

The Baring Foundation



CREATIVE AGEING: WHAT NEXT?

An agenda for the future

Compiled by the Baring Foundation



CREATIVE AGEING: WHAT NEXT? AN AGENDA FOR THE FUTURE

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*.

From 2010-2019 the Foundation's Arts programme supported arts for older people. We have published widely on this subject – a list 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.

Acknowledgements

The Foundation would like to thank all of the authors for both contributing essays to this report and for their contributions to creative ageing.

This report was designed by Alex Valy and edited by Harriet Lowe, Communications and Research Manager at the Baring Foundation.

Creative ageing

There is no official definition of creative ageing.

For the purpose of these essays, we have suggested that any definition should be broad, covering all artforms and older people as audience members and as professional and non-professional creative practitioners.

The entire report could have been a discussion about what constitutes 'older'. Instead in an arbitrary way we have said it is 60 and above!



Sue Gill & John Fox at the launch event of 1001 Stories (Performance Ensemble and Leeds Playhouse). Photo © David Lindsay.

Contents

Foreword <i>by David Cutler, Baring Foundation</i>	07
Wider	09
Older, gifted and from the global majority <i>Arti Prasbar OBE</i>	10
Where are all the men? <i>Claire Cowell, The Whitworth</i>	14
LGBTQ+ inclusion and creative ageing <i>Lesley Wood, New Writing South</i>	20
Creative ageing in sheltered housing: a neglected issue? <i>Lucy Bradshaw, London Bubble</i>	24
What next for creative ageing and the age sector? <i>Farrell Renowden, CADA</i>	28
A global, networked future for creative ageing <i>Raisa Karttunen</i>	33
Deeper	37
More support for emerging older artists <i>Anne Gallacher, Luminare</i>	38
Performance Ensemble: the first older people's NPO <i>Alan Lyddiard, Performance Ensemble</i>	42
Provision not projects – embedding work with older people in arts organisations <i>Dr Virginia Tandy OBE</i>	46
Why is the youth arts sector different from the older people's sector? <i>Pauline Tambling CBE</i>	52

Research in creative ageing: gaps and future opportunities <i>Dr Robyn Dowlen, University of Manchester</i>	57
Dismantling ageism in the professional arts world <i>Dr Joe Atkinson, University of Southampton</i>	61
Older artists as leaders: resisting ageism in creative ageing <i>Sian Stevenson, Moving Memory Dance Company</i>	66
Could national government plans help develop creative ageing in the UK? <i>David Cutler, Baring Foundation</i>	71
A National Charter for creative ageing: the Irish model <i>Dr Tara Byrne, Age & Opportunity</i>	75
Further reading	80
Selected publications from the Baring Foundation	82

Foreword

**BY DAVID CUTLER,
BARING FOUNDATION**

Welcome to a short collection of essays on the future of creative ageing which the Baring Foundation has commissioned to coincide with a national conference organised by the Equal Arts and funded by the Arts Council England and us.

One of the few things that is predictable is that we are living in an ageing society. We see creativity and access to culture as a right at any age and the case for the benefits of the arts in older life has been made frequently and conclusively. So, let's look ahead with the help of the writers in this volume as to what a better future might look like for creative ageing in the UK.

In short, it should be wider and deeper as a field.

It needs to grow more inclusive of older people across the board, whether that's in terms of gender, ethnic diversity, sexual orientation or any other aspect of the older population.

It will include more older people in leadership positions, as older artists in 'mainstream arts' or within creative ageing itself. And that requires us to confront ageism in society, in the arts and in ourselves.

Research should move to a co-production model like the arts themselves.

We should find more opportunities for creative ageing and look at settings that may have been neglected so far, such as sheltered housing and with more activity by older people's organisations.

Creative ageing should become a long-term priority for arts funding as we have seen for children and young people, and that will influence the arts ecology. It should also involve the recognition of more older people's arts organisations, for instance as National Portfolio Organisations.

Provision of creative ageing activities must be a reliable core activity not just start and stop projects. It needs to be supported as a sector systematically, for instance through national strategies or national pledges.

And the world is ageing, so creative ageing needs to be truly international and networked.

Doubtless there are issues we have not covered here in this report, but this already constitutes an inspiring vision. It is worth working for. But there is no time to waste. Let's start now.

Wider



Love Unspoken, a production
by Arti Prashar/Spare Tyre.
Photo © Patrick Baldwin.

Older, gifted and from the global majority

BY ARTI PRASHAR OBE

About Arti

Arti was Artistic Director and CEO of theatre company Spare Tyre for 19 years, stepping down in 2019 and is now a freelance theatre-maker and consultant. She has a special interest in sensory theatre for people living with dementia and is the co-author of the recent report, *Visionaries: A South Asian arts and ageing counter narrative*.

I have donned my rose-tinted glasses to pen my thoughts. I am also channelling my inner storyteller to help me with my thoughts.

The experience of the Covid-19 pandemic has shown us here in the UK, and globally, that despite having the Equality Act 2010, how underrepresented we (intersectional global majority, ethnically diverse, people of colour) still are as leaders, makers, and receivers of arts and culture that is state or trust and foundation funded. There are still far too few of us who are not in leadership roles especially within large organisations and institutions. How steep that hill is to climb to achieve equity, inclusion, diversity *and* belonging. Without a deep and visible sense of belonging, equity, inclusion and diversity remain meaningless.

When I went to collect my OBE at Buckingham Palace in 2022, I made a conscious decision about wearing clothes that not only represented me but also my ethnicity. I chose not to curtsy but

to bow my head with a namaste – and to my surprise and delight it was meaningfully reciprocated. I was being me and accepted for being me with an openness that I have not fully experienced in my 40+ years in the cultural, heritage and arts sectors. Being me is complex, but that tiny moment of understanding was inclusive and significant. I was seen.

Acceptance and inclusion of cultural nuances and responding positively to them is vital if my world is to remain rose tinted as I go from my third age to my fourth age (according to Hindu culture).

Yes, a belonging future is complex, but this should not deter us from seeking different perspectives that could be so empowering for so many of us. To be seen and heard is the respect we deserve, and I believe it would be an inspirational boost for the tired creative ageing sector, especially as this sector operates within participatory arts, health and wellbeing and social care sectors. Where are our older artists? Given an opportunity, look at what we can achieve. Just look at Kully Thiarai at Leeds 2023.

So how should we continue our story? Well, older artists (whether professional or non-professional) need to be acknowledged, heard, and seen.

There are recent examples of a ripple effect happening of 'being seen'. As the writer and actor Meera Syal recently said as she accepted her BAFTA fellowship, "thank you for seeing us". At the same event, supporting actor winner Adeel Akhtar called it a "miracle". Sonia Boyce was the first black woman to represent Great Britain at the Venice Biennale 2022, visual artist Chila Kumari Burman Singh was impactful during Covid-19 with her light installation at Tate Britain, and Talvin Singh, the godfather of Asian underground music, received the Innovation Award at the 2022 Ivors Composer Awards. These are just a handful of high profile older global majority artists that are being seen but there are many who are not being 'seen'.

In storytelling, 'call and response' enables the story to continue and you meet new characters, discover quests, shape shifters, morals, myths and much, much more. After centuries of interaction with each other's cultures we should be able to understand that we can greet each other not only with a handshake or a high five but also a namaste or a hand to the heart – because that is the UK we live in today. The UK must have honest representation reflected in our arts. Will the arts respond positively to a changing UK demographic?

“ Will the arts respond positively to a changing UK demographic? ”

It is hopeful to see younger global majority leaders in key leadership roles at BAC, Bush Theatre in London, New Art Exchange in Nottingham, and Birmingham Museums. I hope this pipeline keeps producing more creative directors, writers, musicians, poets, designers, artists because it is global majority leaders who will bring about further creative and cultural change. Change that must be supported by funders without agendas, except for the wish to see the UK population reflected in culturally non-specific arts organisations.

However, all arts leaders and arts funders need to nurture ethnically diverse voices across the life course. It is not equitable to give young creatives opportunities at the expense of older artists.

What older global majority creatives need right now is for meaningful engagement with funders, and for funders to have the imagination to support them to thrive further. Older artists are still relevant and can produce innovative and pioneering creative projects. Older artists should be funded directly to

enable growth in their craft, even at the risk of failure, so that inspirational projects like The Amplify Project led by Pat Cumper and Pauline Walker can come about.¹ This is a culture changing podcast series that highlights global majority writers. It grows thoughtfully and has the potential to influence what we teach in our drama schools and archive in our great libraries. Kali Theatre's 30 Monologues and Duologues for South Asian actors has a similar potential. There is much craft, knowledge and wealth in the histories and heritage of the global majority that needs a light shining on it within the arts in general, but especially in creative ageing with those of us from the global majority.

So yes, my rose-tinted glasses remain on. But, if we the older artists are not sustained or supported across our life course with respect, we will fade, and then be forgotten. And then the next generation will end up reinventing the wheel. We, older artists, want to see ourselves reflected in the past, present and future, in arts, design, heritage, education, food and fashion. Perhaps AI and new technology can facilitate an encounter to tell this next story of being older, gifted and from the global majority.

I bow my head to honour my elders who came before me, paved the way for me to follow and give me the strength to create my own pathways. *Aum Shanti Aum.*

1 theamplifyproject.co.uk/writers/pat-cumper-pauline-walker

Where are all the men?

BY CLAIRE COWELL, THE WHITWORTH

About Claire

Claire is the Age Friendly Producer at the Whitworth Art Gallery in Manchester.

Despite being at the Whitworth, an organisation celebrated for its Age Friendly programming and not to mention our 2015 research, *A Handbook for Cultural Engagement with Older Men*,² we are still not finding it easy to engage older men in cultural activity. However, given the substantial evidence for the health and social benefits of engaging with art and culture for older men, we believe it is still an investment worth making.

Since the *Handbook for Cultural Engagement with Older Men* was launched back in 2015, we have developed a number of projects and approaches, some of which I will go through here and I hope will be useful to others trying to develop this work.

Firstly, some background. The Whitworth is part of The University of Manchester and sits in the Whitworth Park close to the University's Oxford Road campus. It was founded in 1889 for 'the perpetual gratification of the people of Manchester'. Today, the gallery is driven by a mission to work with communities to use art for positive social change, and actively address what matters most in people's lives.

