legal challenges around Intellectual Property Rights, but also serves to maximise access by older people who may be more reluctant to buy products online even if they can afford them. The main change to the business model has come from the emerging (and largely unanticipated) opportunities to sell the product to cultural organisations willing to pay City Arts to develop bespoke materials on their venues for inclusion in the app.

Website armchairgallery.co.uk

Ladder to the Moon

Ladder to the Moon has 14 years' experience of working with care home providers to embed creativity and innovation in all aspects of their services and organisations. Conscious that their traditional models require intensive input from specialised practitioners, they were keen to use DACA funding to scale up and sustain their face-to-face interventions by developing an interactive digital offer for care homes. This was envisaged as including online training, a digital sharing and reflection platform, and online resources such as scripts and rehearsal exercises.

They partnered with City University and an external tech provider to develop a web- and app-based digital platform based on FrogOS. This enabled staff to create a record of each resident's experience of life in the home, and offered guidance on how to support the person to lead as full a life as possible. A pilot in three care homes identified that staff found the platform difficult to access and use. They wanted something that could be incorporated into everyone's usual daily activities, rather than a stand-alone interactive drama project. The pilot also highlighted more legal issues than anticipated regarding consent and data-sharing. Despite enthusiasm for what was seen as an interesting 'add on', staff did not continue with the approach afterwards.

There was sufficient interest from the care homes, however, to continue working with the original platform provider to develop easier ways for staff to share information and tag photos, and so build a sense of community amongst staff and homes. Ladder to the Moon decided to approach care planning software providers to see how their performance indicators might be incorporated into this existing software. This could be used to provide evidence for Care Quality Commission and the care home market of high quality outcomes for residents.

Business model

The business model shifted from developing a product to sell to the care home market to a research and development project exploring the barriers and opportunities to embedding digital responses into 'business as usual' in this sector.

Website www.laddertothemoon.co.uk

Moving Memory: Digital Doris

A DIGITAL KIT, 'DIGITAL DORIS', PROJECTS IMAGES OF A DANCER AROUND THE ROOM, TURNING ORDINARY SPACES INTO CREATIVE ONES.

Moving Memory Dance Theatre, working with technology partner Butch Auntie, developed a portable, digital kit, 'Digital Doris', which facilitates movement-based performance projects with older people in community and arts settings. Doris uses Resume software to project images of a dancer around the room: these turn ordinary spaces into creative ones, and enable participants to copy moves, interact with Doris, and be inspired to move. Doris has been refined through the project, to make the kit as usable and affordable as possible.

The project has also developed a new tool 'Vera', which uses virtual reality technology to create a deep aesthetic and kinaesthetic experience, without headsets, but responsive to users in three dimensions using a grid of sensors. This makes it particularly suitable for those with reduced mobility, but also makes it more complicated and expensive to set up. The team is currently working to incorporate elements of Vera within Doris.

As the project progressed, the company identified a need for a comprehensive online training programme with Doris embedded into it. They worked with a project commissioned by Medway Council called 'Moving Minds' on a 10-week training programme. The group began to create training content and co-create the refinement of Doris. The company now has the means to deliver participatory dance more effectively, as well as to support others with the tools and training to run their own activities. They also have a group of older people who are confident to go out and facilitate workshops with their peers using the kit.

Business model

The project enabled the partners to gain a better understanding of the potential market and pricing models. Customers in target markets, including local authorities, care homes and other cultural organisations, have shown strong interest in the products. Moving Memory also has a clearer sense of what can be done in-house to bring the product to market, and what is done best with partners.



'Digital Doris' session.

They are investigating working with People Dancing to provide the platform for online training, offered behind a paywall. There is more about Moving Memory's digital resources, including Doris and Vera on the website.

Website www.movingmemorydance.com/digital-resources

Myths and stories

ABOUT DIGITAL ARTS, CREATIVITY AND AGEING

Myth: Digital is a younger person's game

FabLab Belfast's sessions enabled older people to use 3-D printers and laser cutters in order to realise their personal art and design projects.

“One man brought along his grandson to the workshops as well, and suddenly he was teaching his grandson how to use ‘Inkscape’ – one of the programmes that we use. There was that real role reversal of what people thought was achievable: the tables were turned, which surprised the grandson and everyone else as well.”

Myth: Older people won't want or be able to engage with digital technology

Moving Memory Dance Theatre has trained up older people to facilitate sessions with others using ‘Digital Doris’.

