

## MISSING OUT

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Creative ageing and men

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By David Cutler



## MISSING OUT: CREATIVE AGEING AND MEN

### About the Baring Foundation

The Baring Foundation is an independent foundation which protects and advances human rights and promotes inclusion. We believe in the role of a strong, independent civil society nationally and internationally. We use our resources to enable civil society to work with people facing discrimination and disadvantage and to act strategically to tackle the root causes of injustice and inequality. More can be found in *A History of the Baring Foundation in 50 Grants*, available on our website.

From 2010-2019 the Foundation's Arts programme supported arts for older people. We have published widely on this subject – a list of some of these and other resources can be found at the back of this report. Since 2020, the focus of our funding has been creative opportunities for people with mental health problems

### About the author

David Cutler is the Director of the Baring Foundation and leads its Arts programme. He has written extensively about creative ageing, including *Every care home a creative home* (2022) and *Celebrating Age* (2023), and many others which can be found on our website: [www.baringfoundation.org.uk/resources](http://www.baringfoundation.org.uk/resources).

### Acknowledgements

The Baring Foundation would like to thank all the organisations who contributed case studies for this report.

The case studies were compiled and edited by Harriet Lowe, Communications and Research Manager at the Baring Foundation, and the report designed by Alex Valy.

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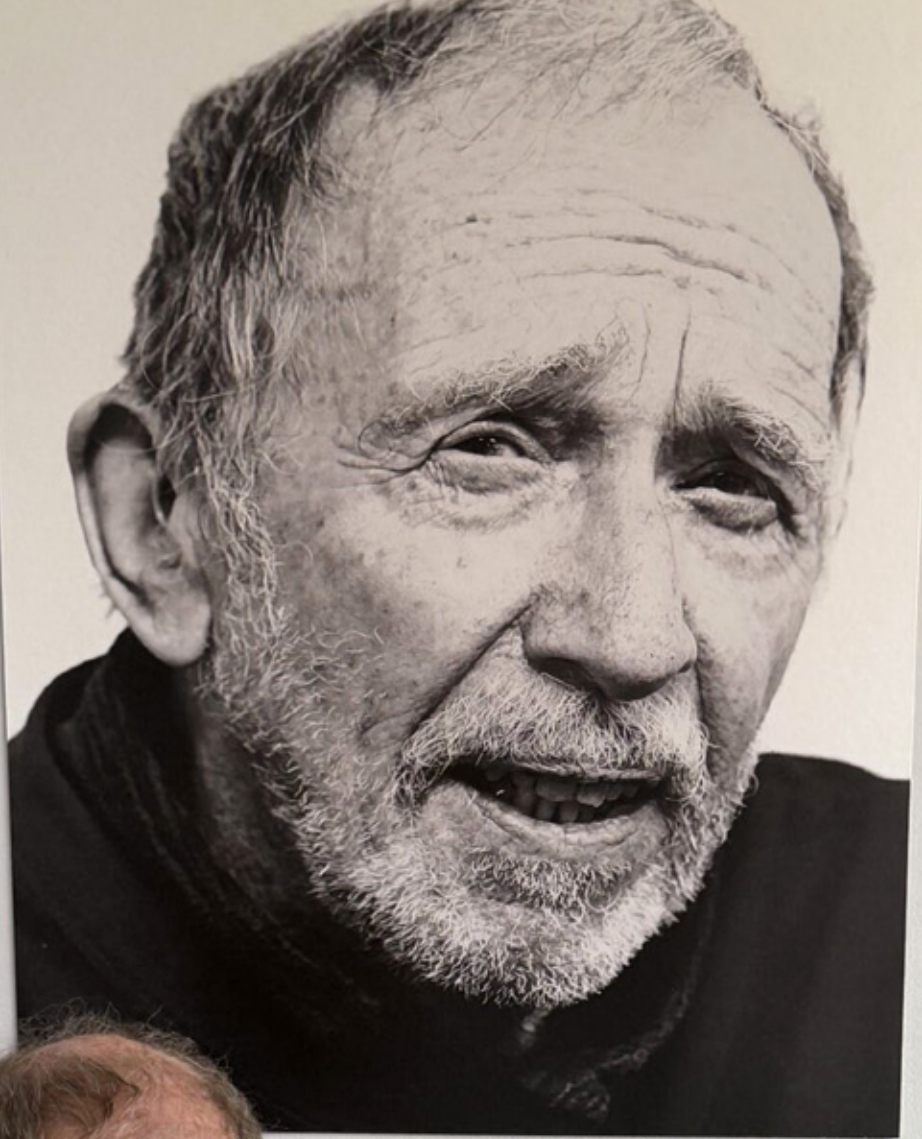
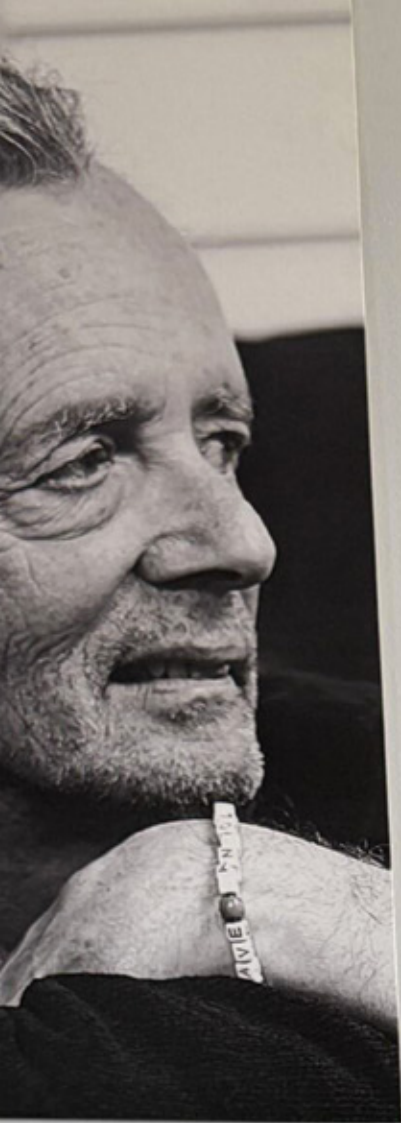
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Stuart.  
Photo courtesy of  
Celebrating Age  
Wiltshire.

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# Summary

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This report looks at the participation of older men in creative ageing. It begins by defining terms and looking at the case for creative ageing giving the benefits for men and women. It gathers the admittedly limited evidence for the under-representation of men and suggests some possible reasons for this. It then looks at existing guidance as to how this can be remedied both for community projects in general and creative ageing projects in particular.

The heart of the report are 15 good practice examples targeting older men.

The report concludes with some observations around the scarcity of work in general, the lack of consideration of the diversity of men, the importance of the Men's Sheds Movement, probable male preference for some arts forms, and the relevance of health inequalities.

## A CALL TO ACTION

There needs to be a concerted effort to make creative ageing more inclusive of men. This has a number of aspects.

### Research

There is remarkably little in the way of monitoring on gender or more in-depth research on the barriers and solutions to the relative lack of involvement by older men in creative ageing.

### Awareness

There are a number of relevant networks for creative ageing and arts and health. These have very rarely made inclusion of men a focus for discussion and mutual support. Let's have a national conference on creative ageing and men.

### Leadership

We are not aware of any arts infrastructure body or arts organisation that had made this a central issue for their work.

### Dissemination of good practice

There is a small number of good practice resources which are simple and effective. These need to be more actively promoted.

### Partnerships

These have proved effective in other areas of participatory arts and would be effective here too, for instance between Men's Sheds and arts organisations. More care homes too could partner with Men's Sheds.

### Funding

Funders often urge greater emphasis on particular communities but rarely on men. There are very few examples of funders dedicating funding to or promoting creative ageing, which is a problem in itself. There then needs to be more funder encouragement for the targeting of older men and their inclusion.

# Introduction

BY DAVID CUTLER

David Cutler is the Director of the Baring Foundation and leads its Arts programme.

## WHY WE WROTE THIS REPORT

The Baring Foundation is an independent funder which believes that everyone has a right to be creative. Between 2010 – 2019 this led us to fund a programme of arts for and by older people. A fuller account of this can be seen here in a 2019 report, *Older and wiser? Creative ageing in the UK 2010-19*.<sup>1</sup> We continue to take an interest in this field which we describe as a 'legacy programme', although most of our Arts programme funding has moved to engaging people (of any age) with mental health problems.

Quite early on in the Arts and Older People programme, we became aware that older men were much less likely to take part in the work we were funding than older women. This led us to fund in 2015 what remains a unique report into how to encourage more men into creative ageing, *A handbook for cultural engagement with older men*,<sup>2</sup> which is described in more detail on page 11.

On the tenth anniversary of *The Handbook* we wanted to look again at the issue of older men's participation in the arts, as unlike many other areas of creative ageing, there remains little in the way of guidance, good practice models or concerted action.

## DEFINITIONS

**Men:** is used for anyone who identifies as male.

**Older men:** we are using 60 years of age as our threshold, but acknowledge its arbitrary status. About a quarter of the population of England and Wales is composed of men over 60, according to the most recent census. This amounts to 14.5 million men. (This declines to 6.3% over 70.)

**Creative ageing:** everyone has a right to access culture and be creative at any age. An older person can practise arts throughout their life or take up a new interest in later life by themselves. This report focusses more narrowly on creative organisations, programmes and projects that especially focus on older participants. These can be solely for older people or they can be intergenerational. There are a range of resources on our website including our recent *Creative Ageing Directory*,<sup>3</sup> which lists over 250 arts organisations working in this area.

**The Arts:** we have used a broad definition of creative arts to include, inter alia, visual arts, photography and film making, drama, comedy, carnival and circus arts, dance, singing, music making, creative writing, crafts including potting, woodworking and metalworking. We have occasionally included access to culture as an audience member, such as theatre and gallery going. We haven't included cooking and gardening, arguably wrongly.

<sup>1</sup> *Older and Wiser: Creative Ageing in the UK 2010-2019*, Dr Rebecca Gordon-Nesbitt, 2019: [baringfoundation.org.uk/resource/older-and-wiser-creative-ageing-in-the-uk-2010-19](https://baringfoundation.org.uk/resource/older-and-wiser-creative-ageing-in-the-uk-2010-19).

<sup>2</sup> *A Handbook for Cultural Engagement with Older Men*, Ed Watts/The Whitworth Gallery, 2015: [baringfoundation.org.uk/resource/a-handbook-for-cultural-engagement-with-older-men](https://baringfoundation.org.uk/resource/a-handbook-for-cultural-engagement-with-older-men).

<sup>3</sup> *Creative Ageing: the Directory*, Baring Foundation, 2025: [baringfoundation.org.uk/resource/creative-ageing-the-directory](https://baringfoundation.org.uk/resource/creative-ageing-the-directory).



**Participatory arts:** we will frequently refer to participatory arts (sometimes used interchangeably with ‘community arts’). By this, we mean where someone who has been trained in an arts practice, for instance playing a musical instrument, shares their skill with untrained participants to make art. François Matarasso has written extensively about this in his 2019 book *A restless art*.<sup>4</sup>

## THE ASSUMPTIONS ON WHICH THIS REPORT RESTS AND WHAT WE KNOW

The first point is one of principle that creativity and access to culture is a human right as set out in the UN Convention on Human Rights. We make this point first as we see it as fundamental. No matter who you are, creativity is an essential part of what it is to be human. So, needless to say, that is irrespective of gender.

The second assumption almost sounds contrary to the first (but it isn’t), and that is that there are many benefits to creativity in older life and that these should be available to men as well as to women. The research base probably isn’t strong enough to say if one gender experiences these benefits more than another, or that one gender needs these benefits more than another, so again, we apply them equally. Early on in our creative ageing programme we asked the Mental Health Foundation to look at evidence of the impact of creative ageing (see page 8 for their summary).

The third assumption is that men participate less in creative ageing activities than women. There is some evidence here but it could be much more robustly quantified.

We are aware that men in general do not live as long as women which will have some effect on these figures. But given that a lot of creative ageing activity is with people in their sixties and seventies, this will be a highly marginal effect and not much greater in a population of people in their eighties. That is not the case in care homes, though, where women outnumber men by more than two to one.

One piece of compelling evidence is the views of arts practitioners. In March 2025 we did a small survey which elicited 52 replies. Of these, 71% considered men to be under-represented in their work.

The strongest quantified evidence that we are aware of comes from the evaluation of our joint programme with the Arts Council England, *Celebrating Age*.<sup>5</sup> This funded creative ageing activities that reached over 31,000 people. Of those participants for whom data was gathered, 26% identified as male and 66% as female.

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“Of those participants [...] for whom data was gathered, 26% identified as male and 66% as female.”

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Another interesting source of data comes from the longstanding national creative ageing festival Bealtaine in the Republic of Ireland. While these are not UK figures, there is no good reason to believe that behaviour will be very different in Ireland. The percentage of men in audiences in recent festivals has varied from 20% to 27%. Bealtaine estimates that when it comes to other events however, only about 10% of participants are men. (Something similar happens in Finland, where the national creative ageing festival Armas had a discussion on the topic called ‘My Wife Participates’!)

There appears to be no academic research in this area. The main meta review or scoping study in 2022 led by Karima Chacur into older adults participation in creative activities looked at 129 papers from around the world.<sup>6</sup> It is unlikely that most of these articles would have been considering participatory arts activities in the way we are defining them here. They would include research on older professional artists continuing their careers. In any case, throughout almost the whole article it only refers to ‘adults’ without distinguishing by gender. In asking for further research around diversity, it asserts a need for more research on older women’s voices, referring to a single study also calling for this. So from the point of view of this report, this study really takes us no further.