² *A handbook for cultural engagement with older men*, Ed Watts, 2015. baringfoundation.org.uk/resource/a-handbook-for-cultural-engagement-with-older-men.

The Whitworth has been a cultural partner in Manchester City Council's Age Friendly Manchester (AFM) programme since 2009 when Manchester became the UK's first Age Friendly city.

In 2015, after a £17 million redevelopment, the Whitworth appointed a post specifically to develop the Age Friendly programme (that's me). During the redevelopment the gallery was closed, and the teams worked to develop new projects and approaches to keeping the gallery and its collection accessible. One of those projects was focussed on addressing an under-represented audience in the cultural sector: older men. The project was led by Ed Watts, currently Deputy Director at The Whitworth, who, with funding from Baring Foundation, researched older men's participation in cultural activity.

The findings of the report were gathered through conversations, with groups, artists, organisations and most importantly with older men. Older men's voices were at the heart of this research, both those who participate and, those who do not, in order to get their views on why they get involved and possibly more importantly, why they chose not to. These findings were then set out in the *Handbook* and designed to provide a framework for future programmes and methodologies when working with older men. The publication outlines findings across three key areas: **Recruitment, Programming and Participation and Impact.**

Alongside the research, a project was developed with a group of older men which would culminate in an exhibition in the newly re-opened gallery.

The project, 'Danger! Men at Work' was co-curated with a group of older male residents at an Anchor Housing Trust care home in Salford. The residents were visited by artists, curators and conservators from the Whitworth and co-developed the exhibition, which explored notions of masculinity, identity, and ageing. The group, made up of a retired postal worker, a civil servant, a teacher, crane engineer and bus driver, had full

control over which exhibits and artefacts should feature in the exhibition. The project recruited the group of older men through working with a local care home and the activities took place in their space which helped dispel barriers and put them and their experiences at the forefront.

The *Handbook* has had a huge amount of interest nationally and internationally. It has formed part of conferences and exchanges including in Australia, Taiwan and South Korea. The level of interest confirms this is not just a Manchester issue but very much a global issue.

That was 2015, so what have we done since then? The Whitworth Age Friendly Programme has continued to develop and deliver activities for older people and 'Handmade', the core offer of free weekly workshops, has proven to be popular with both men and women.

In addition to the core offer, we have developed projects specifically for older men: these include working in partnership with local artists and organisations to deliver time-limited projects such as a research publication on older artists, and a project with the Medaille Trust working with trafficked men.

In 2022, we worked in partnership with a local project, Boiler House, a community workshop and creative space. Using the framework in the *Handbook*, older men were recruited through local age-friendly networks and other groups. The project – 'Men Out of the Shed' – was an eight-week programme of workshops which focused on woodworking skills, with the aim that each participant would produce a greenwood stool which could be sold in the Whitworth shop. Participants learnt about the basics of using traditional greenwood working tools and techniques and used hardwood timber grown in the Manchester area.

The participants got the opportunity to learn about how to design, prepare and finish the timber, as well as learn how to use a belt sander, tenon cutter, draw knife and shaving horse! The project's impact was evidenced by the fact that the participants

kept coming back week after week, retaining an interest in the activity and keen to do more. Although some of the group knew each other, the majority did not and had not been to either the Boiler House or the gallery before. Friendships were formed between the men that continued after the project. The project was extended so that the group could launch the sale of the stools in the gallery shop during a weekend festival where they were also able to do demonstrations of wood turning.

More recently, we have worked with the Men's Room (a creative community for male, trans and non-binary people who sex work), which linked to our '(Un)Defining Queer' exhibition. Over the last year a partnership with the George House Trust AGE+ project has seen us deliver monthly artist led workshops with people (men and women) over 50 living with HIV.

I hope that gives a sense of the range and types of activity we're putting our energy into to address the under representation of older men, which we will continue to do. I will finish with some feedback from the daughter of one of the participants on the Men Out of the Shed project at Boiler House:

“ For the last 8 weeks Dad has been doing a green woodworking course, as part of the Whitworth's Men's Shed project. It's the first thing I've persuaded him to engage with other than TV since the pandemic and it's been amazing for him. Already a skilled woodworker, he's always been happiest when working with his hands but increasingly limited mobility and inability to leave Mum alone have meant he's not done any making for a long time.

It's been so good for him to move out of his role as 24/7 carer and lose himself in creative flow for a few precious hours a week. And after I dropped him off at the workshop in Moss Side, Mum and I went on our own adventures, taking in Whitworth Art Gallery, Victoria Baths & Elizabeth Gaskell's House as well

as autumnal walks around Manchester, so it was a highlight in our week as well as his, and meant Mum was also reconnecting with the world outside.

So, this is my longwinded way to say thank you to the Whitworth and Sow the City for this opportunity. It's had deep-reaching impact – a shining light to look towards, leading us out of dark times. ”

Participant's daughter, Men Out of the Shed project



Participants at The Whitworth's Age Friendly programme. Photo courtesy of The Whitworth, Manchester.

LGBTQ+ inclusion and creative ageing

BY LESLEY WOOD, NEW WRITING SOUTH

About Lesley

Lesley Wood is the CEO of New Writing South in Brighton. She has worked in the arts for over 35 years in a variety of roles including sound engineer, theatre producer, artistic director and company CEO. Lesley also programmes the annual festival of LGBTQ+ writing, The Coast is Queer.

What does it mean to be an older queer person in the 21st century, in an era where the divisive political, media and social media environment amplifies extreme views and differences – extreme views and differences that are a frightening echo of the oppression and fear you experienced throughout your life as you were variously discriminated against, criminalised, silenced, left out, kicked out, shamed, disowned, told you were unlovable.

It is evident that, today, LGBTQ+ people in the UK are more “seen” than ever – high profile, openly gay celebrities are embraced as national treasures, Pride events are celebrated in towns and cities across the country, LGBTQ+ people are legally protected from discrimination in the workplace and society, and same-sex marriage is equal before law. And yet many of the changes witnessed and won by older LGBTQ+ people seem to focus on younger generations and the disconnect is all but invisible.

For the LGBTQ+ community there are fewer opportunities to connect across generations; older members are more likely to live alone and less likely to have children than their heterosexual counterparts. This lack of an immediate family system can make older LGBTQ+ people more vulnerable to social isolation and its consequences. Old fears resurface as queer elders are again left out, silenced, isolated and still discriminated against.

There is ample evidence that participating in creative arts activities improves health, wellbeing and independence of older adults. Beyond the psychosocial benefits, we also know that participatory art is a bridge for connection, community building and empathy across whole sections of society. Contemporary arts framed around social justice provide opportunities to locate the ways our lives and identities converge and challenge the extreme views that divide us.

For the LGBTQ+ community this creative connection is more – more vital, more beneficial, more glorious. This is personal. Arts projects provide spaces of acceptance, understanding, love and validation and for this community; they provide unique opportunities for making connections within and between generations. They enable queer people to share and discover their heritage and their futures in ways not available to them anywhere else. LGBTQ+ centred creative projects activate reciprocal, transformative experiences where young queer people find their elders, and older queer people find their heirs.

“ I didn't even know there were old gay people living here. They were amazing. They don't even look gay... one man who was older than my Grandma. I can't really talk to my parents or anyone about being gay. ”

Arts project participant Adam, age 19

“ (He) said that it was all so much better for young gays these days with gay marriage and whatnot. But he can't hold hands with boyfriend where

he lives and they come to Brighton to live their 'queer life'. We talked about that. I didn't really appreciate how difficult life can be for these kids still, especially with online bullying and Twitter and things like that. ””

Arts project participant, Marion, age 80

Too often, stories that centre older people focus on deficits, not assets – hardship, loneliness, becoming a burden et al. For older LGBTQ+ people, the focus is often reverse-engineered even further to suggest an entire life of struggle and misery. Inspired by the explicit intention of the Baring Foundation-funded Celebrating Age scheme, New Writing South worked with a team of passionate queer elders to create *Hear Us Out*, a cross generational story-telling project that defiantly and actively celebrated participants' queerness.

”” The project makes me happy – it's a positive, creative, fun group who are interesting and inspiring to be with. It's unusual and a change for me to look forward to a group and leave the group feeling better than when I came in. I feel part of the community –not outside it. ””

Helen, age 79

It was critical that the project was empathetically led by members of the community – gay community theatre-maker Dinos Aristidou nurtured and inspired participants to record honest, brave, funny, surprising conversations – stories and anecdotes that ultimately became verbatim performances recorded by older participants themselves and shared online.³

”” Most significant is in gaining knowledge of verbatim performance, introducing me to a whole possibility that I knew of but had never thought of doing. Now I feel inspired to go wider and deeper into these skills, which fit well with me. I've learned how rich others' stories can be. I learned about the creativity, freedom and humour of my peer group. ””

Chris, age 62

³ At www.hearusout.live.

It is that sense of belonging, of being part of a community, that collective creative activities engender so well. This is especially important for generations of LGBTQ+ folk who lived in stealth for fear of incarceration, of their children being taken from them, or of their very lives.

“ I have gained a real sense of belonging to this sweet community of older people, their wisdom, humour, creativity. And it's important to me, being trans to find I belong here in a world which is so often hostile. ”

Persia, age 70

Working creatively in a space where no explanation is required is an empowering, joyful, energising, nurturing, history-saving, tradition-breaking, tradition-making experience for queer elders. It affects the stories that are told and the art that is made. This is the art, these are the stories that are the antidote to the prevailing divisive political, media and social media environment. This is what creative aging means for older LGBTQ+ people in the 21st century. Bring it on!

Creative ageing in sheltered housing: a neglected issue?

BY LUCY BRADSHAW, LONDON BUBBLE

About Lucy

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

Ten years ago, London Bubble made some new friends. They lived in the sheltered housing over the road from our building and the stories they shared with us featured in our intergenerational show about the Blitz.

I'll be the first to put my hand up to say, before then, I had never walked through the door of a sheltered housing unit. I couldn't have told you how it differed from a care home or any other type of housing. Based on many conversations I've had over the last ten years, I'm not alone in that.