“When the core facilitators started, one or two of them had a mobile phone, maybe access to a computer: there was a great fear about getting engaged with technical equipment and scepticism about what the value of that was. We are now at the stage where we have a very experienced and skilled outreach team aged between 73 and 85.

They're going out there with confidence, and one of the main reasons is because Doris is going with them. They know that when they've got Doris set up, and she's working (which they're completely capable of doing now) that Doris will remind them of where they are in the workshop and then she will flood the space with beautiful images which allow participants to have greater creative engagement with the sessions.

They're extremely proud of what they have achieved, and are very confident.... and that's had a huge impact on their sense of self-worth and purpose.”

Myth: Using the internet as a way of accessing arts and arts participation risks further isolating older individuals

64 Million Artists ran their 'January Challenge' to do and share a daily short creative activity across a range of social media.

“ One of the women who did this year's challenge is a full-time carer for her husband who is terminally ill. On the day when the challenge was to create 'a soundtrack to your day', she shared that their soundtrack was 'Shiny Happy People', and explained that ever since her husband's diagnosis they would listen to that song together every day to try and help them feel happier.

The response from the online community was really beautiful, to see people saying, 'We're really with you'. She has continued to post and share and have that interaction with people. ”

Planning considerations

FOR DIGITAL ARTS PROJECTS WITH OLDER PEOPLE

- 1.** Remember that digital is not only a way of sharing information, but can also be an expressive tool, allowing the creation of tangible artistic outputs, and also supporting more transitory forms of self-expression such as story-telling.
- 2.** Digital arts can bring older people together socially to share and create collectively – both virtually, but also – crucially – in real life. Think about how digital means can be used to enhance social relationships and support the formation of groups and group identities.
- 3.** Be sensitive to the risks and opportunities which sharing online can create – making something available online means it can be shared very widely, repeatedly and over a long time. Make sure you are able to support participants to make informed decisions about this and respect that these decisions are individual and highly contextual.
- 4.** Don't assume that all the younger people in your organisation or partnership will be tech-savvy: the evaluation revealed how much some of the professional arts practitioners improved their skills and confidence as a result of participation in these projects.
- 5.** Age is only one aspect of the digital divide – indeed, class, work experience, and other socio-economic factors may be more influential. There is huge diversity amongst older people in their experience of IT; however, even those who have had significant previous experience (e.g. in their working lives) may not have thought of using tech creatively or socially, and may be unaware of how they might do this.
- 6.** If you plan to work with older people's housing, care and support organisations as 'gatekeepers', you need to take time to really get to know how they work. What IT, if any, they already use as part of their day-to-day work, what constraints they operate within, and how individuals feel about digital technology, are all important factors. Think about who you'll be working with, too.

The care workforce in particular is typically low-paid, many may not speak English as a first language, and access to smart-phones, broadband, and skills and confidence in relation to digital technology can often be sketchy. If it is to be adopted and promoted, digital tech needs not only to be doable, but also to fit in and add real value.

7. If you are going to do digital work, you need to act like a digital start-up: start small and simple, iterate constantly and adapt flexibly where things don't work or new opportunities open up. Use free, open access tools wherever possible. At the outset, no one is entirely sure what is possible, so don't be afraid to try new things, to tweak and to learn from what hasn't gone as planned. Be ready to change plans and do something else. Different people may contribute in unexpected ways. Move the focus away from commissioning a particular output or developing a certain product: and concentrate instead on the process, which should be agile, reflective and values-led.

This can be hard in some organisations, or funding programmes, which are less nimble, so you need to be honest about whether and how you can create the right context to successfully incubate these kinds of projects.

Selected resources

ON CREATIVE AGEING

All resources can be found on our website www.baringfoundation.org.uk



Technically older:
an update on digital arts and creating ageing
Joe Randall
2015



Each breath is valuable: An evaluation of an arts in care homes programme
509 Arts
2018



Arts in care homes: a rapid mapping of training provision
Penny Allen
2018



Towards the end: The Baring Foundation's Arts and Older People Programme 2010–2017
David Cutler 2017



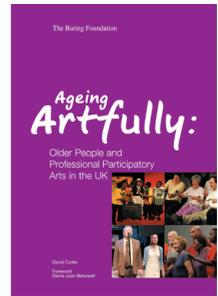
Treasury of arts activities for older people
Liz Postlethwaite
2019



Late style: a Baring Foundation programme of commissions for older artists
David Cutler
2018



Late opening: arts and older people in Scotland
Andrew Eaton-Lewis
2017



Ageing artfully: older people and professional participatory arts in the UK
David Cutler
2009

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