<sup>4</sup> See: [arestlessart.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/2019-a-restless-art.pdf](https://arestlessart.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/2019-a-restless-art.pdf).

<sup>5</sup> Celebrating Age programme evaluation, Imogen Blood Associates, 2023: [baringfoundation.org.uk/resource/celebrating-age-programme-evaluation](https://baringfoundation.org.uk/resource/celebrating-age-programme-evaluation).

<sup>6</sup> Chacur K, Serrat R, Villar F. Older adults’ participation in artistic activities: a scoping review. *Eur J Ageing*. 2022 May 26;19(4):931-944. See: [pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC9729516](https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC9729516).

## The Evidence of the Impact of Creative Ageing

(Source: Mental Health Foundation)<sup>7</sup>

### IMPACT ON THE INDIVIDUAL

#### Mental wellbeing

- Increased confidence and self esteem amongst participants were perceived benefits of participatory art engagement.
- There appears to be added value gained from performing to an audience across all art forms in terms of participants' feelings of accomplishment and the amount of positive feedback they receive.
- Through participatory art, older adults can embrace new and positive aspects to their identity and life role.
- Involvement in community arts initiatives may be particularly important in counterbalancing the mental wellbeing difficulties associated with periods of loss which can increase the risk of low mood, anxiety and social isolation.
- For older adults with dementia, participatory art can help improve cognitive functioning, communication, self-esteem, musical skills, pleasure, enjoyment of life, memory and creative thinking.
- Becoming involved in art activities can however cause frustration when individuals find that they are not able to meet their own expectations (or what they perceive to be others' expectations) of achieving a desired but unobtainable standard of artistic expression or skill.
- Through participatory art many individuals exceed their personal expectations about what they could achieve, which enhances their mental wellbeing.

#### Physical wellbeing

- Particular art forms may lend themselves more than others to significant physical health improvements (such as cardiovascular, joint mobility and breathing control), including dance, singing and playing musical instruments.
- The absorption of the creative processes involved in engaging with participatory arts that are not obviously physically exerting can lead to an increase in the levels of general daily activity that older people undertake which should have a positive effect on their physical wellbeing.

### IMPACT ON COMMUNITIES

Some of the studies in this review provided evidence of the impacts that participatory art for older people could have on the wider community.

- There is clear evidence that participatory arts programmes provide opportunities for meaningful social contact, friendship and support within the art groups themselves as well as improving relationships between those living in care homes and prisons.
- Altruism, experienced through participatory art when it is used as a means of 'giving something back' to the community can have a positive impact on community beneficiaries as well as for the individuals participating in the art.
- Participatory art that involves people with dementia accessing their community or interacting with professionals serves to address age discrimination by raising awareness and expectations within the wider community and can help to break down stereotypes and reduce stigmatising attitudes and behaviour.
- Participatory art that involves those with dementia along with their informal carers has proved to be an effective way of breaking down barriers in the relationship between those two groups. Increased fellowship and raised expectations about the depth and quality of the care relationship can be achieved and then reinforced in other areas of life.
- In day and residential care settings participatory art can foster a better sense of social cohesion and community for those with dementia.

#### Society

- Large scale, high profile festivals have the potential to positively transform attitudes to older people; particularly when intergenerational events are included in the festival.
- Participatory art is a powerful tool that can contribute towards challenging and breaking down both the self and external stigmas of being older that pervade popular societal culture.
- Participatory art can be used to bring people together in a way that helps individuals in marginalised groups mitigate the negative effects of stigma and self-doubt on their wellbeing.

<sup>7</sup> *An evidence review on the impact of participatory arts on older people*, Mental Health Foundation, 2011: [baringfoundation.org.uk/resource/an-evidence-review-of-the-impact-of-participatory-arts-on-older-people](http://baringfoundation.org.uk/resource/an-evidence-review-of-the-impact-of-participatory-arts-on-older-people).





Photo courtesy of New Writing North.

Creative ageing isn't the only area of participatory arts where we believe the under-representation of men is a cause for concern. It is true, we believe, in the current area in which we are funding – creative opportunities for people with mental health problems. This led us to publish a report, *Creatively Minded Men*,<sup>8</sup> followed by a funding round with targeted funding for creative opportunities for men with mental health problems in 2024.<sup>9</sup>

### SO WHY MIGHT FEWER OLDER MEN BE PARTICIPATING?

There is no solid research on which to rest these opinions, but here is what some practitioners have speculated (and some of these causes are inter-related).

- A perception by some men that creativity and the arts are 'feminine'. This is dependent on a very restrictive view of the arts, for instance painting, poetry, ballet and other forms of dance. A broader view of the arts might include photography and comedy, or skills that are seen as more traditionally male, such as woodworking and metal working.

- Men not seeing themselves represented in participants and the practitioners/facilitators. The argument is often made regarding the involvement of people from racialised minorities in the arts that representation is an important factor. Does this argument translate to creative ageing where both practitioners and participants are more often female?
- Little or no effort is made to target work towards older men. So advertising might only include images of women. Topics of work might be seen as more feminine, such as experiences of being a primary care giver.

### GUIDANCE ON TARGETING WORK TOWARDS OLDER MEN

It is hard to find guidance about including older men in community activities. The National Lottery and the Centre for Ageing Better, examined the lessons from a number of projects that they funded (usually not about the arts) and came up with the following (see overleaf).

<sup>8</sup> *Creatively Minded Men*, David Cutler/Baring Foundation, 2024: [baringfoundation.org.uk/resource/creatively-minded-men](https://baringfoundation.org.uk/resource/creatively-minded-men).

<sup>9</sup> See: [baringfoundation.org.uk/blog-post/creatively-minded-men-what-happened-next](https://baringfoundation.org.uk/blog-post/creatively-minded-men-what-happened-next).

## Guidance on targeting work towards older men

(Source: Community Fund)<sup>10</sup>

### Think about the focus of the activity

Speak to men and don't make assumptions about what men want. Our experience is that older men can be put off by groups which they perceive as being a 'talking shop' or an excuse for chatting. Instead, they are more likely to be attracted to groups built around a particular shared interest, such as a hobby, or a common experience, like supporting a team or former job role. There is also the value of having an ongoing programme of activity or a flow of project opportunities to keep men engaged over a longer period of time. We also found that mixed generation activities can help older people feel valued and enhance younger people's attitudes towards ageing. Think about how your group could attract people of different age groups.

### Create opportunities to give something back

Build in opportunities for older men to help run groups. Avoid describing this as "volunteering" and keep it flexible and informal. Look for opportunities for people to share expertise and knowledge and opportunities to help the wider community. All help create a sense of purpose and self-esteem.

### Provide a supportive environment

We found that it worked well to reach older men through social prescribing projects. These projects could provide the additional support which might be necessary to enable people to attend activities or groups. Social prescribing was often a route by which many had engaged with older men, who they may not otherwise have been able to reach. Make sure your group offers a relaxed, casual, friendly and non-competitive environment and consider if there is a need for a men-only group or activity. Consider organising

one off events to 'hook' new members. This might be a trip, a special guest or a taster session. This also avoids people feeling they have to make an on-going commitment which can be off putting.

### Promote your group to men

Promote in places that men go to. This could include pubs, working men's clubs and sports venues. Also consider churches, temples and mosques. Talk to schools, colleges and youth groups about making your activity inter-generational. Word of mouth is often very effective. Ask your members to spread the word. This could be talking to friends, relatives, neighbours and colleagues. It could also mean encouraging men to act as champions or ambassadors in the wider community or encouraging men to bring others along who may be in a similar position.

### Think about the language you use

Think about the activity and who you are hoping will attend and then consider whether including the word "men" in the name of the group will work well or not – it can attract some men but also put others off. Ensure that where appropriate the event is marketed in a gender-neutral and age-neutral way, so that individuals are not put off by it appearing too "feminine" or too "masculine".

### Promoting activities for men through reaching out to those connected to them

For example their partners or children. Some projects have found that partners, in particular, may seek out information on behalf of older men and encourage them to engage. Look at how your marketing materials are likely to be received by men, even if they are not the ones making the initial contact.

## 'A HANDBOOK FOR CULTURAL ENGAGEMENT WITH OLDER MEN'

In 2014, Ed Watts, who is now the Deputy Director of The Whitworth gallery in Manchester, asked us why so few men

participated in creative ageing activities and what could be done to improve on the current state of play. We said we didn't know, but it was a very good question and gave The Whitworth a grant to support some research by Ed and to fund an action research project

<sup>10</sup> *Working and engaging with older men – learning from Ageing Better*, Community Fund, 2019: [www.tnlcommunityfund.org.uk/media/documents/ageing-better/Ageing\\_better\\_working\\_with\\_men\\_summary.pdf?mtime=20200422164345&focal=none](http://www.tnlcommunityfund.org.uk/media/documents/ageing-better/Ageing_better_working_with_men_summary.pdf?mtime=20200422164345&focal=none)

## The Whitworth's top tips

(Source: *The Whitworth*)<sup>11</sup>

### Give it purpose

Most older men prefer project based practical tasks with clear outputs rather than drop-in activities. Investing time in getting to know the diverse needs and motivations of older men without making assumptions is key. Project based tasks also allow participants to find a suitable role within the group. For instance if they are not interested in the practical task itself they can be project managers, photographers, researchers, etc.

### Have a laugh!

Put socialising at the heart of the activity when planning your programme. Creating a space and welcoming environment, where people feel comfortable to share experiences. Think carefully about the physical and intellectual accessibility of your events.

### Spread the word

Work with community ambassadors to raise awareness of opportunities to engage in cultural activities and to recruit more isolated participants through word of mouth. They are full of ideas. Use them! Sharing the ownership

of the project with participants, empowering and encouraging them to make decisions about the development of the group.

### Mix it up

Be flexible, adapting the programming to the needs, motivations and dynamics for each individual group.

### Give it a go

Support the group to increase the confidence of participants to learn new things improving their self esteem and sense of achievement.

### Branding for blokes

Focusing the branding and marketing for more aesthetic activities on the impact and benefits instead of the content, to avoid any barriers in recruitment due to gender stereotypes.

### Keep it regular

Groups prefer weekly sessions to one-off short projects. Think carefully about the sustainability of these projects and consider a long term funding plan for these activities. Try to develop collaborative partnerships with key stakeholders to strengthen your project.

at the Gallery. The latter resulted in a group of older local men curating a wonderful exhibition drawn from the collection called *Men at Work* alongside their creative responses. Ten years later Ed's report is still frequently referred to. He visited six arts projects for older men around the UK and drew out good practice points around recruitment, participation and impact from these. He boiled this down further into seven tips for involving men in creative ageing that remain as relevant today. These bear a close relationship to wider research by the Centre for Ageing Better/National Lottery Community Fund above.

We have not published further advice on the involvement of older men because we feel that *The Handbook* remains just as relevant today.

But the worrying issue is that it seems this advice is not being used. Nor is there much discussion about the lack of male representation. The only network or infrastructure organisation that seems to have been exploring the issue of older men's participation recently has been the London-based *Flourishing Lives* which has held several online discussions on the topic.

## WHAT'S COMING NEXT

We have followed the pattern of many of our arts publications by having at the heart of this report a set of case studies by organisations. They have all chosen to target men's involvement in creative ageing, usually through running men-only groups.

<sup>11</sup> *A Handbook for Cultural Engagement with Older Men*, Ed Watts/The Whitworth Gallery, 2015: [baringfoundation.org.uk/resource/a-handbook-for-cultural-engagement-with-older-men](http://baringfoundation.org.uk/resource/a-handbook-for-cultural-engagement-with-older-men).

It was concerning how hard it was to find case studies given the significance of this issue and that on some occasions work had ceased, such as the Highland Print Studio's Wise Guys<sup>12</sup> group and a group targeting older men from racialised minorities in East London led by Green Candle Dance Company (see page 34).

The final chapter draws some conclusions from what has gone before and ends with a call to action.

**12** [highlandprintstudio.co.uk/projects/wise-guys](http://highlandprintstudio.co.uk/projects/wise-guys)



# CASE STUDIES





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# Beamish: the Living Museum of the North

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**BY MICHELLE KINDLEYSIDES AND DR JAYNE WALLACE**

Michelle Kindleysides is Head of Health & Wellbeing at Beamish Museum.

Dr Jayne Wallace is Professor of Craft & Wellbeing at the Northumbria University's School of Design, Arts & Creative Industries.



Beamish Museum. Photo © Rob Bowman.

## ABOUT US

Beamish Museum is a large open-air museum in County Durham. It is an independent and self-sustaining charity. Its core purpose is to preserve the North East's social, industrial and agricultural heritage using its outstanding collections to share stories of the everyday people of the North East in the past.

Since 2014, the museum's Health & Wellbeing Team have established an innovative programme of group sessions and activities, inspired by the museum's unique collections

and spaces, for adults living with a range of health conditions, such as dementia. The team has three members of staff and a fantastic team of 16 volunteers.

## ABOUT THE PROJECT

The '**Centring**' project is a weekly pottery group of men living with brain changes, such as dementia, held at Beamish Museum's Health and Wellbeing Team's workshop in collaboration with Professor Jayne Wallace. It is part of a long-term partnership with a team



Beamish Museum. Photo © Rob Bowman.

at Northumbria University's Design School, which since 2017 has included wood carving, printing and wood-based construction research projects. 'Centring', which began in February 2024, explores sense of self, identity and community through shared ceramic making. It utilises traditional heritage crafts and skills as inspiration for creativity: assigning new meaning, value and relevance for the makers and audiences in the present day.

This was the first time we had used clay in sessions, but the opening of a Georgian Pottery at the museum provided a unique opportunity to explore this new traditional skill. We utilise hand building pottery techniques and make things in response to the museum's collections, members' own lives and inspired by symbolism such as the forget-me-not flower.