We were ashamed that we hadn't previously made the effort to get to know people who live in places we walk past on the way from the station to our building. As we got to know our neighbours living in sheltered housing, we learned that everyone there was regarded as an independent adult, living in their own flat. Whilst there was a housing officer employed by the housing association and there was a communal lounge space, nothing took place there unless the residents organised it themselves.

I don't know about you, but I wouldn't feel particularly confident suggesting a social event to a brand-new set of neighbours. Even less so if I'd recently moved out of my home of many years, where I'd raised a family, had heaps of memories, but was now too big and the stairs too challenging. Residents told us there were no opportunities for people to get to know each other and to find common ground, to feel connected and visible.

Older adults with incredible stories lived on our doorstep, but what had their local theatre company got to offer them to keep that creativity thriving?

London Bubble aims to remove barriers to people taking part in making theatre. We knew what we offered had to be on the doorstep, free of charge and relaxed. We brought refreshments and played music. The lounges started to come to life and people got curious. We used everyday starting points to storytelling: what jobs have your hands done during your life? What actions would they do? What happens if we bring these different actions together with music?

We learnt that many of the people we were encouraging to take part viewed creativity as, at best, a luxury and, at worst, as superfluous to a life where, growing up, putting food on the table was the primary concern.

These gentle, social theatre groups in the lounges of sheltered housing became known as Tea Break Theatre. In 2023 we celebrate ten years of our Older Adults' Programme. To the best of our knowledge, London Bubble remains the only organisation offering participatory theatre groups to residents of sheltered housing in London.

The diversity of our members is striking, ranging from people in their 60s, working part time, to our almost centenarian, Doll. Some are determined to stay active and tell us about their travels and keep fit classes. For others, ill-health and lack of confidence means they rarely leave their flat.

When Covid-19 lockdowns were at their height I became frustrated by the narrative surrounding what was happening for older adults. I heard a lot about care homes and the challenges their staff and residents faced. But I didn't once hear anyone talk about sheltered housing. Why?

At the same time, I was on the phone with our Tea Break Theatre members most weeks. We'd adapted our practice to deliver weekly sessions on Zoom and 1:1 creative phone calls. I was speaking to people who had been self-isolating for months. Even if we'd been able to run Tea Break Theatre, the communal lounge spaces were locked to prevent people socialising. They relished the opportunity to share stories. With all the seriousness of the news, permission to be silly was a breath of fresh air.

Having returned to running in-person groups, our appreciation for the creativity, imagination and humour of the older adults we have the privilege to get to know has gone from strength to strength. Every week they surprise us and challenge our assumptions. Lockdowns created new possibilities: members will now join us on Zoom if they're abroad visiting family for any length of time. Why do they choose to? Because Tea Break Theatre has provided a new set of friends, a sense of community and a feeling of belonging. They want to be involved and have their say in what the group are creating, even if they're not physically in the room.

Making theatre collaboratively with Tea Break Theatre provides a sense of purpose. Being part of the wider London Bubble community provides access to social and cultural capital that many of our members tell us has shrunk for them with age and the move to sheltered housing. We're based in Southwark with its glorious density of world-renowned arts institutions. Bubble has spent 50 years supporting access to theatre for people in London who feel that those places are 'not for them'. People

who've lived in Southwark all their lives are finally setting foot in West End theatres (and enjoying themselves immensely) because they're part of Tea Break Theatre.

This June, our groups came together for our annual 'Takeover Day' where our Older Adult members take over every space in our building. They spend time with each other and share their work with fresh audiences. One member, who has been with us since our very first group told us:

“ When you're old, you become invisible. My friend and I joke about it, like when you're ignored or pushed to the side we joke “Oh, it's cos we're INVISIBLE aren't we?! ””

“ We don't feel invisible when we're with Bubble. On the Takeover Day instead of being ignored, strangers came up to us and congratulated us on our work. We weren't pushed to the side, people saw us. ””

Invisibility and access are two of the greatest obstacles Tea Break Theatre aims to overcome. We need sheltered housing and the views of its residents to become part of the conversation to break the cycle so that more people can appreciate their incredible insights and stories.

What next for creative ageing and the age sector?

BY FARRELL RENOWDEN, CADA

About Farrell

Farrell is the new Director of CADA, England's Creative Ageing Development Agency. She is also Head of Cultural Partnerships at Age UK Oxfordshire, leads the Age of Creativity Network, and is a Trustee of Human Story Theatre Company.

When you think of the age sector and creative ageing, what immediately springs to mind? Making Christmas cards, Knit and Natter groups, or chair-based movement... Whatever it is, I'm guessing that you aren't picturing something that you might long for in later life. Having spent eight years supporting local Age UKs across the country to develop their creative offer, it's true that most delivery is based in a community centre, led by a volunteer, rather than projects funded by Arts Councils, so you could be forgiven for thinking that the age sector has been left behind when it comes to the creative ageing movement. But whether you realise it or not, they have been on quite a profound creative journey and continue to be so.

Back in 2015, I was the only person with a role dedicated to creativity across Age UK, and it felt like there was little hope in making it beyond my fixed term contract. Some colleagues were curious about my remit, but most felt my project was a frivolous experiment when day centres were closing and food banks were opening. At that time, I leaned into the 'Age Friendly Museums'

programme because there were gains to be made, and I had access to older people who weren't the 'usual suspects'. Little did I know that this was my age sector apprenticeship when I learned hard truths about working with older people marginalised by the cultural sector and realised my colleagues really were the experts in older people and critical assets to the creative ageing ecology.

The breakthrough came in 2017, with the publication of the *Index of Wellbeing in Later Life*,⁴ when 'creative and cultural participation' was revealed to be the top determinant of wellbeing for those aged over 60, using a trusted national dataset. The research hadn't set out to measure the impact of creativity in later life, and the link between culture and wellbeing had not yet been widely acknowledged, so the findings came as a shock to Age UK, and a gift to us all. Working with Age UK's Research Team, I co-authored a follow up paper *Creative and Cultural Activities and Wellbeing in Later Life*⁵ and this subsequently became my golden ticket to progress across the organisation, and the wider sector.

The reason the age sector is so effective at working with older people is because they are motivated by whatever supports older people to live their best lives: pension credits, scams prevention, creativity. These new reports showed the instrumental value of creativity in supporting wellbeing, from older people themselves, so the evidence threshold had finally been reached. The response from colleagues was significant, projects such as Dance for Parkinson's, Singing for the Brain, Music and Dementia were in demand, and many local Age

4 A summary of Age UK's Index of Wellbeing in Later Life, Age UK, 2017. Available at: www.ageuk.org.uk/globalassets/age-uk/documents/reports-and-publications/reports-and-briefings/health--wellbeing/ageuk-wellbeing-index-summary-web.pdf.

5 *Creative and Cultural Activities and Wellbeing in Later Life*, Age UK, 2018. Available at: www.ageuk.org.uk/bp-assets/globalassets/oxfordshire/original-blocks/about-us/age-uk-report--creative-and-cultural-activities-and-wellbeing-in-later-life-april-2018.pdf.

UK's joined Celebrating Age⁶ projects, investing resource into strategic cultural programmes. When Covid-19 lockdowns came, cross-sector partnerships flourished as the necessity for innovation forced us all to adapt our practice. So, with all this development, why do we still assume that the age sector lacks progression in creative ageing delivery?

Martin Green (Care England) recently said that the care sector is based on a 'deficit model which assumes that being in need of support and being able to contribute to society are mutually exclusive'⁷ and this is a significant point when it comes to creative ageing from an age sector perspective. When viewed through the lens of a deficit model, creativity becomes an instrumental 'intervention' that reduces decline and loss, rather than a fundamental human right, and intrinsic to the human condition. But whether we like it or not, older people are statistically more likely to acquire a health condition, impairment, or disability, and the support they will need over time will increase and the age sector is built on this premise. Ageist or otherwise, the age sector offers services based on providing an antidote to loss and decline and *The Index of Wellbeing in Later Life*, speaks to this narrative, which is why it gained traction. So, if older people 'need' creativity to live their best lives, what is the harm in an interventionist approach if the wider care sector will support it?

In my opinion, there is no harm, and this work is crucial to the creative ageing sector as a plural, intersectional ecosystem. Neither is there harm in making Christmas cards, Knit and Natter groups, or chair-based movement. There is merit in community creativity and everyday creativity; there is space for it all. However, there is a danger that because one element of creative ageing is gaining traction, we ignore the others. At what point do we also make space to discuss the fact that the

6 *Celebrating Age programme evaluation: final report*, Imogen Blood Associates/ Arts Council England, 2023. Available at: www.artscouncil.org.uk/celebrating-age-programme-evaluation-final-report

7 See: www.youtube.com/watch?v=I7rOJRHZ06Y.

‘cultural industries generates £109bn to the UK economy’⁸, there is a 1 million shortfall in the workforce⁹ and older people are part of the solution, when can we discuss the ‘class ceiling’¹⁰ policy and why it’s reserved for the young, when do we explore older artists with long-term health conditions, impairments or disabilities and our responsibility to help them to continue to make art until they die?

“ If cultural boards, senior management teams and programmers aren’t thinking about age, ageing and ageism in the same terms as other protected characteristics, then are they progressive? ”

If the argument is that these discussions are for the cultural sector, rather than the age sector, then why isn’t it happening? It is my belief that the cultural sector is equally culpable of seeing creative ageing through a narrow lens and missing the wider context. There might be more specialist creative programmes in venues than in 2015 when I was pushing the agenda, but if cultural boards, senior management teams and programmers aren’t thinking about age, ageing and ageism in the same terms as other protected characteristics, then are they progressive? I would argue that the music/ design/ festival industry has as much to learn about Creative Ageing as the volunteers running creative activities in community centres.

When we stop viewing creativity as an intervention, programme, or engagement, and see it as an instrumental part of life, many of these questions become redundant. The reality is, we are

8 *Arts and creative industries: The case for a strategy*, House of Lords, 2022. Available at: lordslibrary.parliament.uk/arts-and-creative-industries-the-case-for-a-strategy.