## ABOUT OUR PARTICIPANTS

There are six men in the group, aged from their late 50s to mid-80s, all living at home. Within the group there are a variety of needs, cognitive abilities and levels of independence, but what unifies the group is their wish to socialise with other men, to be active, creative and to take part in something new and meaningful. The members were all signposted to Beamish's Health & Wellbeing

## STAR STORY...



We have also run a short 12 week project: 'Clay Connections', between the six men in the group and six members of a mental health arts charity in Newcastle called Chilli Studios. In this reciprocal making project the men were paired with a member of Chilli Studio's group and all shared things about themselves with one another using a method called design probes, e.g. "things you like about yourself" or "favourite foods". They then used the responses from their project partner as inspiration to make a dinner set for them. Everyone put great care into making these pots, even though they didn't know the other person yet. Richard, a Beamish group member, said of the pots he received:

**“[the pieces]...they made me laugh. They felt like me, if you know what I mean.”**

Making for someone else added a layer of purpose and of agency for all of the people who took part in 'Clay Connections'. Similarly, being valued for new skills and ways of communicating who you are, in this case through creative pottery, is incredibly important for our sense of wellbeing.

The men made pieces that echoed the other person's favourite things, places, colours and stories from their lives. When everyone met at the end of the project to exchange their pots and to have a meal together some of the things that were shared between them were profound:

**“I felt like I made a friend through the project.”**

Nelson, participant

This was also evident in what Cazaly (Nelson's project partner) said to him when showing him a bowl he had made for him:

**“...when it was fired it blistered and I thought it would be nice to highlight the blisters because I feel that the things that affect us, erm, I don't think things are ever broken, or damaged, erm, it's like you should celebrate what's still there. I wanted to give life to that feeling.”**

Team through well-established links with Occupational Therapists, Admiral Nurses and Social Prescribing Link Workers. One member, alongside living with dementia, is also a volunteer at the museum and he now helps to run the sessions and supports everyone in their making.

## OUR IMPACT

‘Centring’ has provided an opportunity for the men to learn new skills, together with others, in a mutually accepting and supportive space. Focusing the weekly activities around a variety of pottery techniques such as slump forming over a mould, slab building, or painting underglaze designs to bisque pots meant that the emphasis was shifted from predominantly relying on conversations and language, which several of the men found challenging. Instead, they were able to express themselves and engage with others using creativity: through design, colours and techniques they explored.

None of the participants had ever worked with clay before, and several of them claimed ‘not be artistic’ to begin with. For some of them, their background in engineering meant that the idea of ‘free flow’ and abstract art was not a familiar concept, but over time their confidence and skills set have flourished, and they feel comfortable trying new ideas with design, technique and colour. Through bespoke tailoring of activities and equipment to ensure that everyone can participate in the sessions, this project is helping to show the men, and their families, that the journey of lifelong learning continues, even with dementia. Running the activities in the workshop, a typically masculine space, also felt important to the group. They are surrounded by the pottery they have made which serves as

aide-mémoires and they are involved in all aspects of the making, from setting up the worktables to loading the kiln.

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“ He felt that he had found a friend who could understand him with his present conditions. ”

**Nelson’s (participant) wife**

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Many people living with dementia will experience feeling a loss of independence, skills and very often friendships too. ‘Centring’ is providing an opportunity for these men to learn new things and to use and develop their existing skills, not only to work on their own pieces independently, but also to help one another in making pieces. To work alongside others and build relationships within the group has been incredibly important. Humour is plentiful and the men feel comfortable together to laugh and joke. On many occasions members swap pieces they are working on and share some of the making process together. It is also exciting when members find talents and skills they never knew they had.

Making things for others has also been hugely valuable. The men have made pieces to give to their wives as a surprise on Valentine’s Day or for family birthdays and their pride was palpable on these occasions.





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# Blind Tiger: The Infant Hercules men's choir

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BY MIKE MCGROTHER

Mike is founder of Blind Tiger, choir master of Infant Hercules and a community engineer.



Photo © Ian Allcock/ EnA Photography.

## ABOUT US

Teesside's Blind Tiger CiC, whilst relatively new, was formed to pull together over 30 years of my experience as a musician, teacher and community engineer. Whilst essentially a one-man band, Blind Tiger employs a host of creative practitioners and, working from and with Stockton-on-Tees' ARC Art Centre, delivers projects across the North East of England to develop community voice, cohesion, wellbeing and change. Collectively, we believe that when people come together to sing, laugh,

share and remember, something extraordinary happens: communities are reawakened and start to roar with positivity.

Infant Hercules is a pub-based choir of men. Formed in 2013 as a one-off, three-month project in which a reticent group of mainly retired men were tempted / tricked into joining via the lure of a free bar!

## ABOUT OUR PROJECT

Despite a less than glorious debut singing to an empty social club in Redcar, something transformational happened that day and,

to my surprise the men declared they were now 'a choir'. Adopting the moniker given to Middlesbrough by a visiting William Gladstone in 1862, Infant Hercules was born.

“It has changed my life. Lifting me up from my lowest ebb, I have been able to recover my confidence, feel a real part of something meaningful, it made me smile at a really rubbish point in my life.”

**Participant**

These days up to 100 men gather each week to sing locally inspired songs of the past to make their present 'feel better'. With the strapline 'If We Can Sing About It, You Can Talk About It', their collaborations with The Samaritans, MacMillan Cancer Support and dementia friendly initiatives point to the rich and impactful nature of this very special 'brotherhood'.

Using what we describe as a 'free & easy' singing tradition, the 'wall of sound' that ensues and inevitable audience interaction make often-unsuspecting listeners proud to come from Teesside – even if they're not!

Infant Hercules gives men – particularly older men, the sense that they are part of something. And in finding their voice, they realise that they still have much to offer. Splinter projects have ensued and the men now deliver projects using their other passions – from walking clubs to pop-up story sharing bars in residential homes to buddying work with teenage pupils in local schools. Singing somehow reinvigorates the heart and the mind in a very unique and transformative way!

## ABOUT OUR PARTICIPANTS

Infant Hercules has never promoted itself as an 'older persons' choir but the locally inspired narrative underpinning its musical content appeals to older men. Songs of a now depleted industrial landscape reconnect men with their formative years. Tears often flow and personal stories are shared when singing about the steelworks, railways, chemical factories that were their livelihoods. A sense that their presumed forgotten contribution to their

## STAR STORY...



We were asked to devise an initiative that would encourage men to talk about, get checked and seek support if faced with a cancer diagnosis. We chose to sing, talk and walk our way along the 130-mile Cleveland Way. Documenting the walk, I asked the lads to propose a song to record that would amplify this particular story. It was Lee, a former binman, whose choice was selected. Lee revealed that he was living with incurable cancer and would never get to 'ring the bell' but wanted to live each day 'Forever Young'.

His 'song', as Bob Dylan's lyrics described, 'will always be sung'.

“What the lads have done over the past 10 days will have saved more lives than I have in over 30 years of Cancer Surgery.”

**Johnny Wilkison, Cancer Consultant,  
South Tees Health**

community is being rekindled gives the men a spark. Many are retired – but that 'tiredness' is awoken. They feel alive.

Just as songs provide the local narrative, they also bring human characteristics to the fore. Singing about life and its struggles become a natural part of the repertoire. Many men have consequently joined as they relate to songs reflecting on issues they are facing, be that mental health struggles, a cancer diagnosis or dementia. Adding their voice to the singing, means that their story can be heard, and they feel 'better' for it.

Infant Hercules seems to work because it happens in a space that men naturally gravitate to: the pub.

Early promotion of the choir used to play on this – encouraging others to 'sing in the key of ale' or 'raise a glass to Teesside'. The reality seems to lie beyond the pint-glass and deeper within our local traditions and culture. Whilst the 'novelty' of singing in the pub can be a pull, we have found that it isn't the alcohol that draws men into the project. There is something in the familiarity and, one would assume, inherited connection with a pub environment that makes

Infant Hercules 'fit'. We have tried moving it into other spaces. Even an available bar doesn't provide the same 'ambience' or spirit found in the local pub.

The 'free & easy' singing tradition can be traced back to the saloon bars of late 19th century pubs, agricultural and social clubs. Men would gather at the end of a long shift and, without any particular regard to quality of sound, they would sing local songs, tell local jokes and just 'be'.

So, what is happening in Teesside is nothing new – it is simply a resonance – an echo of how our ancestors coped with life's struggles.

### OUR IMPACT

Infant Hercules helps men – particularly older men regain a sense of identity and belonging, because it amplifies their pride in being a "Teessider". They feel a part not only of the group but of their community.

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“ Infant Hercules supports my mental health and gives me a sense of contributing something positive to the community in which I live. ”

**Participant**

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“ The choir has changed my life. Since I retired and joined the choir I have expanded my participation in other community projects. I know my life would be completely different – worthless had I not joined. ”

**Participant**

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The choir's influence extends beyond singing. It is a group that seeks to make a difference in the lives of people by providing companionship, offering support, and helping to break down stigma – in some way 'normalising' issues that were previously not talked about. This can apply to issues of health and wellbeing – but also in relation to community cohesion and societal change.



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# The Causeway Shantymen

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BY DAVID PAUL

David is the Secretary for the Causeway Shantymen.



Photo courtesy of the Causeway Shantymen.

## ABOUT US

Formed in March 2023, the Causeway Shantymen are dedicated to enhancing mental health and positive wellbeing among adult men.

By reviving the age-old tradition of sea shanties, we engage our audiences and counter the effects of rural isolation and loneliness. Singing together serves as a time-honoured therapeutic practice, bringing us closer and bolstering our collective spirit.

Most of our members are based around the North Coast of Northern Ireland from Limavady to Ballycastle but we have one from as far

afield as Banbridge. We have no staff – we are a voluntary society – but we do have committee members as is necessary.

The Causeway Shantymen were started by a local Portrush man, Barry Torrens, who sent out a post on Facebook inviting men who would like to gather and sing sea shanties to get in touch. He was surprised with the level of response (granted mostly from wives who were keen to get their men out of the house).

Established research shows that singing together is a great mental tonic, improving breathing, posture and muscle tension, as well as improving mood and memory.



Whilst initially focussed on singing (specifically Shanties), it became apparent that there were some musicians in the group, and this provided an outlet for them to play and indeed perform and in some cases dust down instruments they had not played for a while. Some of the group arrange to stay on after practice just to play instruments together and learn new tunes beyond the Shanty spectrum. For some it has been the kick start they needed to learn an instrument and their shipmates are all too keen to help them on their journey.

The Causeway Shantymen meet weekly and at regular public and private performances, receiving the above benefits, as well as the social aspects of bonding, belonging and having an outlet to engage.

The group is growing in capability and confidence. It is fantastic to see some members who were barely confident to perform as part of the group sing and perform solo as “The Shantyman” for a song.

## ABOUT THE SHANTYMEN

There are approximately 30 men involved in the group ranging from 44 to 86 years, but with the vast majority in the 55+ bracket and many retired.

There are a few health issues in the group such as heart or mobility problems. We accommodate this as best as possible and if someone is unable to perform, they will still be involved in practice or other spin-off social activities (such as getting together for breakfast). A number suffer or have suffered from depression or simply isolation which our group really helps them with.

The main reason for taking part is fun. We agreed at the start of the project, the minute it stops becoming fun, that is the time to stop. The buzz from performing is also a draw, and the warm words from the audiences at various events demonstrate that they can see we are having such good craic that that they can't help but enjoy themselves.

We don't really need further recruitment as this happens organically, with people seeing us, or hearing about it from friends or existing members. There has been a small turnover as people have other life priorities, move to a different location or due to changing family commitments.

## OUR IMPACT

The group is for many an opportunity to talk and make friends. Men often find it difficult to talk about issues and this forum provides a real outlet for that. For some this may be their “personal time”, a time that allows them to step away from family and responsibilities and simply enjoy themselves. The various events give some a reason to go somewhere and something to talk about to their friends and family, or for those less able, just to attend practice and sing.

In terms of impact, in recent months we had to say a final farewell to one of our members who had been in the group from the start. His family chose to have him laid to rest wearing his Causeway Shantymen Polo shirt and invited the group to sing at his funeral, which perhaps says it all.

There have been so many memorable moments in terms of performances and all for different reasons: Stendhal Festival, The Dark Culture night in Belfast, on the Pool Deck of a TUI cruise ship, live on Radio Ulster, the recent Shanty Festival in Sligo was such a positive atmosphere, and a collaboration with The Tuned in Collective (supporting individuals with learning disabilities). Probably the one that stands out for us all was performing for the King and Queen during their visit to Belfast and the fact they stopped to chat, interact and even sing and clap along.<sup>13</sup>



[www.thecausewayshantymen.co.uk](http://www.thecausewayshantymen.co.uk)

<sup>13</sup> [metro.co.uk/video/king-queen-meet-causeway-shantymen-visit-famous-belfast-street-3396571](http://metro.co.uk/video/king-queen-meet-causeway-shantymen-visit-famous-belfast-street-3396571)

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# Celebrating Age Wiltshire

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BY NELL FARRALLY

Nell is a freelance evaluation consultant and evaluator for Celebrating Age Wiltshire.



Photo courtesy of Celebrating Age Wiltshire.

## ABOUT US

Celebrating Age Wiltshire (CAW) is a partnership of arts, heritage, cultural, community and older people's support organisations who have worked together since 2017 to support older people's wellbeing through regular events and activities in community venues across 11 community areas of Wiltshire. The programme aims to reduce older people's social isolation and loneliness, enhance wellbeing through creativity, and increase knowledge of services that can support health and wellbeing.

From September 2025, leadership of CAW transfers from Wiltshire Music Centre to Age UK Wiltshire, who will provide strategic guidance to the staff team of creative producer and project assistant who work with local delivery partner organisations.

## ABOUT OUR PROJECT

Men's Creative Conversations groups are one strand of CAW's activities. Creative Conversations was first conceived during coronavirus lockdowns, offering individual older people weekly one-to-one phone calls from an artist that explored their past and

current creative interests, often involving a lot of storytelling of life-history. Often people spoke of creative activities they used to do in years gone by and then the artist facilitated exploration of those interests – often rekindling a lost passion. As lockdown restrictions eased and group activities resumed, the CAW team sought ways to expand Creative Conversations to more people and trialled the first group in 2022. The core idea of the groups mirrors one-to-one Creative Conversations – the artist facilitator introduces creative activities that respond to people’s interests and encourages conversation and connection between people. The groups meet weekly for a series of one-hour sessions (often 12 sessions) in a community venue such as a local library. An artist facilitator provides creative stimuli that encourage conversation and connection between participants: for example, one week’s stimuli might be a favourite walk, a topic relevant to all, that initiates sharing life stories. In between sessions, the artist sets “homework” to prepare for the following week’s topic. There is no focus on particular artforms, but interests of the group are followed such as poetry, photography, songwriting and visual arts.

The first Creative Conversations groups were for a mix of genders, but the creative producer and artist facilitator observed that men participated differently to women. Whilst men fully participated in the group activities and reported wellbeing benefits, females more easily formed social connections. A notable number of men who were experiencing bereavement following the loss of their spouse were joining the groups. The idea to trial a Creative Conversations group just for men led to the first men-only group in February 2024. Further funding enabled developing the groups further. The intended outcomes of the men-only groups are:

- increased confidence and reduced anxiety to attend group activities;
- greater social connections in their local communities;
- reduced loneliness and social isolation;
- greater purposefulness in life through participation in creative activities and/or other community activities.

## OUR PARTICIPANTS

Each group involves around a dozen men. Over the past year, 32 individuals participated across the groups in two locations. People self-refer to the groups, usually after seeing information in the local press, posters in community venues, or by being signposted by professionals such as social prescribers. Participants range in age from their late sixties up to some in their eighties.

Creative Conversations is welcoming to all older men; therefore detailed demographic or health data is not requested. However, as part of a pre-programme evaluation questionnaire, everyone is asked how they would currently describe their health and wellbeing. There have been responses such as “*quite well considering my age*”, but most people have health challenges that have included Parkinson’s disease, cancer, stroke, prostate problems, memory problems, arthritis, anxiety and visual impairment. Ways that people describe their mental wellbeing included “*up and down with mental health*” or “*mentally down in the dumps sometimes*”.

Men are very open about their reasons for joining Creative Conversations. In the pre-programme questionnaire, the most common motivations are a wish to meet people and increase social interaction. Whilst people do not necessarily use words such as loneliness and isolation, their responses often indicate they are not satisfied with their current situation.

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“ Since retiring, I have felt isolated and missed the company of other men after working in a male dominated industry. Looking forward to stimulating conversation with others. Also hoping it will boost my confidence. ”

“ Getting me out of the house. Meeting new people of my age. I haven’t spoken at great length to anyone since retiring from work. ”

“ I have been retired for 11 years and spend a lot of time at home on my own. I certainly need more social stimulation. ”

**Participants**

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## OUR IMPACT

Men's feedback provides a wealth of evidence of the impact Creative Conversations can have. All those who completed a post-programme questionnaire felt the group had contributed to their wellbeing "a lot" (a score of 4 out of 5) or "exceptionally" (a score of 5 out of 5) in one or more aspects of wellbeing: increased confidence to attend groups, reduced anxiety to attend groups, increased social connections, reduced loneliness/isolation or increased sense of purposefulness in life. For some, the impact was significant:

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“This has really changed my life – I wasn't getting out at all before this group.”

**Participant**

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The men report friendships developed within the group and a supportive ethos:

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“I feel kindness and acceptance around the table now.”

“The moment you walk through the door it all changes – there's warmth.”

**Participants**

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For some, the social connections developed to meeting up outside of group sessions. The open-to-all nature of the groups enables meeting people from different walks of life, and the men enjoy hearing of others' diverse life experiences. Some value the cognitive stimulation from the conversation topics:

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“It's made me think more. My brain is active.”

**Participant**

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A men-only group makes some participants more at ease to share experiences and open up. Men's reluctance to seek help with common experiences of ageing, such as hearing loss, was noted by the facilitator, who observed peer-support within the groups where members have been encouraged by others to seek help for health problems.

CAW's Men's Creative Conversations was a 2024 winner of the Family Arts Campaign's Fantastic for Families awards in the best age-friendly outreach category. This was a great affirmation for the CAW team in the value of Creative Conversations, also generating a sense of pride for the group members that they were part of an award-winning project.

In one group, a member with an interest in photography suggested that the group take portraits of each other. The high artistic standard of the photographs produced spurred developing an exhibition that toured to Wiltshire Libraries and community venues.





# Creative Arts East

**BY ALICE MORELLI, ASTON HOWE AND NATALIE JODE**

Alice Morelli is Community Cinema Manager; Aston Howe is Communications and Marketing Assistant and Natalie Jode is Executive Director at Creative Arts East.



Raz at Shotesham Village Screen – Trish Thompson/Creative Arts East.

## ABOUT US

Creative Arts East (CAE) is an arts and community development charity working with rural and underserved communities across Norfolk, Suffolk, and Cambridgeshire to enable live performance and cinema events, deliver health and wellbeing projects, and support cultural education opportunities. We have been operating for over 30 years, funded by Arts Council England, British Film Institute, local authorities and other trusts/bodies. We employ nine staff to deliver our aims, governed by a board of trustees, and we hold Investors in People status.

## ABOUT CREATIVE ARTS EAST SCREEN

CAE Screen is a rolling cinema scheme that supports access to a diverse range of mainstream, independent, and archive films, including foreign language and 'event cinema' titles.

We work in partnership with a network of voluntary exhibitors in towns and villages who select, market and host films in village halls, schools, pubs, libraries, and small arts centres. The scheme offers portable projection



CAE Screen Audience – Trish Thompson/Creative Arts East.

equipment, technical training, menus of relevant titles, marketing materials, and financial subsidies to help manage risk.

Screenings cater to people from the immediate locality who generally wouldn't go to a conventional cinema because of the distance and/or because of the environment. Indeed, between 2022-2024 100% of the Screen audience travelled less than ten miles (approx. three miles on average).

CAE Screen began in 2005, running alongside our already successful live performance scheme. Today these schemes operate together, partnering with 60+ communities where residents might not otherwise have access to a varied cultural provision. In 2024-2025, they enabled 510 community events (of which 379 were Screen), 29,110 audience interactions (of which 10,759 were film audiences) and 1,516 volunteering instances (of which 1,334 were Screen promoters).

## OUR AUDIENCES AND PARTICIPANTS

Both schemes are open to everyone in the community who would like to volunteer or be an audience member; however the work largely attracts an older demographic. Between 2022-2024, 76% were aged 55+ (22% were 75+), 16% identified as disabled, 71% were female, and 93% were White British. This is largely mirrored in the profile of our volunteer promoters. However, in CAE Screen we see a higher percentage of male participation in contrast to those people running or attending live performance events.

Between 2022-2024 the percentage of male audience members for screenings was 39%, 10% higher than those for live performance. Further, in a comparison of our 'lead contact' data for volunteer promoters, in 2025

## STAR STORY...



### “Hidden man – no more!

Being a projectionist with the Thornham Film Crew for the last 10 years has made such a big difference for me.

It has really improved my self-confidence and mental wellbeing and renewed a happy social life, after years of debilitating depression.

In my early working life as a theatre designer and technician, I was very comfortable as an “invisible” backstage worker. When I became a pensioner, wanting to keep busy and still feel useful, I enthusiastically accepted a challenge from a good male friend and neighbour to collaborate in starting regular film screenings in our local village hall.

Many of the traditional community activities used to be instigated and run by women, where the kitchen almost became a no-go area for most men!

In contrast, practical maintenance was usually the domain of male DIY enthusiasts with experience of technical equipment.

Running regular film nights seemed a natural fit for male volunteers.

Our role model was like the projectionist in the classic film – Cinema Paradiso.

It has been so rewarding to be able to create regular enjoyable social gatherings, and to feel recognised and appreciated for our efforts. ”

Mick from Thornham Magna

approximately 50% of Screen contacts were male, 16% more than for Live. Many of these men have engaged as part of their screening group for several years.

Running a film screening often involves operating projection equipment, working with digital technology, and lifting/assembling portable kit. We believe this is one of the primary reasons why CAE Screen attracts a higher percentage of men.

Other likely factors include the following.

- Cultural habits and social acceptability: cinema is often perceived as a more “neutral” or mainstream cultural activity compared with live theatre, which research shows is more strongly female-dominated.
- Film genres and programming – there is a wider variety of cinema titles with broad or male-leaning appeal (action, thriller, war, sci-fi, classic cinema) and male programmers are likely to attract a higher percentage of male audiences as they may unconsciously tailor film choices to their own interest.
- Lower barriers to entry: screenings are often shorter, cheaper, and require less prior cultural knowledge than live theatre, making them more accessible for people who don’t usually identify as “arts attenders”, a group in which men are typically over-represented.
- Social atmosphere: screenings in community spaces can feel more informal than traditional theatre etiquette and often these spaces are already known for mixed-gender activities. This environment may particularly encourage men who might feel out of place in formal arts venues.

## OUR IMPACT

This analysis is backed up by anecdotal feedback from many volunteers. Derek from Hindolveston says:

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“CAE Screen has enabled me to spread the word about films I have enjoyed – and the regular structure of our monthly screenings have given a rhythm to my social activities and also, significantly, a rhythm to the communal life of our village.”

**Derek, audience member**

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This sentiment is echoed across the cohort, with people gaining satisfaction from contributing to their venue’s continued use and sustainability, making a positive connection with others in their community, and using or learning skills later in life. William from Holt told us:

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“I enjoy being part of a team using previous workplace skills through the planning and execution of world cinema screenings whereupon essential new friendships have been formed. In addition, it’s great engaging with the wider community having a common link of loving inspiring film. A lot of people in North Norfolk, including myself, can live quite remote and so the club atmosphere is welcome.”

**William, volunteer**

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# Equal Arts

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**BY DOUGLAS HUNTER**

Douglas is CEO of Equal Arts.



Photo courtesy of Equal Arts.

## ABOUT US

Equal Arts is a creative ageing organisation with over 40 years' experience delivering high quality and innovative interventions to improve wellbeing and provide voice and agency to older people.

We work with artists specialising in participatory practice with skills and experience in their creative field whilst having a commitment to supporting often vulnerable older people to enjoy and be aspirational in their creativity.

We have a Relationship Centred Care approach which embraces differing stakeholders in the lives of older people as well as differing partnerships with organisations across culture, community, health and education sectors.

## ABOUT READING WITH DEMENTIA

Reading with Dementia is an Arts Council England-funded collaboration between Newcastle Libraries and Equal Arts. The project aims to support people living with dementia to continue reading for enjoyment for longer.





**Bewick Tales, a dementia-friendly book published by Equal Arts.**

The programme launched in February 2025 and is scheduled to run through to June 2026, culminating in a national Reading with Dementia symposium.

Many people with dementia – even lifelong booklovers – give up reading because their symptoms make conventional books inaccessible: there is little pleasure in a novel when you can't remember what happened on the previous page and your brain feels exhausted after deciphering just a few lines. Yet these obstacles can be overcome. People with early to moderate dementia can still enjoy reading and benefit from both the cognitive stimulation and the opportunity to share the experience with friends and relatives.

But dig a bit deeper and, among the self-help guides and memoirs, there aren't any books aimed at supporting people with dementia to continue reading for enjoyment.

Equal Arts set out to address this issue and the Reading with Dementia partnership with Newcastle City Libraries is a positive step forward.

“I’ve never been that into poetry. But the poems that they’ve come up with, and because they’ve explained them and we’ve talked about them in context, I’ve quite enjoyed them.”

**Participant**

The work raises questions about the lack of provision for people with dementia across libraries and bookshops and we’re asking the question, what more can be done?

Engaging older men with a dementia diagnosis in shared reading content from cultural archives wasn’t planned or anticipated but at present is a very strong and evident element of the programme to date.

The Equal Arts team often hear that after a dementia diagnosis people often stop hobbies that they’ve long enjoyed.

Reading is among the pleasures that can be lost. One participant shared they couldn’t follow the narrative of a novel without becoming frustrated and couldn’t understand what was written on food labels.

“For me, it’s listening to somebody else and I think, “Oh, yeah, he’s right.” So, listening to other people.... I want to hear what other people say about things I don’t agree with, and sometimes disagree... Yeah, it’s good to find out what people think.”

**Participant**

## OUR PARTICIPANTS

While not exclusively a “men’s” group, all of those who’ve joined the Reading with Dementia group are men. Some attend with the support of (female) partners/spouses whilst others come on their own.

There are about 12 people who attend, with eight usually present on any particular week and five or six of those being men with a dementia diagnosis.

Sessions run for two hours, once a week, and are led by a freelance facilitator, with support from a heritage professional from the Equal Arts team.

The reading materials range from maps to theatre bills to historic cookery books and facilitators bring other materials such as poetry or non-fiction narratives to use as shared reading.