9 Freelancers in the arts and creative sectors, House of Lords, 2023. Available at: lordslibrary.parliament.uk/freelancers-in-the-arts-and-creative-sectors.

10 E.g. labour.org.uk/missions/breaking-down-barriers-to-opportunity.

all ageing, no matter what sector we work in and whatever creativity means to us, so we all have a vested interest in developing a creative later life that we can look forward to. Ageism pits our younger selves against our older selves, so let's make space to discuss creative ageing as the life we all might want: dance if we are diagnosed with Parkinson's, Age Friendly Museums, new routes into the creative industries, Knit and Natter groups, bursaries for accessible arts equipment... There is no hierarchy; the creative ageing ecology is rich and diverse, but it needs progressive development and collective action by us all.

A global, networked future for creative ageing

BY RAISA KARTTUNEN,
THE CABLE FACTORY, FINLAND

About Raisa

Raisa Karttunen works as a Producer in the biggest cultural centre in Finland, The Cable Factory. She is the founder and director of the Finnish creative ageing festival, Armas.

What are we talking about when we talk about creative ageing? In my experience, it can mean different things depending on who is speaking, where the discussion is being held, and the angle we are approaching the issue from. Rapidly ageing societies are a reality around the world, and it is easy to see the commonalities in London, Laos and in Los Angeles. However, we tend to use different words when examining the issue of ageing, whether from the perspective of the care sector or the perspective of the cultural sector, for example. We need a shared language to understand and to be understood.

International gatherings

In 2019, the Baring Foundation published *Around the world in 80 creative ageing projects*, which showed that there are similar challenges, but different solutions to implementing creative ageing across the world. Two year later, the Finnish creative ageing festival, Armas, organised the first international creative ageing gathering in collaboration with the Baring Foundation

and the City of Helsinki. Entitled 'To Infinity and Beyond: Visions and Strategies for the Arts and Our Ageing Societies', this online event was a remarkable success with participants from 14 different countries representing the arts, health and social care, research, and education sectors. The following year, over 200 participants across five countries attended the online summit, 'Ageing Artfully: Going Global', hosted by the UK Creative Ageing Development Agency (CADA) in collaboration with the City of Helsinki, the Baring Foundation and the Greater Manchester Combined Authority. In June 2023, the third international summit was hosted by Lifetime Arts in New York. This event – 'Paradigm *Shift*: Advancing the Cultural Rights of Older People' – attracted more than 430 registrations from 23 countries.

The interest in these gatherings shows that there really is a need for facilitation and networking between actors in the field of arts and healthcare, policy makers, and communities to learn from each other. As a movement, we already know the creative potential of older people, but current services and opportunities are not sufficient to respond to current and future demand. It is time to look beyond seminars.

An international centre for creative aging?

There is no funded or staffed professional body that brings together the issues of ageing and creativity at the international level. However, in a collaboration between the Armas festival, its host organisation Kaapeli and the Baring Foundation, the first outlines of the mission of such a centre were sketched out during the summer of 2023. We envisage that an international centre could be:

- **A bridge:** acting as an intermediary between the separate policy worlds of arts and ageing.

- **A network:** members would all share an interest in creative ageing. They could come from the arts/ageing/health/disability sectors. Professionally, members could be artists, researchers, others working in those sectors, and organisations at the local, national, and international level.
- **A knowledge repository,** including an updated digital map of organisations, research and tools.
- **A focus for advocacy,** largely directed at the national level, encouraging countries where creative ageing is in its infancy.

The centre would also ensure the continuity of the annual gatherings we've started.

Cultural participation and cultural rights

Ageing societies are a global phenomenon, and the rights of older people will become more important as they become a larger part of almost all societies. Participation in cultural activities plummets when people turn 70 or 75. There are several reasons for this: illness/disability, loss of contact with friends/relatives, lack of transport services, dislike of going out alone or in the evening or lack of interest in the cultural activities on offer. Nevertheless, cultural participation is linked to several areas of social and economic impact: social inclusion, wellbeing and health, and civic engagement. We all are facing the same challenges of improving the participation and securing the cultural rights of the older people.

We can't afford for an ever-growing section of our societies to be left without services and without voice. We need to strengthen the international movement to advance the cultural rights of older adults through creative ageing.

Armas Festival, the Baring Foundation and Kaapeli have already started to do the groundwork to establish an international centre for creative ageing. An African proverb says it takes a village to raise a child. Maybe it takes a global centre to create a brighter future for creative ageing.

Deeper



Cultural Instructors/Pirjo Rantala.
Courtesy of City of Helsinki Social
Services and Health Care.

More support for emerging older artists

BY ANNE GALLACHER, LUMINATE

About Anne

Anne has been Director of Luminare, Scotland's creative ageing development ageing, since the first Luminare Festival was launched in 2012.

Luminare is Scotland's creative ageing organisation, and we aim to ensure that older people's creativity can flourish whatever their circumstances, experience, interests and ambitions. The final word in that sentence is important to us; we believe older people should have the opportunity to fulfil their creative ambitions whatever they are, including developing a professional arts practice if that's their aim.

Luminare has worked with older, early career artists since 2017, when we first collaborated with Magnetic North Theatre Company on a residential lab for older artists at Cove Park artists' centre in Argyll. The artist proposals we received were impressive in both number and quality, and the response convinced us that there was a need for an ongoing programme of support. This has now become a central strand of our work.

Our programmes for older emerging artists support people who wanted to study an artform in their youth but didn't have the chance, as well as those who discovered a new talent in their later years. We've also worked with people who had been to art college, conservatoire or studied an arts course at university

when they were younger, but life had taken them down a different route and in their later years they wanted to return to their artform. Then there are those who already worked in the arts but were looking to make a change – community artists and producers for example, who had spent their careers supporting other people's creativity and now wanted to nurture their own.

Becoming a professional artist in your twenties brings many challenges, but doing so in your later years can be tougher still. Finding opportunities to develop skills, experience and networks can prove tricky. You may have caring responsibilities, perhaps for teenage children or young grandchildren as well as for ageing parents; you may have work and financial commitments that limit your flexibility. You almost certainly have less energy than you had in your twenties.

“Becoming a professional artist in your twenties brings many challenges, but doing so in your later years can be tougher still.”

And then there are societal attitudes to contend with – the commonly held view that innovation is only possible if you're young, for example. These kinds of views are deeply held, and I think they are a key issue here.

In 2021, Luminare was a partner in an exploratory project connecting older artists in Taiwan and Scotland, along with Taipei Artists' Village and Cove Park, and with support from the British Council. Although not focused on emerging artists, there was learning from these conversations that I think is relevant.

The Taiwanese artists were surprised to have been invited to participate specifically because of their age, and it became increasingly clear that the different perspectives on ageing affected how the artists thought about their practice in relation

to their own ageing process. For the Taiwanese artists, while they expected physical changes, ageing was perceived overall as a strength, bringing more life experience and deeper thinking to their practice. For the Scottish artists, ageing was seen as more likely to be a challenge, with self-confidence and interpersonal relationships being hindered along with a much larger sense of restriction caused by physical changes.

It is clear that the culture in which we live and work has a huge influence on us. Our expectations, both of the opportunities that might be available to us and of what we may be capable of at different stages of our lives, are undoubtedly shaped by the views of ageing that we see and hear around us from a very early age.

Related to these cultural issues are challenges of language. I think the expression ‘emerging artist’ has become conflated in our thinking with ‘young artist’, and yet we all emerge – and re-emerge – in different ways across our lives. We take on new roles regularly – change jobs, work on different projects, become a partner, a parent, a grandparent, a mentor or a friend – and we learn new things throughout our lives.

“ ‘Emerging artist’ has become conflated in our thinking with ‘young artist’, and yet we all emerge – and re-emerge – in different ways across our lives. ”

But still, we tend to connect the new with the young. We either need to change our thinking on this or find a new way of describing what we mean by ‘emerging’. Undoubtedly many of the older artists supported by Luminare don’t feel that other emerging artists’ programmes are for them, even those that don’t have age limits attached.

So, in the next ten years as society ages and it becomes increasingly commonplace for people to have second – and even third – careers, what needs to happen to change the landscape for an older person who wants to become a professional artist?

Firstly, I think we need greater recognition within the arts sector that career journeys are frequently not linear: people change career, retrain, have career breaks and discover new interests and talents throughout their lives. Professional development and commissioning opportunities for artists need to be framed in a way that reflects this.

I believe we will still need some opportunities specifically for older artists, particularly for those at an early stage in their development who may have been away from higher education for some time, or whose training may have been gained via a less traditional route. Our experience at Luminare is that sharing learning with people at similar life stages can be valuable and affirming, and can play an important role in validating someone's practice and building their confidence.

Support for networking is needed too. If your initial training took place many years ago and you haven't been involved in the sector for a while, you are unlikely to have the current connections and networks that many younger artists have. Moving forward, we need to ensure that there are opportunities for older and younger artists – regardless of their training or career route – to network with each other and with cultural organisations and policy makers, to support the development of a truly age-diverse sector.

Supporting older emerging artists remains a high priority for Luminare, and artists tell us they value this support. I have been hugely inspired by the work created by those we work with – they have interesting things to say and fascinating ideas to explore, and they are diverse in their passions and skills.

In ten years' time, I hope opportunities for artists will be more inclusive of those who develop a new arts practice later in life; the arts world will be stronger for it.

Performance Ensemble: the first older people's NPO

BY ALAN LYDDIARD

About Alan

Alan is the Artistic Director of The Performance Ensemble, and an award-winning theatre and film director, producer, and writer working across the UK, Europe and beyond. He was formally Artistic Director of Northern Stage from 1992 to 2005 where he formed the Northern Stage Ensemble.

The last time I was in charge of an Arts Council England (ACE) National Portfolio Company (NPO) was 18 years ago at Northern Stage in Newcastle. I joined that company in 1992, the same week that Kevin Keegan become manager of Newcastle United and was caught up by the optimism of the moment. I left in 2005 having created a young ensemble company of performers from the North East of England, who created work in Newcastle and toured it across the UK and internationally.

Now, The Performance Ensemble, based in Leeds, a company I founded in 2016, has been awarded NPO funding from ACE and I am learning from the past and getting excited about the future.