It is not obvious why men have wanted to join this group. As a generalisation, more women attend traditional reading groups than men. However, once through the door, the type of reading materials available from maps to geological surveys, theatre bills or business invoices seem to spark and sustain the interest of the group. These archive materials are further supplemented with poetry, letters and other forms of short text.

Recruitment is often a challenge in a 'crowded marketplace' with the current default of services being 'hot food and a chat' and sign-posters often lacking a nuanced understanding of what an individual could enjoy and achieve.

Most attendees have had some level of connection with Equal Arts or have self-referred following an online search.

It is also possible that libraries and local history study spaces are comfortable spaces for men to enjoy.

## OUR IMPACT

The 'culture' of the group that has evolved gives permission or allows partners/carers to take a step back and the person with dementia to step forward and engage with others in the group.

Reading in pairs or aloud to the whole group has been an unexpected positive. Initially regarded with a degree of trepidation, it is now a focal point and a joyful moment.

For some members who struggle to find words or who struggle to construct sentences, being able to read a short piece of text has been incredibly positive and affirmative. Participants and family carers have reported going home in buoyant mood, talking about the texts discussed and the friendships made.

Three married couples who attend have met up socially, providing peer support and friendship both for the person with dementia and their spouse.

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“These sessions have been invaluable for Dad. He talks about them all week and it's given him confidence to go out more. They're the ideal activity for him and have really given him a boost that extends across the rest of his week and life.”

**Participant's daughter**

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The approach is entirely innovative and the participants are helping to shape the 6 Principles of Reading with Dementia being developed by Equal Arts in partnership with Newcastle Libraries. The programme is prompting interest from other library services nationally with learnings, conversations and partnerships gearing towards a national Reading with Dementia symposium, in May 2026.



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# Galanos House: The Royal British Legion

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BY SHELLEY FARDON

Shelley is Hub Development and Engagement Manager at Galanos House.



Galanos House Shedders, courtesy of Galanos House/Royal British Legion.

## ABOUT US

Galanos House is a CQC rated Outstanding, Royal British Legion care home exclusively for the Armed Forces community, set in Southam in the Warwickshire countryside. In 2024 the Royal British Legion (RBL) teamed up with the UK Men's Sheds Association (UKMSA) on a national level to support Men's Sheds in all six RBL care homes and their veterans.

The Men's Shed at Galanos House is open to the residents and the wider local community. In addition to the care home, we have a Community Hub and Café where we focus on tackling community isolation and improving

mental health and wellbeing which supports the ethos of the Shed. The residents and the Shedders (mainly older men) use the shed together, working on large and small-scale creative projects.

The Shedders have started to do some fundraising themselves and are also supported to do so by the RBL. The Shed has no staff but there is a strong committee and a link to the care home and support from care home staff. The volunteers also support activities when residents are using the Shed.





Galanos House Shedders, courtesy of Galanos House/Royal British Legion.



“ Yeah, we can do this!

I came close to becoming an alcoholic many years ago, so I feel close to this project. I was a bin worker driving the lorry and saw the effects of alcohol and drugs on the streets. If we can bring some light into someone's life and keep them out the pub, the I'm happy. I just want to bring someone some happiness. ”

**Participant**

## PROJECT ACTIVITIES

The Shedders have created a 'buddy bench' in partnership with Diageo's responsible drinking platform DrinkiQ and UKMSA. This 'shoulder to shoulder' initiative called on Men's Sheds across the country to design, build and install community benches to be symbols of what Sheds stand for: conversation, connection, and community.

Our Shedders decided to take part in this project as it enabled a new group of people to work together on a substantial project and raise the profile of their Shed having only been open for 12 months. For some of men involved, alcohol addiction can be a concern as they fit

into the high-risk age category and they felt passionate about the 'Drink in Moderation' messaging that underlines this campaign.

The brief was to build a bench; however, the team got creative and created a bench with two separate seats with a table in the middle. The tabletop was upcycled from old bed slats and acrylic paints were used to add the decorative poppies. Cedar wood was used for the main bench, and the bed slats were made from ash. The bench was coated with 10-year Ronseal wood stain, with routed corners. Equipment involved included: saw, router, drill, brushes, drill press, and a laser cutter for the 'Lest We Forget' wording. The final bench is beautiful with poppies painted along the front.

“ Who knew where this project was going to take us, it's been great for us all and we are super proud of our creative project – please take a seat! ”

**Participant**

“It was a good way of promoting team spirit; having input from several members, irrespective of how old they were or their gender.”

#### Participant

The men involved are mainly from the community but also shared conversations with the residents who took an interest in the project. Some of those people have dementia and the smell of varnish, sawdust, and the touch of familiar items such as screwdrivers, paint and brushes brought back memories, feelings and emotions, allowing them to reminisce. They also took time for a chat with a cuppa with a change of scenery.

This creative build has initiated much interest in the Shed team and their skills, which has led to requests for more orders.

The project build was short term; however, the bench will have longevity in the community, a place for people passing by to sit with a cuppa or coffee and have a conversation.

Two of the Sheddies have also built a hydroponic station (a method of growing plants without soil, using water-based nutrient solutions to deliver essential minerals, hydration, and oxygen to the plant roots). This has now been installed near the Potting Shed area and residents from the care home will be looking after this, watching the crops grow and harvesting the produce to eat in the care home under the supervision of the catering team. They're currently growing mint, mixed lettuce leaves, curly cress, and basil. Next up, we're going to try growing strawberries.

## OUR IMPACT

Five older men took part from the community, with three residents from the care home visiting often to check in on the progress. Two men have served in the Armed Forces (Army and Navy) and now meet at the Southam Armed Forces & Veterans Breakfast Club too.

They range in age from 68-82 with the residents aged 85-94 years.

The community Sheddies and care home participants have a range of health conditions from COPD to dementia but the focus on a creative team project can put these worries to the back of people's minds.

One gentleman has seen a huge improvement in his mental health and wellbeing which his wife has commented on. It has also helped him keep his PTSD attacks under control and given him a structure to his day.

Our participants didn't know each other before the Shed was built. Many of them have found that they have things in common. The Shed is a natural place to meet that doesn't involve too much planning – people just turn up and someone is usually there working in the Shed. The Shed gives the men a sense of achievement and purpose, and a level of social interaction and new friendships at the same time.



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# Green Candle Dance Company

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**BY FERGUS EARLY**

Fergus is the founder and Artistic Director of Green Candle Dance.



Older Men Movin', photo courtesy of Green Candle Dance.

## ABOUT US

The work of Green Candle Dance Company based in the borough of Tower Hamlets, East London, is based on a belief that dance is a fundamental and beneficial human activity and can make a vitally important contribution to the health and wellbeing of individuals and communities. It is therefore the birthright of everybody to watch and participate in dance; but many are deprived of opportunities to experience the pleasure and joy of dance.

Green Candle sets out to provide such opportunities, particularly to those who have least access to dance: in practice, older people, children and young people with and without learning and mental health difficulties.

Green Candle's work falls into three main areas: participation, running workshops and projects for people of all ages and abilities; and performance, making and performing shows for audiences of children, young adults and older people in theatres, arts centres, schools, community centres, day centres, residential homes, and hospitals across London and beyond. The third area is our

training programme which centres around a diploma course, alongside other short-form training workshops.

## OUR PROJECT

Older Men Movin (OMM) was a project within a wider programme of work which aimed to bring dance to as wide a cross section of Tower Hamlets communities as possible. We had long noticed that the demographic of older men of different ethnicities was the one we found hardest to engage in dance activities.

We began Older Men Movin in order to address that problem.

The project was commissioned and funded by the East London NHS Foundation Trust Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG), via an innovation grant.

Two groups of men took part in OMM: a Bangladeshi group from the Horwood Estate Luncheon Club and a Somali group from the Mayfield Somali Day Centre. Each group had a weekly dance session which included fitness tests – before and after pulse rate and blood pressure measurements, and a personal log was kept by each participant. Green Candle teaching staff worked alongside a trained nurse, supplied by the CCG.

In all, 35 older men participated in the project, with an age range of 50-93. The men had many conditions commonly associated with ageing, such as: diabetes type 2, arthritis, COPD, osteoporosis etc. Many reported considerable improvement to their symptoms over the course of the project.

“This is why I come to Mayfield on a Wednesday. I am 89 years old and the exercises are suitable for my age. This is the only exercises I get apart from prayers.”

**Participant**

Two main motivations for attending stood out in particular: one was sheer loneliness. Quite a few lived alone and through the project, they got to dance and eat together in a large group. The second motivation was a concern for health and the possibility of taking some agency over it oneself.

“At home I sit down for 5-6 hours in a chair all day, this doesn't help me. I like Green Candle because it gives me incentive to get up and move. It's not easy to do this when I am home alone. I feel alive when I dance.”

**Participant**

This project is unfortunately no longer running. However Green Candle continues to run an older people's dance group called 'Spin Off': weekly dance sessions for older people (55+) designed to develop individuals' skills using a variety of creative contemporary dance styles in a fun and supportive environment.

Sessions provide an opportunity for participants to meet and socialise whilst gaining the physical and mental health benefits associated with dance. Providing a friendly but focused atmosphere to enable participants to work on improving their dance skills both technically and choreographically, enabling a personally satisfying and enjoyable experience that gives a boost to self-confidence and self-esteem.

Spin Off regularly perform at local community events and larger events such as Big Dance, Sadler's Wells 'Elixir' Festival, the Royal Festival Hall and Queen Elizabeth Hall.





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# Live Music Now

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**BY DOUGLAS NOBLE & ROSANNA KWOK**

Douglas is Strategic Director and Rosanna is a Senior Project Manager for Music In Health at Live Music Now.



Medway Veterans' Social Mornings at the Royal Engineers Museum, Gillingham, with musician, Gavin Alexander. Photographer © Rikard Osterlund.

## ABOUT US

Live Music Now is a charity, set up in 1977, creating inclusive, measurable social impact through music, in healthcare settings, care homes, schools, community centres and libraries, across England, Northern Ireland and Wales. Our work enhances quality of life, health and wellbeing, and promotes equity of opportunity. We reach over 55,000 people a year, train and employ 320 professional musicians from all genres. We have a staff team of 17. In 2024-2025 our turnover was £1.5 million.

## ABOUT THIS PROJECT

This project was aimed at:

- responding to isolation and loneliness in veterans living in the Medway area, to bring them together in an enjoyable and engaging music event, creating new social connections; and
- enabling access to support for life challenges, through raising awareness of a specialist advice service.

It was developed in partnership with the Medway Citizens Advice (CA) team and their Veterans First project. They highlighted that the Medway veterans population was both significant, because of the naval connection, and faced a range of challenges around debt, housing and benefits. However, they were hard to reach and often weren't aware of the support services on offer.

The activity included a process of development with partners, community consultation with local veterans and three live music participatory events over Spring and Summer 2024 at The Royal Engineers Museum in Gillingham. These featured local Live Music Now musician Gavin Alexander.

In late 2023 partner meetings took place to agree that a CA advice worker would attend the live music events, get to know veterans and make them aware of their specialist advice service and trial a new means of signposting to the service for people they were not already reaching.

Early in 2024, a consultation and participant development phase took place. The Medway based project manager carried out research and attended existing veteran breakfast club events to meet with representatives of the community, connect with potential participants and to gather feedback on what the event series should include and where they might take place.

## OUR PARTICIPANTS

Across the project we met and consulted with over 100 Medway veterans, with anonymous feedback forms completed by 51 Medway veterans; 20 during the consultation phase and 31 at the programmed events.

At the first event there were 14 people, 38 at the second and 46 at the third; a total cumulative of 98. This was made up of veterans (mostly men) and some family members. The majority of the men taking part were aged 55-75.

Location of the activity was key; considerable time was dedicated to finding the right space for these events to ensure accessibility and that veterans would feel welcome and willing to attend: good transport links, free parking, disabled access, catering facilities, central location, a large friendly and interesting

environment. The Royal Engineers Museum provided the perfect venue partnership for this pilot project.

Spending the time connecting and making relationships through existing local veterans networks and attending events was also key; as was an informal welcoming approach to the structure and content of the live music events with space for participants to contribute to the content and express their own musical identities.

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“Gavin <the musician> was really good on it. He was fun. There was nothing serious there. Almost nobody was bothered about how they sounded, you know, and I think Gavin was a big sell... I think the fact it was so informal, that was the main thing.”

**Participant**

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Having consistent, familiar faces was key. As well as Gavin, each event was attended by the Live Music Now Project Manager, a representative from Help for Heroes, the Museum Project Officer and the Citizens Advice advisers – greeting and chatting to people to make them feel welcome and recognised. Having built relationships and familiarity, the Citizens Advice Advisor was able to identify people who needed advice.

At each event free cooked food was offered, including bacon and sausage butties, as a result of feedback we collected during the consultation.

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“It was all the little things, you know you can say to someone, oh you get a free breakfast as well, you know, it's an attraction... you seemed to cover a lot of little extra bits, which drew extra people in.”

**Participant**

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By the final session there was a huge progression in engagement by the attendees with people bringing along their own instruments, standing to sing with Gavin, and two separate veterans arriving with their own songs to share and perform for everyone.

## OUR IMPACT

Feedback from participants shows that the events offered a totally new experience for Medway veterans, unlike any other social event in their monthly calendars and one they valued and became increasingly engaged with. Participants met and connected with new people and as a result of taking part felt more positive about themselves and more connected to their community. They gained new awareness about the CA's specialist advice service.

“I was surprised, everybody got really stuck in to it... we hear about music helping and, certainly, that worked here.”

**Participant**

Loneliness and mental ill health are common in the veteran community in the UK. Help for Heroes recently found that 82% of the veterans they surveyed said they were lonely and not getting the help they need:

“Often veterans who are lonely and isolated are the least likely group of people to come forward and ask for help.”

**Sarah, Help for Heroes Project Manager**

“We have been able to speak to veterans at every event and give follow-on advice and support through appointments at our office. It has made us more aware of local veterans and the networks and events they attend. We are also more aware of their needs and gaps in support in the community. As a traditionally hard to access group, there was extremely high engagement at these events. Many of them have told Citizens Advice how important it is for events such as this to be held at a regular place that they can attend.”

**Jack Lewis, Advice Services Manager  
at Citizens Advice Medway**

Citizens Advice evidence tells them that key issues for Medway veterans include housing insecurity, threats of eviction, and the inability to secure relevant benefits. Without guidance, many veterans face homelessness and escalating debt, particularly Disabled Veterans who often miss out on cost-of-living support payments. The emotional toll of these challenges significantly impacts their mental health and wellbeing.

This project directly addressed these needs by bringing advice into a community-focused, engaging setting where veterans can gather with peers. This approach fosters a supportive environment, reducing stigma around seeking help – participants connect over a high-quality interactive music experience and bacon butty, while receiving crucial information.

Citizens Advice Medway reached and advised new people, getting support directly to those in need. 60% of feedback responses said that before attending they were not aware of the Citizens Advice services. 76% said they were more aware of and connected to that service and 72% said they would like to find out more.



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# London Bubble Theatre Company

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BY LUCY BRADSHAW

Lucy is Executive Director and Co-CEO of London Bubble Theatre Company.



Rotherhithe Men's Shed; photo courtesy of Muna Liban.

## ABOUT US

Established in 1972 and based in Southwark, South East London since 1984, London Bubble's mission centres on creativity, connection, and community. We believe in uniting people through creative activities and amplifying the voices and stories of those who often go unheard in society.

In any given week we support people aged six to 100 with multiple, complex needs, including children with communication needs, children at risk of serious youth violence, young people in the care and criminal justice systems, unemployed young adults, early-career artists

facing barriers to the industry, and older adults living alone and in sheltered accommodation. We reduce financial barriers by offering all our activities free of charge.

## ABOUT THE ROTHERHITHE SHED

The Rotherhithe Shed provides the space, tools and community for older men to make, mend and upcycle their own creative projects. It is a collaborative initiative between London Bubble Theatre and neighbouring charity Time & Talents which provides a vital space for older people to foster creativity, fight isolation and build friendships, all for free.



The project was born from our concern about the lack of older men participating in activities locally, including our own Tea Break Theatre groups held in the lounges of sheltered housing and community spaces. As the Men's Shed movement was gaining momentum, we wondered how we could apply the same principles and make better use of the workshop space in our building. We ran pilot sessions in the space – involving hand-held practical activities like wood whittling. As we hoped, the activities sparked conversation, joy and sharing of life experiences.

The Rotherhithe Shed has been running consistently since 2014 and has welcomed over 200 people through its doors.

More people join weekly, and we are over-subscribed. Paradoxically, despite ten years of this valuable service to the community, we have been forced to reduce the number of sessions from two to one per week, due to lack of funds.

“Everyone who comes brings a different skill and there are opportunities to share those skills with other members.

This, for me, is a really important part of The Shed, and I've learnt a number of things through other members since joining. I'm proud, that at 77, I enjoy keeping my brain and body active and being a member of The Shed makes me feel good.”

**Participant**

## OUR PARTICIPANTS

Embracing inclusivity from the outset, The Rotherhithe Shed is open to both men and women aged 55 and over, catering to all abilities.

In last 12 months we welcomed around 40 active members, who drop in and out depending on their needs.

Members get up to anything and everything from building a pet feeding station, repurposing/refurbishing furniture, remodelling a guitar, basic DIY repairs, up-cycling items for a local charity shop; or large collaborations such as building Stephenson's Rocket locomotive from a disused mobility scooter! 'Shedders' are regularly invited to help to build and paint planting boxes for local community gardens and nature reserves.

Aged 55-86, Shed members are an eclectic and diverse gender-mix who attend for a variety of reasons. Some have physical or other health issues, and we can accommodate wheelchairs. Two members of freelance staff, one from each charity, are on hand to assist with equipment or to help those less able physically or who need some support to complete projects independently.

Shed members describe it as a 'youth club for older persons who wish to create and contribute'. Before each session starts you can guarantee at least a few members will have arrived early and be waiting for the workshop door to be unlocked. They'll help get the tables out onto the yard, ready for anyone who might want to spray paint or prefer to use outdoor space.

## STAR STORY...



As well as bringing their own independent projects, sometimes Rotherhithe Shed members work together on something bigger, often for the benefit of others in the local community.

When a local resident asked if the Shed could take a mobility scooter that was no longer working, they rose to the challenge. Having mended the electrics, members wondered what to do with it. Ever inventive, their solution was to convert it into a sleigh.

They created side and front panels, fitted a ledge to the back to carry presents and one member became the 'spirit of the Shed' bonnet mascot thanks to the use of a 3D printer! LED lights were added and a Bluetooth speaker on the back played bell sounds.

When the local Business Improvement District donated Christmas gifts for isolated local people, the sleigh was able to fulfil its destiny, and members drove it to two local sheltered housing units to deliver presents to residents.

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“ I only have limited mobility in one arm, so when you make something, or design something, you get a sense that you’ve achieved something. You feel part of a team and a community. ”

**Participant**

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The sense of belonging that members feel is evident – they call themselves ‘Shedists’ or ‘Shedders.’ Word of mouth is our strongest recruitment tool with our existing members encouraging new people to take part.

They value it being an accessible, inclusive space for people to come together. By providing all activities free of charge to our beneficiaries, we ensure financial circumstances are no barrier to taking part. There’s always a tea break mid-session and Shed members are usually found grouped around the tables out on the yard, passing around the biscuit tin and sandwiches.

The skills and experiences of each person are welcomed and valued at the Rotherhithe Shed, building strong relationships and sense of community across our members.

## OUR IMPACT

As well as being the ‘shed at the bottom of the garden’ that many older people in our local area don’t have access to, the Rotherhithe Shed provides a mutually supportive environment for sharing skills and advice. Following retirement, bereavement or declining health, having a positive space to be purposeful and create useful, practical projects supports physical and mental wellbeing.

One of our regular members described how the Rotherhithe Shed has transformed his weekly schedule. Another member shared the benefits sessions have had on their wellbeing over the last six years:

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“ It gives you a project to work on, it gives you a purpose and a bit of an incentive to come in and carry on. And then I find that in situations like that you get a sense of ownership and a sense of priority and urgency. ”

**Participant**

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# New Writing North

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BY TESS DENMAN-CLEAVER

Tess is Senior Programme Manager (Young People & Communities) for New Writing North.



Photo courtesy of New Writing North.

## ABOUT US

New Writing North's mission is to bring people together through writing, reading and engaging in ideas, deepening mutual understanding and encouraging creative habits. We find and support writers from all backgrounds to access creative opportunities and to enable them to flourish.

We work across the North of England. Our Young People and Communities programmes are focussed in the North East, where we take a long-term, place-based approach to working in some of the most deprived areas of the UK.

We have 22 permanent members of staff and an average annual turnover of £1.5m. We are an Arts Council NPO. Our partnerships span culture, industry, health and education.

## ABOUT THIS PROJECT

We run a Creative Writing Group for older men living in the West End of Newcastle who have a range of mental health vulnerabilities.

We developed this programme in partnership with Search Newcastle to respond to a need they identified for opportunities for older men who have mental health problems due to social

isolation, bereavement or caring responsibilities to come together, strengthen their social networks and increase their confidence.

We were already working with Search to deliver a mixed creative writing group for socially isolated older residents of the West End, and a filmmaking project with older South Asian women in the West End. These programmes were hugely successful in tackling the root causes of ill health, and Search could see the potential of our approach to delivering targeted creative activity for men they were already working in this area of the city.

The programme will run for an initial period of two years, but it sits within a long-term embedded programme that we have been running in Newcastle's West End for 12 years now, and which we intend to continue into the future.

The participants attend fortnightly sessions led by professional writer, novelist Matt Wesolowski, who leads storytelling and creative writing activities that are suitable for a range of writing abilities and literacy levels. Matt supports the group to share stories and looks for artistic potential in the work they are doing as a group, guiding them towards the production and sharing of finished written artworks they can be proud of and share with the local community and further afield.

## OUR PARTICIPANTS

A total of 29 men have attended the programme so far. After 13 sessions in total, a core group of five regular attenders has formed. The men we work with are between 56 and 79 years old.

The most common issue affecting the mental health of the men who attend is loneliness and social isolation. Most of the men we are working with suffer from extreme social anxiety and their daily lives are affected by the symptoms of severe depression. Many of them are carers, often for partners with dementia.

A lot of the men we meet are trepidatious about the idea of writing due to a lack of confidence, often as a result of negative experiences of school when they were younger. The most effective strategy for engaging them in the programme has been the advocacy of our key member of staff at Search, who has pre-existing trusting relationships with men

## STAR STORY...



Our Creative Men's Group is currently working on a ghost story project that will see them produce a set of short stories that encompass their interest in local histories, mythology and folklore, as well as being a way to explore themes of loss and bereavement through a creative lens. The project is supporting them to overcome anxiety about writing, because regardless of your literacy level or confidence, everyone has a ghost story to tell!

who would benefit from this activity. We also run taster sessions in places and programmes men already attend so that people can get to know Matt who leads the group, making the idea of attending for the first time less intimidating for people who do not feel confident with reading and writing, or who suffer from very high anxiety.

The men who come lack structure in their week to week lives, so this gives them something to do and a way to meet people. When they join, they enjoy telling their stories and getting to know each other; this is why they come back.

We emphasis the storytelling in the group description when telling new people about it as that is at the heart of the creative activity they do together, regardless of their confidence with writing.

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“ [the group] gives participants a lot, from structure and something to look forward to in their week, a safe space to chat and laugh, a place to challenge themselves and grow as well as trying something new or at least something that they have never done since school. ”

Staff member

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## OUR IMPACT

The group is still growing and becoming part of people's week to week routine, but we can already see that it "gives participants a lot, from structure and something to look forward to in their week, a safe space to chat and laugh, a place to challenge themselves and grow as well as trying something new or at least something that they have never done since school" (Search staff member).

We have been delivering 'creative health' work for as long as we have run engagement programmes and have seen incredibly positive

changes in people's lives, from having the confidence to go to the GP for chronic health issues, to completing GCSEs later in life due to improved literacy. People describe our programmes as 'lifelines' in areas where there is a severe lack of community infrastructure and support for residents.

Creativity and writing is the mechanism we use for addressing social inequality and addressing the root causes of poverty and ill health in these communities.



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# OTH Music Collective

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BY PAUL KANE

Paul is Director of OTH Music Collective and Music and Older People's Manager at Oh Yeah Music Centre.



Photo © Carrie Davenport

## ABOUT US

OTH Music Collective, formerly Over The Hill, was set up 12 years ago in Belfast. OTH provides a platform for older musicians/people to come together to perform, collaborate and learn about the music industry. We offer the opportunity to collaborate regardless of age, race or religion and provide a safe and welcoming setting for people to express themselves creatively.

We provide people the opportunity to record their music, tour and play external gigs. We work with people with dementia and provide

live music which enables people to relax, enjoy music and to use this as a vehicle to reminiscence. We have no paid staff and are run by volunteers. We are based out of the Oh Yeah Music Centre in Belfast.

OTH was set up to provide a platform for older musicians/people to come together to perform, collaborate and learn about the music industry. There is often negative bias toward older artists in the creative industry.



Photo © Carrie Davenport.

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“As a person who would now probably be labelled as a senior but in daily life very much behaves as a junior, I have found great value in taking an honest assessment of my life at this point, and particularly being allowed to use creative outlets to express it.”

**Participant**

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Before this there were no outlets for ‘older musicians’ or older people who enjoyed music to come together regularly.

We had no idea how long the concept might last but to date we have built partnerships, worked with many older people’s groups, and recorded four albums of original music recorded in professional studios and released in both physical and digital formats.

As well as recording music, we provide people the opportunity, tour and play external gigs throughout Northern Ireland. OTH also works with people with dementia and provides live music which enables people to enjoy music and to use this as a vehicle to reminiscence.

We feel this work strengthens the voice of older people, reduces isolation and loneliness and provides a legacy of creativity. Our work provides advocacy for older voices.

## OUR PARTICIPANTS

There are several dimensions to our work:

- regular meetings, which included meeting professional mentors;
- collaboration with other musicians or artists;
- recording of work;
- live showcase performances;
- providing live music to people living in residential care or community settings.

On average we have 25 people attending meetings and recording work involves at least 15 artists (including a house band). Our showcase work averages around five performers. Our work to date has mainly been with older men (but is open to all) and many who attend have recovered or are recovering from illness, have a chronic illness, or have mental health issues. Some have had early onset dementia.

Since its inception OTH attracted predominantly male participants. We are not wholly sure why this is the case; however, the environment we provide is welcoming, safe and central to Belfast. We also offered a buddy system to new participants which we felt helped people integrate more quickly. Fewer people use social media (anecdotally) who attend but we have a really strong word-of-mouth referral system. Writing, collaborating, recording and releasing original music has also helped to spread the word. We have also had many radio and print pieces on our work which we think appeals to our participants.

We have been told that it is great to meet like-minded people and people of their age bracket.

Some members have socioeconomic issues and our work is always free. We feel this also helps people attend.

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“I feel I have really personally achieved something incredible here. I am proud of both my work and my colleagues. This work has changed the way I think about how I create my music and that has been worth everything.”

**Participant**

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“Despite my reservations and ‘fear’, I have really enjoyed creating some of my own new music in my favourite room.”