When world-renowned Japanese theatre director Yukio Ninagawa put an advertisement in the newspaper in 2006 and invited older people to audition for his new company, The Gold Theatre of Saitama, it inspired me. When Pina Bausch created a company of local older people from Wuppertal to recreate her piece 'Kontakhof' and tour it across Europe it inspired me.

I had met both artists, followed their work for decades and presented Ninagawa's work at Northern Stage, so I was familiar with their performance work and philosophy. I visited Saitama Theatre in 2016 and met with Ninagawa again. By this time, he had formed a young company. His production of *Richard the Second* with both companies was utterly spellbinding.

Both artists spent all their lives creating great performances around the world with their professional companies.

Both changed direction and formed ensembles of older non-professional performers in order to learn something new for themselves. To create a new style of theatre.

Today I am following in their shadow and creating the first permanent ensemble of older artists in Britain, creating 'art with the experience of age'.

“Today I am [...] creating the first permanent ensemble of older artists in Britain, creating 'art with the experience of age'.”

We are putting together a company of artists, some of whom have spent all their working lives in the professional arts and some who have spent all their working life doing other things. We have, for example, a former rocket scientist, an ex-primary school teacher, a former priest who doesn't believe in God anymore, and a range of other older people who bring a wealth of knowledge and experience to our company.

Our work emerges from stories of our own lives, from the past, the present and from an imagined future. Authentic stories told through performance, music and dance that reflect our lives and our desires. We are interested in those seemingly insignificant things in life that become meaningful to us and others. Small

moments that teach us things about ourselves and the world we live in. When we share them through performance or short videos or on radio or in exhibitions, we do so in the naive assumption that we might change attitudes about what it means to grow old.

There are approximately 167,000 people over the age of 60 currently living in Leeds, roughly 20% of the city's population. Leeds City Council's ambition is to be a place where people age well: where older people are valued, feel respected and appreciated, and are seen as the assets they are. Being age-friendly is one of the eight priorities of the Council Plan. So, we will play our part.

We have just completed a large-scale project for Leeds 2023 Year of Culture Celebrations called '1001 Stories – A Take Over of Leeds Playhouse by Older People'. It started with us collecting stories. Our plan was to collect 1001 Stories from older people across Leeds. Stories that told others who we were. To entertain. To inform. To educate and, inspired by the story of Scheherazade, to keep ourselves alive.

In fact, we collected over 1200 stories from every corner of Leeds, some in different languages and from many diverse cultures across the city. These stories were the material that ignited the Take Over of Leeds Playhouse. Over 80 community organisations from the city banded together to fill every inch of the public and theatre spaces, to bring older people's creativity into a city centre institution and make a noise. Two weeks full of stories, performance, music, dance, circus skills, roller skating, DJ-ing, exhibitions, poetry, open mic sessions, burlesque, shared recipes and discussions to name a few of the events. Most importantly eating, drinking talking and laughing together.

We also made a new piece of contemporary performance, *Sinfonia*. Everything made by the ensemble is created in a devising process in the rehearsal room with the performers. They are telling their own stories and sharing their personal reflections of life and their desires for the future.

Sinfonia is about the relationships between intimacy and spectacle. About how we build love and solidarity for each other when we believe in something together. The performers had a lot to say. They all want to be part of a movement for change and the views expressed in *Sinfonia* began to address their concerns. It was extremely well received by audiences and critics alike. We plan to tour it across UK and internationally over the next three years.

With three-year funding we can continue our participatory work in collaboration with partners across the city. We have a sense of permanence even though we know nothing lasts forever. We have been given an incredible opportunity and a big responsibility.

In the last seven years of project funding we have started a process. It is just the beginning. The 167,000 older people will grow in numbers. The number of Leeds residents, for example, aged 80 and over, it is estimated, will increase by about 50% in the next 20 years.

Our major aim is to build a better future, offering older people the opportunity to explore their own inherent creativity and support them to make meaningful contributions to society. In the process we will make beautiful art with thousands of people in theatres, streets, communities, on sites and online. We hope to inspire others, build new opportunities and touch people of all ages and share the knowledge that older people are not to be underestimated.

Provision not projects – embedding work with older people in arts organisations

BY DR VIRGINIA TANDY OBE

About Virginia

Virginia was the Founding Director of CADA – England’s creative development agency, and formerly the Director of Culture for Manchester City Council.

Why is this important?

Ageing is a global issue. 2020-2030 is the World Health Organization’s *Decade of Healthy Ageing*. As part of adjusting to an increasingly older population, we must reframe our view of later life, confront our mortality and assert our right to remain creatively engaged to the end of our days. This issue is not about ‘other’ older people but about ourselves and our families. Creative ageing can be an important part of ageing better, extending our health span as well as our lifespan.

This stage of the life course should be full of opportunity offering social connection and purpose, the discovery and development of new skills and talents and a channel for activism and agency. For some older people who were dissuaded from pursuing a career in the arts when they were young or had no access to opportunities, this time in their life is their chance to finally follow their interest and develop new skills. Creative work

by and with older people that explores art with the experience of age can be one of the most powerful ways of sparking bigger and better conversations about later life.

One of the biggest barriers to making progress, in terms of increasing investment in the amount of and access to high quality creative ageing activity, is that we don't like talking about or thinking about ageing. The poverty of positive language about growing older is evidence of this, just take a look at birthday cards.¹¹ Despite age being a protected characteristic and the one that will relate to most of us in time, there is still only guidance, not standards, for the press about writing accurately about ageing and older people.¹² In England, there has been no national government policy on older people since 2015. Ageism is ever present. At its best, arts and culture can offer new imagery and narratives about later life, moving us towards more equitable treatment of older people.

Where are we now?

National multimillion pound and multi-year funding programmes focused on older people, both in culture and community development were in place until 2022. *Ageing Better*, developed by the National Lottery Community Fund, invested in older people in 15 communities across the UK and *Celebrating Age*, funded by Arts Council England (ACE) and the Baring Foundation, supported 31 creative projects across the country. These two programmes were running alongside the Baring Foundation's own visionary creative ageing programme (2009-2019).¹³ All were time-limited and have now ended. They leave behind a lot of learning and legacy, such as the establishment of CADA: the creative ageing development agency in England. Now is the time to think what is next for

11 www.betterbirthdays.org

12 See: ageing-better.org.uk/news/guidance-for-journalists-writing-about-older-age-available-on-IPSO-website.

13 *Older and wiser: creative ageing in the UK 2010-2019*, Rebecca Gordon-Nesbitt/King's College London, 2019. baringfoundation.org.uk/resource/older-and-wiser-creative-ageing-in-the-uk-2010-19.

this growing population group, which was one of the most impacted by the pandemic and, it could be argued, has been the slowest to recover.

The UK's 2021 census confirms our shifting demographic. We now have a population with more people over 65 than under 15 and this trend is forecast to continue. How do we respond to the challenges this brings? Arts and heritage organisations are making tough choices in the current adverse economic climate. Where are older people in their thinking? We know that pre-pandemic over 50% of audiences at ACE funded organisations were over 50, so does this sector of the population – the audience of the present – rather than the future, even require more attention and investment? But which older people make up that audience and who is missing?

What needs to change?

With official definitions of older people, in some cases starting at 50, how do you make sense of a diverse group of people that encompasses five decades of lived experience and in some families, three generations? We need sharper definitions which recognise the needs of the 'older' old and the diversity of the older population. How should we nurture the range of ways that older people with diverse histories connect with and contribute to culture in our digital age, and remember that they can be producers as well as consumers?

It can take sustained and patient work to connect with this slice of society, which is often misrepresented, because of ageism, as either over privileged or frail and vulnerable. Building awareness of opportunities, creating meaningful relationships and building a workforce and participants skilled in the art of co-production needs time.

Will we ever create a climate which goes beyond one-off projects to genuinely support sustained high quality, relevant, creative work by, with and for older people across the country?

Can we build a funding system that makes best use of pilot projects to build tried and tested ways of working and then favours continuity of good practice? Can we persuade a range of arts funders and perhaps most importantly those who work with and for older people, such as social prescribers or the gatekeepers of their creative lives in care homes and sheltered accommodation, to ascribe more value and attention to creative opportunities for older people?

“ It can take sustained and patient work to connect with this slice of society, which is often misrepresented, because of ageism, as either over privileged or frail and vulnerable. ”

Some ideas for the future

Great work is out there and the difference it can make was demonstrated during the pandemic by how the established elders' groups in theatres and other large cultural organisations, alongside the local long standing creative programmes led by small specialist organisations, held networks of older people together. Some enlightened care homes have brilliant programmes in place that benefit staff and residents and their families. There are Age Friendly standards and Age Friendly Communities, but without sustained investment or national debate and policy, there will never be a universal cultural offer for older people.^{14 15}

Imagine fostering some creative ageing ambition by encouraging more older people's ambassadors in arts organisations and ensuring the adoption of Age Friendly standards. Can we make a strategic relationship between Arts Council England

14 www.familyarts.co.uk/age-friendly-standards

15 ageing-better.org.uk/uk-network-age-friendly-communities

and the Centre for Ageing Better, connecting to Creative People and Places?¹⁶ Let's create opportunities for cultural leadership training and artistic development for older artists and practitioners to build networks, confidence and skills and an Arts Award programme for older people to recognise skills and learning in later life.¹⁷ But most importantly, let's tackle ageism.

16 www.artscouncil.org.uk/creative-people-and-places-0

17 www.artsaward.org.uk/site/?id=64

IS QUEER

FESTIVAL
LGBTQ+
LITERATURE



The Coast is Queer
Literature Festival
in Brighton.
Photo courtesy of
New Writing South.

Why is the youth arts sector different from the older people's sector?

BY PAULINE TAMBLING CBE

About Pauline

Pauline Tambling is a retired arts professional, a trustee of the Roundhouse and Creative Lives, and co-author with Sally Bacon of *The arts in schools: foundations for the future* (2023: A New Direction/Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation).