**Participant**

## OUR IMPACT

For all participants this work was invaluable. In our experience, older men struggle with sustaining or building new relationships – listening, talking about, creating and participating in music projects has really brought people together.

The writing/recording work in particular offered a real sense of purpose, freedom and a chance to collaborate to produce a new body of work.

There has been great learning, building of confidence and a real sense of achievement. Legacy means that people can share and revisit work and many have become role models for others to attend and even try their hand at writing or recording new material.

## STAR STORY...



Room Songs was set up as a response to reducing isolation, loneliness and to foster and rekindle musical creativity. It was a community music initiative focused on the relationship between individuals and their living spaces. It focussed on feelings of being alone experienced by many, especially older people. The project involved four older musicians who lived alone writing songs about their rooms, personifying them as sentient beings. These songs were then produced, recorded, and distributed online. The four musicians comprised of people who had not written or performed in a while with professional musicians participating offering support. The work was supported by the Bank of Ireland's Begin Together fund.

Listen to the Room Songs album:  
[othmusiccollective.bandcamp.com/album/room-songs](https://othmusiccollective.bandcamp.com/album/room-songs).





# Re-Live

BY KARIN DIAMOND

Karin is Artistic Director at Re-Live.



Coming Home comic issue 1: art by Casey Raymond; image courtesy of Re-Live.

## ABOUT US

Re-Live is a life story arts organisation based in Wales, working alongside under-represented communities who wish to explore and express their lived experiences through the arts.

Our life story process invites people on a transformative journey and places their story centre stage. This process can be thrilling, cathartic and life-changing.

Along the way, new creative communities are formed, and stories that are often unheard reach wider audiences through theatre performances, comics, and songwriting projects – helping to build compassion and understanding in our complex world.

Re-Live works across Wales and internationally, with a small core team and, depending on the project, between two and eight freelance arts practitioners. Our annual budget is around £200,000.

Over the last twenty years, Re-Live has co-created life story projects with many older men through our creative ageing work and our theatre group, *Company of Elders*. In these settings, we've seen how creative collaboration and long-term relationships can help older men build trust, reflect on their lives, and express emotions that are often kept hidden. This experience has taught us that creative projects can benefit men if there is time, consistency, and genuine connection.

## ABOUT OUR PROJECT

In 2022, we set up a life story group for veterans – the **Coming Home comic book project**, which was open to ex-service men and women to support mental health and wellbeing. Six men over the age of 55 joined the group. Our veteran coordinator – herself a veteran and former Re-Live participant – played a vital role in connecting with participants. Her military experience and gentle support created an essential bridge between the arts and the veteran community.

Our new life story group met online during a period of continuing uncertainty after Covid-19, when many people were still living in isolation. As trust grew, the men began to share experiences they had held quietly for decades. The experience of being listened to, and of listening in return, helped dissolve years of silence and separation.

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“Support groups have never been on my radar... With Re-Live and my fellow veterans, I felt I was able to open up about things I've kept hidden for so long.”

**Participant**

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As the group's confidence grew, they began to talk about how they might share their stories more widely, so that other veterans might know they were not alone. From these conversations, the idea to co-create a comic emerged. For the men, comics offered a form that felt familiar, rooted in childhood memories of *The Beano*, *The Dandy*, and *Commando*. For Re-Live, this was completely new territory, but guided by the veterans, it quickly became



Stan at the Imperial War Museum's *War and the Mind* exhibition.

a shared creative challenge. The familiarity of comics made the creative risk possible — for them, and for us.

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“Holding a printed copy of *Coming Home* was a very important moment. I could feel the shame I'd lived with for so long lifting.”

**Stan, participant**

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The comics-making process provided both structure and support, offering a way to revisit difficult memories panel by panel. This gave the men time to pause, reflect, and stay present as they re-examined the past. It helped them avoid becoming overwhelmed by their own stories while staying in control of how they were told.

What began as a group of strangers became a small creative community built on trust, humour, and a shared purpose to get their stories out into the world. The process not only helped them release painful experiences but also to imagine new possibilities.

One veteran spoke about having reached rock bottom before joining *Coming Home*, and how the project helped him find peace and a renewed sense of purpose. Since then, he has reconnected with his family and looks forward

to becoming a grandparent for the first time. Another reflected on how the group, once strangers, “built a team of trust and opened our hearts by creating something truly unique.”

For some older men, talking about emotive experiences can feel impossible — yet we’ve seen how the comic can become a gateway to connection.

“Having my story in the comic means I don’t have to explain, warts and all, what happened to me. I can say, okay, well, have a read and then you’ll know where I’m coming from and what I’m about.”

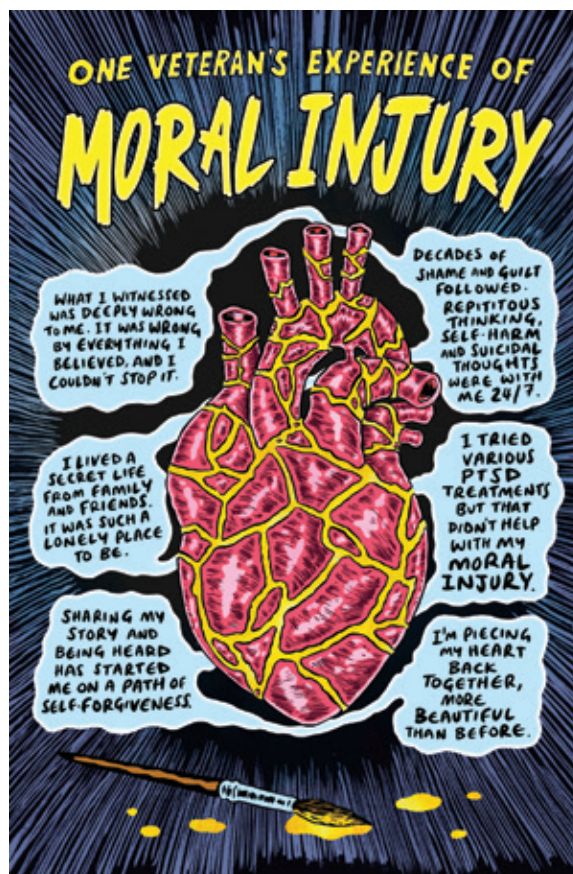
#### Participant

We have now co-created two *Coming Home* comics, which are used in NHS mental health and community settings, and in NHS training in Scotland, helping healthcare professionals better understand veterans’ experiences. They are available in comic shops for the wider public and, in 2025, became part of the permanent collection at the Imperial War Museums in London and Manchester.

Across the arts and health sector, there is growing awareness that men can be harder to reach through creative programmes. Yet when creative opportunities feel familiar — like the comic, they can offer men a space to reflect, connect, and begin to share what has long been unspoken.

We are now working with Stan, one of the veterans from the first *Coming Home* group, on a graphic novel that follows his life from boyhood to where he is now, reflecting on his journey as an older man in his seventies. The story explores how inherited ideas of masculinity and heroism shape a person’s sense of self — and what happens when those ideals are finally questioned.

We hope the graphic novel will connect with readers of all ages — but especially with older men who, like Stan, have found it difficult to



Coming Home comic issue 1: words by Stan; art by Casey Raymond.

speak openly about their experiences because of the unspoken expectations placed on men to stay strong and keep things in.

“This process is enabling me to understand who I am. I can talk now without shaking. I couldn’t have done that a year ago. My suicidal thoughts are behind me, and I’m now able to imagine a new future for myself.”

#### Stan, participant





# Romford Care Home: The Man Shed

BY TRACY SMITH

Tracy is Business Development Manager at RCH Care Homes.

## ABOUT US

Romford Care Home is in Romford, part of RCH Care Homes, and provides person-centred residential and nursing care, including for people with dementia. RCH Care Homes specialise in dementia care with innovative technology such as Motitech Bikes, Immerse Health Virtual Headsets, large digital tablets, services and environments designed to support emotional and physical wellbeing.

Romford Care Home launched The Man Shed in May 2025 – a twice-monthly community initiative created in partnership with the UK Men's Sheds Association. Officially opening its doors on 23 May, 3pm to 5pm, the Shed was set up to become a valued space where men of all ages can come together to share stories, skills, and good company.

Running on the first and third Friday of every month, The Man Shed is open to residents, their families, and the wider community. Whether it's woodworking, DIY, or simply enjoying a chat and a cuppa, the initiative offers a welcoming environment where individuals can connect through shared interests and purpose.

## OUR PARTICIPANTS

On an average week we have around 8 – 12 men attend the Shed. Most of the men care for family that live with dementia or other illnesses. Some of them have health conditions of their own, but they are mostly care givers. The average age is 72, however we have had a gentleman as young as 58 and one over 90, so all in all we have a very varied group.

“It's great that men's mental health is now being taken seriously.”

Local community member

When female partners move into care, their husbands or partners can become very lonely. Setting up a Men's Shed felt like the ideal way for us to offer support. Before we started we contacted local support and dementia groups to ask what was missing in the local area for older people. The response was astounding; we were told that whilst there are many groups offering support, there were none dedicated to men and none where it was more of a friendly relaxed atmosphere.

We are very lucky here to have two amazing volunteers, Bob and Bernie, who have both been in the position of needing support and who jumped at the chance to be able to return this to other men in need of the same.

“I'm very honoured to be able to give back some of the support I received when I needed it.”

Volunteer



## OUR IMPACT

Despite only being a few months old, the Man's Shed has already had an impact on both the local community members that have come to the Shed and on the residents we support.

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“It's been a long time since I have sat with friends and chatted about my life.”

**Participant**

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People that live here have loved that they have visitors and spend time sharing stories from their past.



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# Sound Minds

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**BY CHAS DE SWIET AND LOL O'CONNOR**

**Chas is CEO of Sound Minds and Lol is Volunteer Arts Facilitator at As It Is Arts and leads the Sound Minds Sea Shanty choir.**



Photo courtesy of Sound Minds.

## ABOUT US

Sound Minds is a user-led charity improving the mental health and wellbeing of people living in Wandsworth and the surrounding London boroughs through arts participation and peer support.

The majority of Sound Minds employees, volunteers and trustees have lived experience of mental ill health and originally came to use the service they now help to provide.

The core staff team of 11 provide music, visual arts and drama programmes, including high-profile gigs and exhibitions.

## ABOUT OUR PROJECT

During one of the weekly rehearsal sessions of the Sound Minds Community choir when the traditional sea-shanty, Drunken Sailor, was being sung as a warm-up, choir participant and stand-in choir leader, Lol O'Connor (61), noticed that the response to singing was particularly enthusiastic and full-voiced among the older men. After rehearsals, Lol approached them to ask whether they would like to meet regularly to sing shanties. Their response was very positive, expressing eagerness to begin as soon as possible.

“It’s fun! It brings back memories - when I was at school, we lived at a port and we used to sing sea shanties together and it brings back good memories of being a youngster by the sea. I enjoy the songs. I remember one time when we did a Christmas show and all dressed as matelots.”

#### Participant

A sea shanty is a type of traditional folk song originating from sailors. These songs were sung as work songs to accompany rhythmic labour on sailing ships. Shanties typically use a call and response and by nature are easy to share with others to learn and participate.

Lol is diagnosed autistic and bipolar and is an experienced theatre-maker, arts facilitator, acting teacher and musician. He had been compiling and learning an anthology of sea shanties and was keen to share them with others. Lol had also been researching mental health, social isolation and suicide in older men as part of his MSc in Creative Arts and Mental Health at Queen Mary University of London during which he had been shocked at the extent of older-male social isolation with associated mental health and their over-representation in death-by-suicide statistics.

### OUR PARTICIPANTS

The regular group is approximately five men with an age range of 61 to 75 and two to three women, ages 30-60+. All have lived experience of mental ill health.

During a sea-shanty session, the older men participating appear to experience a sense of freedom to express themselves more fully. They are encouraged to sing out unselfconsciously and often take up this invitation, often with more volume and vocal range than in other singing groups.

“What I like is getting people together of different ages and having an enjoyable time. Singing songs that I haven’t heard of before. I think it is run really well, in a way that is sociable, caring and understanding which makes it easy for people to participate.”

#### Participant

There also appears to be an empathy with the subject-matter of the narratives of the shanty e.g. loneliness, longing and loss as well as the mutual encouragement, bonding and mutual support of men voyaging and labouring together, in rhythm, as they sing.

We will often talk about the story behind a given shanty, and there is always a great deal of interest in this, with the participants invited to reflect on what it means to them.

In one memorable session, each person was invited to create their own verse for a shanty based on their own experiences and or story-of-the-day that they wished to share.

“I love the energy and the fun. I think it’s run very well by Lol.”

#### Participant

### OUR IMPACT

We believe that the impacts of the Sea Shanty-singing group on the participants include:

- increased self-esteem
- increased freedom of expression
- reduced self-consciousness
- sense of belonging/bonding to others
- social life
- social confidence
- self-expression
- recovery







Photo courtesy of the  
Causeway Shantymen.



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# A view from Finland

## Older men's participation in the City of Helsinki's cultural programme

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BY SARA KUUSI

Sara is a Special Planner at Helsinki's Culture and Leisure Department where she is responsible for developing cultural participation and accessibility.

**This article shares insights from art and culture projects funded by the Helsinki City Culture and Leisure Department in Finland.**

In 2020, Helsinki's City Council decided that unclaimed inheritances collected by the municipality should be dedicated to activities increasing the wellbeing of older residents. Before this, these funds had been allocated to the city's general social and health budget, so this new strategic focus on older people was a historic moment.