UK arts funders promote the importance of the arts for everyone, where 'every one of us has access to a remarkable range of high-quality cultural experiences' (Arts Council England) or 'where the arts are 'central to the life and well-being of the nation' (Arts Council Wales). 'Every one of us' suggests access regardless of age, ability, class, income or geography. Even the authors of such vision statements would acknowledge them as aspirational: what we would like to see in an ideal world. Funders' choices reflect priorities which are often determined by the need to maintain portfolios of professional organisations with a few changes here and there, augmented by development funding, often time-limited, for 'innovative projects'. As the total annual arts spending in England is £576.5 million¹⁸, less than 0.05% of all government spending, of which £458.8 million

is for 985 regularly funded organisations, the budget to fund 'all of us' is very tight indeed: less than £10 per person per year, compared with £7,460 per pupil per year in state education.¹⁹

One example of a long-term arts funding priority is work for young people. Since 1979 the Arts Council of Great Britain (ACGB) and its successors have required funded organisations to include learning in their programmes. This exhortation was never strictly defined as uniquely for young people but, with a few exceptions, most organisations have interpreted it that way. The introduction of the National Lottery in 1994 picked up on the theme. Policy makers saw the new funding as a way to invest beyond the narrow group of organisations that had dominated for decades. Suddenly there was more emphasis on more arts for young people, accessibility, particularly of buildings, and work in 'harder-to reach' locations. New youth arts organisations emerged with their own claims for long-term funding as a result. Funding begets a need for more funding.

Why has funding for young people been so important to funders? Many boards and CEOs saw the long game as audience building even if heads of learning had other ambitions, or to give young people a taste for the arts early so that they would take the experience with them into adulthood. There was a perception that among the young were future artists and arts professionals. And a sense too that many audiences were dominated by older people anyway. I wonder whether the focus on young people as future professionals and audiences has led us down a path where skill and technique are prized at the expense of 'lived experience', ignoring the voices and interests of older people and other excluded groups? There was also a view in the 1980s that working with schools would be a productive way of making finite funds go further: if arts organisations could complement school-based arts education then the impact would be greater. A recent report I've written with Sally Bacon documents how over the forty years since

¹⁹ explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/school-funding-statistics

1982 the arts sector in England has arrived at a place where it is now subsidising education shortfalls in the state system rather than benefiting from education spending²⁰. CEOs of arts organisations are complaining bitterly about the gulf between arts provision in state and independent schools and the impact on young artists joining the profession²¹.

There was also a view, developed by ACGB in the 1950s, that if funding was stretched then the focus would be ‘few but roses’. This sentiment led to arts funders’ general reluctance to fund the amateur, participatory or community arts – which is precisely where most arts activity happens, and where we could potentially find ‘every one of us’ including older people. Engagement with the arts, as participants, audiences or as future professionals, is not necessarily always linked to funding although it helps. Very few of England’s nearly 50,000 formally constituted amateur groups reaching nearly 9.5 million people of all ages access public funding²². Many of these individuals will be older people. We saw from Creative Lives’ ‘Get Creative and Make a Difference’ campaign during the Covid-19 pandemic that there is a real appetite for creative activity amongst older people. Some came to the arts for the first time or re-engaged after many years, and others realised that they had a talent worth developing into professional practice and the time to do it. Many reported social and health benefits but others just found the arts enjoyable and fulfilling.

But can it be true that arts organisations do not see older people as new audiences or professionals? In an ageing society where older people are likely to have long and healthy retirements, why is the focus still only on the young? Funding is important but is not the whole story and it is worth remembering that beyond

20 www.anewdirection.org.uk/the-arts-in-schools

21 ‘Horrible disparity emerging in cultural education in schools, says V&A head’, *The Guardian*, 26 June 2023. Available at: www.theguardian.com/education/2023/jun/26/cultural-education-disparity-schools-v-and-a-tristram-hunt?CMP=Share_iOSApp_Other.

22 www.culturehive.co.uk/resources/our-creative-talent-the-voluntary-and-amateur-arts-in-england

the money, engagement with a funder accords value and profile. Creative Lives' research²³ suggests that barriers to participation include having a suitable space and someone to organise things. Practical issues like insurance, health and safety regulation, and data protection requirements can be significant barriers. Many groups overcome these problems, particularly in wealthier communities popular with retirees but, sadly, in creative ageing there are the 'haves' and 'have-nots'. Some communities are rich in choirs, Arts Society events, village festivals and book clubs but there are others where older people do not have the money, time or opportunities to take part and are missing out.

“ Sadly, in creative ageing
there are the 'haves' and 'have-nots'. ”

Following some significant investment in recent years from the National Lottery Community Fund, ACE and the Baring Foundation there is more evidence than ever before of what works in creative ageing. As with youth arts in the past, this type of significant time-limited investment shines a light on what constitutes effective practice: we have more evidence of excellent models than ever before but as with youth arts we don't have sustainable provision. Knowing what works is key: programmes that are well-designed, appropriate and accessible should be available to everyone.

Can we learn anything from the arts sector's long-term prioritisation of work for young people? Young people have to be in schools so working with the education sector has meant that arts organisations and practitioners can benefit from on-the-ground expertise, knowledge of local needs and easy access to participants. Where older people are in care, or accessible through specialist groups like Age UK there is

a case for working in partnership and less likelihood of making assumptions about older people's needs. In our recent report we found that specialist brokerage between the arts and education sectors was crucial: without intermediaries hard-pressed staff in other sectors with their own priorities cannot be up to date with opportunities and contacts to help them integrate the arts into their communities and settings, let alone cater for individual older people.

But beyond schools and residential settings, older people, like their young counterparts, are everywhere. Arts funders encouraging, and monitoring, their funded organisations over decades to prioritise young people's work has made a difference.

“Arts funders encouraging, and monitoring, their funded organisations over decades to prioritise young people's work has made a difference.”

A similar policy for engaging older people would help create more inclusivity and opportunities. But if investment can be found the priority should be towards supporting grassroots development and consistent cross-sector collaboration between community groups, local authorities and partnerships on the ground.

Otherwise, arts activities will continue to be the preserve of individuals prepared to pay for them, know where they are and have the confidence to take part, perpetuating the 'them and us' of access to creative activity. This is not 'all of us'.

Research in creative ageing – current gaps and future opportunities

BY DR ROBYN DOWLEN,
UNIVERSITY OF MANCHESTER

About Robyn

Robyn Dowlen is a Teaching & Research Associate in the Division of Psychology and Mental Health at the University of Manchester and Co-Lead of the British Society of Gerontology's Creative Ageing Special Interest Group.

Creative ageing is a vast and ever-expanding area of research and practice. A wide group of researchers work in this space, approaching creative ageing from different disciplines, perspectives, and personal lived experiences. I come to this area from a background in music and psychology, taking a route through a division of nursing, followed by cultural value, and back to psychology. I have also always worked in an interdisciplinary way, collaborating with cultural organisations, NHS trusts, groups of people living with dementia, and creative practitioners. My experience in this field to date has shown me both the joy and impacts of creative ageing research and practices, alongside an acute awareness of the challenges and barriers which make researching this vibrant area more complex.

I want to start this piece by reflecting on a question I was recently asked at an event highlighting current research gaps – ‘*If we know that it works, why do we need research to back up what we already know?*’. It was a very interesting question and highlighted that as researchers there is work for us to do to ensure the research we do is grounded in the questions and curiosities that are presenting themselves in the field of creative ageing. I’m going to share some reflections on a review²⁴ I conducted with Karen Gray (supported by the Centre for Cultural Value and Connecting Through Culture as We Age²⁵ project at the University of Bristol) to highlight what goes wrong when we don’t take this approach to research.

Our review identified 70 peer reviewed studies which examined the role of cultural participation for older people (defined as 60+ in our review) and the impacts it has on feelings of social connection and wellbeing. While there was a huge body of literature to draw on, we were left feeling slightly underwhelmed by what the collection of studies had to offer in terms of illuminating the value of arts, cultural, and creative experiences for older people. And why was this? We believed the methods that had been used were not painting the vibrancies of creative ageing – they largely relied on short (perhaps 20-30 minute) interviews which only scratched the surface of the experiences held by older people.

And we must question why there is so little methodological innovation in this area – are older people an afterthought? Is there an assumption that they may not have much to say? Is researchers’ time so stretched that they can’t get to understand the value of creative practices for older people? Have older people and cultural organisations grown suspicious of researchers who helicopter in, collect data, and never report

24 *Older people – culture, community, connection: research digest*, Centre for Cultural Value and Connecting through Culture as we Age, 2022. www.culturehive.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/Research-digest-older-people-v1.pdf.

25 connectingthroughcultureasweage.info

back findings? These are all questions that may have some validity and could have hindered research in this area to date (while there are notable exceptions I will discuss later in this essay).

As researchers, we must also question who is represented within the research and how we can do research that matters for those who take part. The more I learn about co-research, the more I understand how significant it might be within the field of creative ageing. I recently attended the British Society of Gerontology conference and was so invigorated by the wide variety of creative ageing projects that used a co-research approach in understanding the role and value of creativity in later life.

Take for example, *Uncertain Futures*²⁶ which evolved into a co-produced exhibition focussed on inequalities facing women over 50 relating to work and worklessness, bringing together older women, Manchester Art Gallery, and an interdisciplinary team of researchers. Or the co-curation of the ground-breaking 'Every Third Minute' festival at Leeds Playhouse through an innovative, embedded PhD position held by Nicky Taylor. What these particular studies show is that older people want to steer the direction of research in this area; they want to be able to celebrate the highs and the challenges associated with the research process; they want to be invited to conferences, to speak with policy-makers and members of the public. So why are we limiting their involvement in research, and potentially limiting the contributions they can make to our understandings of what it means to age creatively?

Of course, co-research is not always the best 'fit' (it's time consuming, expensive, and not for the risk averse) but we need to be able to consider what this approach offers, and how we might be able to apply its principles to other research work to ensure our processes are equitable, centred on older people, and most of all creative. There needs to be a bit more stretch in our

26 manchesterartgallery.org/event/suzanne-lacy-uncertain-futures

practices, allowing us to be more flexible in our approaches to understanding what creativity means to us all as we age. It also requires us to examine ourselves, our backgrounds, our life experiences and how these relate to our perceptions (or perhaps stereotypes) of what it means to age creatively. We also need to explore creative ageing through a range of lenses, whether that be through anti-racist practices, health and social inequalities, protest and action, disability, ethics etc, to just name a few.