In 2025, there is a budget of 2 million euros, of which 1.3 million euros is for culture and 700,000 euros for physical activities to support Helsinki's older residents. The funds are held in common between the Culture Department and Sports Services, and projects that highlight participation, accessibility and innovative partnerships are prioritised.

The Culture Department is currently funding 32 projects taking place all over Helsinki and covering multiple art forms, including dance, circus, cinema, music, theatre and photography. The power of art and creativity have been fully realised in the diverse activities funded: music organisations have created neighborhood bands and choirs; dance schools have piloted new teaching methods and movement practices for older people; circus organisations have held intergenerational workshops and developed creative methods for healthcare professionals working with people with dementia. Performing arts groups have

collected stories and memories, which have then been staged as performances, or printed as recordings and publications.

An evaluation report in 2023 demonstrated that these projects have been meaningful and empowering for the older people involved: they have allowed them to express themselves creatively; helped to reduce feelings of loneliness and isolation; improved physical and mental wellbeing; and restored self-confidence. The funded projects have also been learning experiences for the cultural organisations and associations running them, who have been able to pilot and create new working methods, as well as find new partnerships and audiences.

However, when looking at the gender balance of the projects, it is evident that older men are under-represented. It seems that women are generally more active than men, they participate more in cultural and volunteering activities, and are more open to seek peer-support. Men seem to have a higher threshold for starting a new activity and accepting guidance, and may also feel uncertain about participating in something unfamiliar or artistic if they have no prior experience in those areas. Men do not participate as well in regular activities that require long-term commitment but prefer to come to open events and gatherings (such as senior cinema screenings, park dancing sessions or festival performances). These types of open events seem to engage men better and can then act as a necessary step to more regular participation.



Susanna Leinonen Dance Company's performance, *Roots*. The Company offers regular dance workshops, and also performances created and performed together by professional dancers and older participants. Photo © Sakari Viika.

“I was surprised that even as an elderly person, you can learn and understand dance as a movement language. I have experienced that I can free my mind through movement and I don't care what I look like and what others think. I felt that working in a group with like-minded people is very rewarding. I made new friends in the group and the connection has remained even after the project. I also liked the fact that contemporary dance is not a partner dance, but the expression is done in a larger group.”

**Participant, Susanna Leinonen  
Dance Company, see photo**

Funded organisations have also tried 'low-threshold' activities, such as intergenerational and family circus events where older caregivers have been given opportunities to try out circus equipment and perform easy tricks together with their grandchildren.

“Dancing has given me better fitness, mobility and stamina. For me, it is important in performing that it touches the audience and evokes different emotions. It's nice to hear that someone from the audience said: Oh, how you can do all that at that age!!”

**Participant, Susanna Leinonen  
Dance Company, see photo**

We have found some variety in men's participation between art forms. For example, the threshold for men to participate in music activities seems lower than for dance, theatre or visual arts. For instance, the band activities coordinated by a music education school have been really popular with men.

Project activities have been promoted through social media, local newspapers, posters, and newsletters. It is clear though that targeted marketing and tailored communication strategies need to be deployed to attract more older men. These include using male role models and testimonies from peers, as well as reaching out through channels that men are more likely to follow (e.g. sports

clubs, hobby groups, veterans' associations, or local community centres with male-oriented programming). Collaborating with partner organisations has also been useful in creating welcoming pathways into the project activities and in building a reassuring atmosphere.

One example of a project that has been able to attract men well is the Repair Thursdays sessions hosted by the Museum of Technology. These weekly workshops are designed to engage and encourage participants to repair various items, household goods and appliances, while offering them the opportunity to learn new skills in a communal and inspiring environment. Many of the older men who attend may still have the skills but might need help in repairing objects due to problems with sight or physical limitations. Those attending have found pride and joy by being able to help others and share their knowledge, e.g. about working with wood or metal objects. Repair Thursdays events always have two instructors present to guide and assist participants and they have clearly seen that that participation has been motivating and empowering to men as their life experience and skills can be transmitted to younger people.

To conclude, an imbalance in participation between genders has been evident in our cultural projects. Special attention needs to be given to identify communication tools and language that resonate better with men. Collaboration with relevant partner organisations has been essential and has helped to build pathways to other services and activities. Wide variation in the intensity and type of engagement is important, keeping in mind that low-threshold activities are an important first step in overcoming the barrier of participation and building a life-long relationship to arts and culture.

**Sara Kuusi is currently managing a new programme promoting cultural activities for older people, which is a joint initiative with Helsinki sports services.**





Susanna Leinonen Dance  
Company, Finland.  
Photo © Sakari Viika.



# Observations

## SCARCITY OF EXAMPLES

We have written many reports about good practice in the areas of participatory arts that we fund. We do this to shine a light on important issues and spread good practice. In most cases we have to carefully select examples with many more than that we would like to include than space permits. Although we are very grateful to everyone who has submitted one of the 15 case studies in this report, this represents all the examples that we were able to find after advertising for them through our extensive networks and a considerable amount of desk research. It appears to us that, given there is a lot of consensus about the need for greater involvement of older men in creative ageing, there is not a lot of activity. During the course of writing this report we did come across several additional examples such as *Men! Dance!*<sup>14</sup> in Liverpool. But to say that examples are few and far between seems to be putting it mildly.

The small number of targeted examples we have managed to gather for this report necessarily means that, aside from Men's Sheds, large parts of the UK lack any specialist creative ageing provision for men.

“The small number of targeted examples we have managed to gather for this report necessarily means that, aside from Men's Sheds, large parts of the UK lack any specialist creative ageing provision for men.”

We are well aware that funders to a large extent influence activity by arts organisations. There are very few examples of dedicated funding for creative ageing, (the Rayne Foundation and the Arts Council Northern Ireland being honourable exceptions). We aren't aware of any funders who have specially prioritised the inclusion of older men in creative activities. More generally, funding for older people's activities is thin on the ground and again almost never seems to emphasise the inclusion of older men.

## DIVERSE MEN

Everyone is intersectional – that is an older man, with a class background, ethnicity, of a faith or none, a sexuality and so on. When it comes to older men and creative ageing, there does not seem to have been a great deal of attention or targeting regarding intersectionality.

We are aware of some projects over the years that have focussed on older gay men. (There is a larger issue here too of LGBTI people being concerned about pressures of going 'back into the closet' if they become frailer and more dependent). In our 2023 report, *Creative ageing – what next?*<sup>15</sup>, Claire Cowell, also at The Whitworth in Manchester, wrote about their work with a group of older gay men, trans and non-binary people to contribute to an exhibition called (Un)Defining Queer. It does also feel as if there has been more consideration of the inclusion of working class men and making creative opportunities familiar and welcome to them.

Racialised minorities in the UK population tend to be younger and therefore there are proportionately fewer people in their sixties and above. Even so, the lack of opportunities focussing on them is concerning. This is especially important as in some communities

<sup>14</sup> [www.sadlerswells.com/digital-stage/elixir-on-digital-stage-2024/crossing-the-bar](http://www.sadlerswells.com/digital-stage/elixir-on-digital-stage-2024/crossing-the-bar)

<sup>15</sup> *Creative ageing – what next?*, Baring Foundation, 2023: [baringfoundation.org.uk/resource/creative-ageing-what-next](http://baringfoundation.org.uk/resource/creative-ageing-what-next).



Photo courtesy of John Stewart / Rotherhithe Men's Shed at London Bubble Theatre Company.

it is more difficult to have combined groups of men and women. The one example in this report – by Green Candle Dance (see page 34) – is sadly no longer running. This issue will only become more significant and concerning unless action is taken.

### THE MEN'S SHED MOVEMENT AND THE ROLE IT PLAYS IN CREATIVE AGEING

Men's Sheds started in Australia in 1999 and now number over 3,000 around the world. They feature in a number of case studies here (Rotherhithe Men's Shed/London Bubble Theatre - page 39, Romford Care Home - page 51, and Galanos House care home - page 32), as well as in our 2024 report about arts for and by men with mental health problems of any age.<sup>16</sup> There are roughly 1,100 Men's Sheds across the UK. Frequently these aren't in sheds and some include women in their membership. The average age of men using Men's Sheds is late sixties.

Men's Sheds rarely or never describe themselves as arts organisations. And yet most would have at least some strand of activity that everyone would see as creative rather than exclusively mechanical or functional like mending an electrical appliance. Most would include wood- and metal-working and some would even have kilns for pottery or drawing and painting classes. At a time of strained funding for the arts, Men's Sheds would very rarely look to arts funding to support their work, most of which is supported by a combination of low fees for members and voluntary effort.

Any account of creative ageing for men should acknowledge the extremely valuable contribution of Men's Sheds. But there are ways in which these movements are not coterminous. Although Men's Sheds do tend to engage older participants, this is by no means always the case and there are older men who would find it difficult to use a Men's Shed due to their frailty. And most importantly, their creative offer is limited and for instance would not include

<sup>16</sup> *Creatively Minded Men*, Baring Foundation, 2024. Available at: [baringfoundation.org.uk/resource/creatively-minded-men](https://baringfoundation.org.uk/resource/creatively-minded-men).



Photo courtesy of the Causeway Shantymen.

the performing arts, and very rarely creative writing or visual arts such as photography, film-making, drawing or painting.

### THE RANGE OF ART FORMS

The City of Helsinki's case study (see page 56) makes some interesting comments about art forms preferred by men and that the threshold for joining in music activity is lower than for theatre, dance and visual arts. There are several examples of group singing in this report – Live Music Now (see page 36), Causeway Shantymen (see page 20), Sound Minds (see page 53) and Blind Tiger/Infant Hercules (see page 17), as well as performing in a band in the OTH Music Collective in Belfast (see page 45). The reference made by Creative Arts East about the informality of watching cinema as opposed to 'theatre etiquette' also speaks to the idea of lower thresholds to participation (see page 25).

Although there are counter examples, several case studies talk about a male preference for one-off activities or short-term projects as opposed to weekly, perhaps more social groups.

Sara Kuusi mentions the Repair Thursdays held at the Museum of Technology in Helsinki (see page 58). We also have the example of Beamish Museum (see page 14), an outdoor heritage site which includes industrial heritage. And many of us will probably have noticed how many men volunteer to help industrial museums such as transport museums around the country or those like the Museum of Water and Steam in West London. These clearly feel like comfortable places for older men. They rarely include creative opportunities but clearly there is an opportunity for them to add photography or creative writing about the objects and histories they preserve.

### CREATIVE AGEING AND HEALTH INEQUALITIES

The Baring Foundation's arts funding is predicated on creativity being a human right – something that is essential for everyone. But creativity is also a public health issue. The positive impact of access to culture and of being creative is developing as a field of medical inquiry across the life course. There is a growing body of evidence about the positive effects of creativity, especially as regards

singing and people living with dementia. Rightly, there has been increasing attention on health inequalities and the effect that for instance living in a poor area has on a person's health outcomes and life expectancy. What is mentioned less often is that men on average always have shorter lifespans than women with a similar demographic profile. Putting these two facts together further strengthens the case for targeting men as regards creative ageing, acknowledging its positive effects on health.

## **A CALL TO ACTION**

There needs to be a concerted effort to make creative ageing more inclusive of men. This has a number of aspects.

### **Research**

There is remarkably little in the way of monitoring on gender or more in-depth research as to the barriers and solutions to men's relative lack of involvement in creative ageing.

### **Awareness**

There are a number of relevant networks for creative ageing and arts and health. These have very rarely made inclusion of men a

focus for discussion and mutual support. Let's have a national conference on creative ageing and men.

### **Leadership**

We are not aware of any arts infrastructure body or arts organisation that had made this a central issue for their work.

### **Dissemination of good practice**

There is a small number of good practice resources which are simple and effective. These need to be more actively promoted.

### **Partnerships**

These have proved effective in other areas of participatory arts and would be effective here too, for instance between Men's Sheds and arts organisations. More care homes too could partner with Men's Sheds.

### **Funding**

Funders often urge greater emphasis on particular communities but rarely on men. There are very few examples of funders dedicating funding to or promoting creative ageing, which is a problem in itself. There then needs to be more funder encouragement for the targeting of older men and their inclusion.

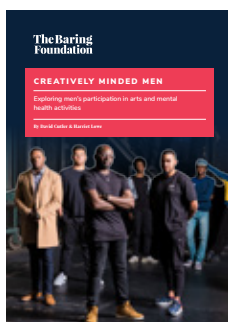


# Selected Baring Foundation resources

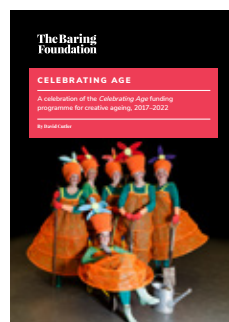
All resources can be found on our website [www.baringfoundation.org.uk](http://www.baringfoundation.org.uk)



Creative ageing: the directory  
The Baring Foundation  
2025



Creatively minded men  
David Cutler  
2024



Celebrating age: A celebration of the Celebrating Age funding programme, 2017–2022  
David Cutler  
2023



Creative ageing: what next?  
The Baring Foundation  
2023



Treasury of arts activities for older people, Vol. 2  
Liz Postlethwaite  
2021



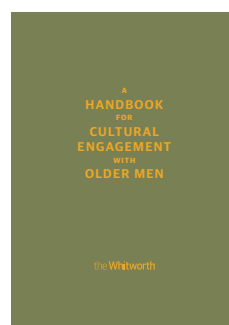
Treasury of arts activities for older people, Vol. 1  
Liz Postlethwaite  
2019



Around the world in 80 creative ageing projects  
David Cutler  
2020



Older and wiser: creative ageing in the UK 2010–19  
Rebecca Gordon-Nesbitt  
2019



A handbook for the cultural engagement of older men  
Ed Watts/The Whitworth  
2015









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