The time has come to think beyond creativity as simply being 'good' for older people, and more towards co-curating research practices that put creative citizenship at the forefront of our minds. As researchers we need to change our practices to ensure we are actively listening, changing, and adapting to the older people we work with ensuring we work collaboratively to identify research areas, understand lived experiences, and build a clearer picture of the value of being creative as we age.

Dismantling ageism in the professional arts world

BY DR JOE ATKINSON,
UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHAMPTON

About Joe

Joe is a lecturer in employment law at the University of Southampton, where he is co-director of the Stefan Cross Centre for Women, Equality and Law. In his previous position at the University of Sheffield, Joe was one of the contributors to a report in 2021 by the University of Sheffield's Arts and Humanities Knowledge Exchange, called *Creative Lives: Dismantling Ageism in the Professional Arts World*.²⁷

Ageism in the arts

The art world has a serious problem with ageism. It's not alone in this: research by the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) found that ageism is the most commonly experienced form of discrimination in the UK.

The world of work is a key site for this discrimination, with more than a third of over-50s reporting being disadvantaged at work due to their age according to Age UK. Ageism manifests itself in the professional art world in several ways. While younger people also experience age discrimination, it is older artists who are most affected and so are the primary focus here. Most obviously, ageism can be seen in the age thresholds imposed by some prizes and residencies, excluding artists over 40, 35, or even 30.

²⁷ *Creative lives: Dismantling ageism in the professional arts world* University of Sheffield, 2021. Available at creativelivessheff.org/report.

Although there have been some positive steps away from these thresholds, such as the Turner Prize removing its under-50 age requirement, they remain common in the industry.

Less explicitly, negative stereotypes are applied to older artists based on long standing but unfounded assumptions about them being less creative, innovative or productive. Ageism is also driven by the commercial art world's constant demand for new and fresh talent, which creates a bias in favour of young and marketable artists that is reflected in 'best young artists' or '30-under-30' lists. These biases and the industries' emphasis on youth influences galleries, arts organisations, and the media, and ends up denying opportunities to less-established older artists.

This pervasive ageism harms both individuals and society. Age discrimination undermines artists' dignity and self-worth by suggesting that they have nothing valuable to contribute, and denies them a fair chance to pursue their vocation. Older artists may internalise negative stereotypes about ageing and so impose constraints on themselves and their artistic practice. Age discrimination also intersects with and compounds other inequalities that artists may be facing. For instance, women are particularly disadvantaged by age restrictions on art prizes because they are more likely to have caring responsibilities earlier in life.

More broadly, society suffers culturally due to age discrimination in the arts, as it leads to a less diverse artistic scene that lacks the perspectives of older people. This is in addition to the other economic and social harms that result from having a more divided and unequal society.

Ageism and the law

Given the harms of ageism, it is welcome that the Equality Act 2010 makes age discrimination unlawful in certain contexts. But even here, there is evidence of the low priority given to ageism. The UK introduced protections against age discrimination more

than thirty years after protections against sex discrimination, and only then because they were required to by the EU. Age is also the only protected characteristic where 'direct discrimination' (meaning treating people less favourably because of their age) can always potentially be justified as necessary to achieve some other goal.

More troubling for artists in practice is that they will generally fall outside the scope of legal protections against discrimination. These primarily apply in the context of employment or the delivery of goods and services. But organisations awarding art prizes and residencies, or deciding who to feature in galleries, exhibitions and the media are not engaging artists as 'workers' or offering them good or services. They are therefore not covered by the Equality Act 2010. The important exception to this is public authorities involved in the arts, such as the Arts Councils. These are subject to discrimination law and must therefore not treat artists less favourably because of their age, or act in ways that disproportionately disadvantage certain age groups. They also have a legal duty to promote equality of opportunity across all ages.

“ More troubling for artists in practice is that they will generally fall outside the scope of legal protections against discrimination...” ”

However, even where artists are covered by equality law there are well-known problems with enforcing these rights. The significant time and costs involved, and the practical difficulties in proving discrimination, mean there have been few successful claims for age discrimination.

Dismantling ageism in the arts

So, what more can be done to address the problem of ageism in the art world?

First, legal protections against age discrimination should be strengthened. The justification defence for direct age discrimination should be reviewed, and a test case brought to clarify when, if at all, self-employed artists are protected under the Equality Act. The enforcement of age discrimination protections must also be improved by introducing a role for artists, unions and other representative bodies and providing greater funding to the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) to support litigation.

However, the endemic and ingrained nature of ageism means that deeper social change is necessary. Central to this is greater awareness and understanding of the problem: ageist tropes are currently seen as more socially acceptable than other forms of discrimination, with the ECHR finding that more than half of people view age discrimination as 'not at all' or 'only slightly' serious.

There is important work being done to change public attitudes on ageing by organisations such as the Centre for Ageing Better and World Health Organization, as well as the Government's 'Fuller Working Lives' strategy. But arts organisations need to be more vocal in joining and supporting these campaigns and helping to build a broad anti-ageism coalition. As part of this, arts organisations and media should do more to highlight the work of older artists, ensure they are included in outreach activities, and seek to develop intergenerational collaborations between artists. Ageism should also be included in any internal diversity training and equality strategies or monitoring, as it is too often overlooked in these contexts.

Perhaps most simply, arts organisations could send a strong anti-ageist message by removing age limits from their prizes and awards. While it is important to support new and

emerging artists, this can be done by basing eligibility on a maximum number of years as a practising professional artist rather than arbitrary age thresholds. This approach is already well-established in academia where some grants and awards are reserved for 'early career' researchers.

“ Arts organisations need to be more vocal in joining and supporting these campaigns and helping to build a broad anti-ageism coalition. ”

Finally, we can all contribute by reflecting on our own internalised stereotypes and implicit biases, and by highlighting and challenging examples of ageism whenever we come across them in the same way we would with instances of racism or sexism.

Although there remains a long way to go, the good news is that ageist stereotypes and prejudices are not set in stone. They can be changed over time, and with sustained and concerted effort we can dismantle ageism in the arts.

Older artists as leaders: resisting ageism in creative ageing

BY SIAN STEVENSON, MOVING MEMORY

About Sian

Sian Stevenson is the Creative Director of Moving Memory Dance Theatre and a theatre-maker with over 35 years' experience as a performer, choreographer, director and educator.

Moving Memory Dance Theatre, an inclusive physical performance company, was established 13 years ago in response to the lack of representation of older women in the performance world. The older body was, and still remains, rarely seen centre stage. Our mission focused on challenging ageism, questioning who has the right to be recognised as an artist, and equipping older people with skills to become 'movers and makers'. Our practitioners become the leaders of creative communities via a distinctive, non-prescriptive performance practice that celebrates the dynamism of those we work with.

When we started making work we faced barriers to getting the work seen. Venues were sceptical that older women would put bums on seats. When approaching one venue, the response to the possibility of being programmed was "we've got one of those already". We chose to ignore such rebuffs and took, guerrilla style, to the streets, shopping centres, any public space where the work could be shared, particularly with non-traditional

theatre audiences. People were delighted to see the streets taken over by older women, to see themselves represented in the public arena, and thrilled by the message of the work. What initially was a challenge, became central to our practice and, as a result, our participatory programme was born.

In developing our unique practice three questions shaped, and continue to inform, our approach. Who is this for? Whose stories are being honoured? What are the essential ingredients to ensure participant ownership? As a Theatre Maker of 35 years' experience working in a variety of settings, I have learnt from some wonderful people, as well as witnessing participatory work which is ultimately self-serving. On embarking on the new adventure with Moving Memory, I checked in on my intentions and who was I serving. I had seen so many participatory artists imposing ideas without properly listening to or serving the stories of others.

Prior to founding Moving Memory I was called out by a group of tea dancers who asked if I was going to make yet another piece of work about lonely old women dancing together. And the truth was, some of those assumptions were held by me. Pulled up short, I started to really listen, my eyes opening to a feast of interpersonal dynamics simmering on the ballroom floor: stories of marital infidelities, moments of intimacy, the politics of the tea dance world. Lesson learnt, I strove to ensure that our inaugural project honoured our participants, served to change the way people perceived those who were dismissed as 'old' and countered prejudice with a rich panoply of stories, dripping in complexity. Our practice was built from the bottom up, in response to participant engagement and feedback, and, as a result, it is ever evolving.

Importantly, Moving Memory is led by older women, starting from a place of shared experience and understanding. More often than not our performers have little or no experience in professional theatre making when they first join the company.

They work alongside more established facilitators who have been trained on the job, so there is a sense of possibility and potential. This aspect of the practice is often commented on by participants, people feeling at ease and inspired to be led by their peers. It was only as the company became more immersed in the world of creative ageing that I realised how unusual this was.

As we became part of this new world, I encountered some unexpected issues around group leadership, participatory practice and participant ownership, some of which hit me during a couple of events attended in our early days.

While at a well-respected dance festival welcoming a large number of companies, I noted that I was the oldest artistic lead in the space. While I was surprised, I also realised that this gave the company an edge. I also became aware that our autobiographical approach and our intention to skill our participants as an ensemble of 'movers and makers' was unusual and a strength. This approach offers company ownership, and a real sense of belonging to a distinctive creative community within which participant stories are animated and celebrated, as opposed to having stories/choreographies prescribed upon them by those who have limited understanding of their lived experience.

When the creative lead has the same experience as the participants, the power relationships are changed – there is an equity. Empowering and opening up opportunities for an exchange of views with lived experience at the heart of the matter is the breeding ground for a truly creative conversation where all voices are heard and we begin to chip away at the power imbalance that is the stuff of ageism.

Creative ageing is gaining due attention and drives some fabulous initiatives, but we can do more to ensure that those who are involved in the decision-making process have lived experience of ageing and ageism. We need more of our creative

programmes to be led and facilitated by older people, and to ensure participants are given ample opportunity to have their opinions and views heard. I have attended too many events where the average age of speakers is around 30 and the older participant voice is not present – or present but not heard. I know of no other-ism where people would not be up in arms if a panel was not populated by at least 50% of the community it is representing. We know the benefits of intergenerational learning, but the balance of representation needs to change otherwise the views and interests of the people whose lives we wish to enhance are brushed under the carpet and participants' voices are nullified.

Things are getting better but we need to make a greater effort. If we are to up-end the pernicious impact of ageism and be a role model for society, we need to start with ourselves, continually reflecting on, and questioning our practice, organisational structures and participant ownership. Integrity needs to be at the heart of all we do in order to achieve real change in attitudes to age.



Paulette Morris (performer),
‘The Promise of a Garden’
created by The Performance
Ensemble performed at Leeds
Playhouse in 2021.
Photo © Ben Pugh.

Could national government plans help develop creative ageing in the UK?

BY DAVID CUTLER

About David

David Cutler is the Director of the Baring Foundation and from 2010-2019 ran its Arts programme focused on creative ageing. He is the author of many reports on creative ageing, including *Love in a cold climate: creative ageing in Finland* and *Every care home a creative home*, which makes the case for a systems approach to arts in care in England.

Well, it certainly helped in Finland.

When I first started to work with colleagues in Finland on creative ageing over ten years ago, Finnish colleagues would modestly say how much they had to learn from the UK. They would still modestly say the same thing today, but the difference is that it is much less true. A contrast between our nations has been a proactive, consistent and systematic approach from the Finnish Government which has turbo-charged the development of creative ageing there.

A new era began with the National Arts and Culture for Wellbeing Action Plan for 2010-2014. This took an interdisciplinary approach based on an acceptance of the health and wellbeing impact of arts and culture. It came with an arts infrastructure body, the Taika, as a coordinating centre. This

approach directly led to a similar pattern of working across health and culture departments at the local level, for instance in Helsinki with shared posts and budgets. More recently this has been further developed at the local authority level in the Municipal Cultural Activities Plan 2019.

Finally, the Government's National Programme on Ageing 2030 includes the following impact objectives:

- preventative measures for at risk groups
- extending functional ability and working careers of older people especially in social and health care
- increase voluntary work
- ensure equality and economic sustainability
- improve age-friendliness of housing
- use technology to assist older people.

Creative ageing is then funded by the Ministry for Social Affairs and Health (not Culture) and facilitated by Taike to help secure these goals, along with a commitment to institutionalise creative ageing in wellbeing services around Finland (especially rural communities) and to have distinct plans with all cities and towns. So, it is a national strategy on ageing which specifically weaves in creative ageing throughout and funds it.

Our report *Love in a Cold Climate: creative ageing in Finland* (2021)²⁸ gives a series of case studies of developing practice there, often supported by this national policy. Examples include the use of digital technology for culture in domiciliary care, cultural planning for new care home residents and expert arts facilitators in care called Cultural Instructors, as well as national learning networks to improve creative ageing practice.

However, every nation is different and at the Baring Foundation we are deeply aware that the functions of government that relate to creative ageing (arts and culture, health and social care, employment and education etc.) are all devolved. So that would

28 *Love in a cold climate: creative ageing in Finland*, David Cutler, Raisa Karttunen and Jenni Räsänen, 2021.

mean each administration being responsible for establishing its own national strategy. We also understand the issue of scale. Finland has a similarly sized population to Scotland. The budget of Taike is reasonably similar to that of Creative Scotland, its closest analogous body. What is different is the degree of national government leadership and coordination. And national traditions differ. Finland, like other Scandinavian countries, tends towards strong government involvement throughout society and the relationship to culture to health, wellbeing and ageing is just one example.

The situation in each of the four home nations of the UK is unique and the current state of play on arts and ageing would take more time than I have here. Each of the national Arts Councils has their own strategy. These are generally open or permissive to creative ageing, but none of them really prioritise older people in the way we have seen happening with children and young people for some time. But here I am really talking about national plans or frameworks for older people. These need to encompass all aspects of ageing and not just be, for instance, a single-issue policy on social care or health for older people, or pensions and so on.

To my eyes, Scotland comes closest to this with 'A Fairer Scotland for Older People: framework for action' (2019)²⁹. Wonderfully, this specifically includes a section on 'Engaging with Culture and Creativity' and had input from Luminare, the Scottish Creative Ageing Development Agency. That's a really strong start but my gentle criticism is that it does not then link creativity with all the issues affecting older people but only commits to listening to older people when developing the Scottish Culture Strategy which seems very limited in ambition and a long way from what has been happening in Finland. (When the Scottish 'Culture Strategy' was published in 2022

29 Available at: www.gov.scot/publications/fairer-scotland-older-people-framework-action.

it simply referred to the previous document and made no commitments whatsoever regarding older people – so perhaps we are no further forward.)

There are bad ways to create and run a national strategy and good ways. The bad ways are not evidence based but a matter of short-term political whim, lack genuine consultation with stakeholders and are little more than press statements. They suppress the bottom-up view of practitioners and citizens and quickly become reports sitting on shelves gathering dust.

Good policies, as we see with Finland, are the opposite.

A National Pledge model as described in Ireland by Tara Byrne in the next essay is a complementary approach, which gives guidance and a framework within which arts organisations can choose to be judged. In some ways it is similar to the Age Friendly Standards developed by the Family Arts Campaign which are already in operation here and well used. (Ireland also has a National Plan on Positive Ageing.)

There is much to be said for a bottom-up approach, but government action can be designed to support this without abdicating all responsibility. Matters seen to be important by Government will be the subject of national strategies. Ageing effects all government departments which is why it needs a cross-governmental strategy and that should include culture and creativity. Active and explicit government support opens doors in government departments, the NHS and local government. It gives direction and sets expectations. Although Arts Councils are arms' length bodies, a national policy helps set a context for their decisions.

A Finnish-style national policy feels like distant goal. Perhaps we need to admit how much we have to learn from them.

A National Charter for creative ageing: the Irish model

BY DR TARA BYRNE, AGE & OPPORTUNITY

About Tara

Dr Tara Byrne is Arts Programme Manager and Bealtaine Festival Artistic Director at Age & Opportunity, Ireland.

Last autumn (2022) Age & Opportunity launched Ireland's first National Arts & Creative Charter for Older People³⁰. The Charter is based on eight commitments (or pledges) sought from arts organisations in relation to how they will engage and work with older people vis a vis welcome, accessibility, participation, dialogue, communication, diversity and programming. The initiative's key aim is to improve and support older people's relationship with the arts and arts venues in Ireland and to underline their value as creative and dynamic participants. The Charter also aims to support arts organisations to deepen their relationships with older people.

The origin of the Charter goes back to our search for a more constructive method to engage with arts organisations and their relationships with older people. Our involvement with a number of collaborative research projects in recent years had revealed the need for older people to feel more 'welcome', more dynamic and more visible in relation to the arts, as well as highlighting the more practical 'access' issues.

30 bealtaine.ie/arts-creative-charter-for-older-people-launched-along-with-new-national-arts-events-listings

The launch of the initiative, however, concluded a three-year process of consultation with the arts sector and older people in relation to arts provision for older people in Ireland. A key message from this consultation was that while older people don't feel particularly excluded from the arts, nearly three quarters reported that they don't believe all ages are represented equally. As one person summed up: "I think there is a tendency for older people to 'slip away' as younger people fill the mainstream".

The consultation also told us that simple enjoyment of the arts is key but often a forgotten factor in thinking about why older people might get involved, and that there's a need for more diverse programming to avoid being programmed 'at'. Being ghettoised and streamed into older audience groups was also cited as a problem in terms of precluding access to meeting other groups. As such, it was communicated that older people wanted to be recognised as complex and diverse cultural critics and leaders and not just passive, homogenised consumers.

“ Older people wanted to be recognised as complex and diverse cultural critics and leaders and not just passive, homogenised consumers. ”

In addition, older artists perceived a drying up of opportunities as policy and practice focusses on the young, stating that they didn't "feel valued as artists, employees, producers or performers by the wider arts community". In addition, the consultation stated the need for a wider understanding of access to avoid being discouraged from participation (internet, transport and physical access in buildings).

The development of the Charter, therefore, was an attempt to address some of these issues by engaging with the arts sector on a tangible and publicly visible statement of intent, and one which underlined the UN-enshrined cultural rights of older people.

As I write, the functionality and implementation of the Charter is being road-tested through a pilot project with six diverse arts venues around Ireland. This process began in late 2022 and has already yielded some learnings, not least the intense work pressures the participating venues are under in terms of initiating and introducing the Charter to their own staff. These pressures are significant in relation to the increasingly onerous governance requirements sought from them as publicly funded venues. In addition, although the Charter commitments are intended to be both realistic, concrete and unambiguous, the subjectivity of certain commitments (like welcome) and the room for interpretation has proved tricky in this pilot phase.

However, the issue of long overdue but nevertheless challenging governance and Equality, Human Rights and Diversity (EHRD) requirements in the publicly funded arts has raised the issue of not only capacity, but how individual documents like the Charter relate to existing or developing equality and equity-based policies. One early organisational response to the question of adopting the Charter (pre-pilot) was to decline on the basis of it threatening their existing EHRD policies by, as they saw it, prioritising older people.

Clearly, as an organisation charged with supporting quality of life *for older people*, we take the view that a singular focus and affirmative action approach is a pragmatic choice in an ageist world and necessary to ensuring discrete change for older people, an arguably existential issue for Age & Opportunity. We feel the Charter should amplify and complement, not replace other EHRD policies.

“ A singular focus and affirmative action approach is a pragmatic choice in an ageist world. ”

Similarly, the pilot has raised other more fundamental issues about our work and focus on older people. The issue pertains to how many [older] people don't identify with the word 'older' (presumably because of ageism and the consequent negative connotations around the word) and thus might not identify with the Charter. Equally, many other older people with age-related disabilities don't identify with the word 'disability' or even 'access needs', which aspects of the Charter address. Clearly, we are all free to (and should) define ourselves as we choose, but these internal biases can work against us and may impact the Charter.

There are encouraging signs coming from the pilot too, whereby the group has reported that the increased focus on older people has nudged staff into thinking more deeply about their work, to share ideas and to identify gaps, even from the sometimes erroneous starting point of 'sure we're doing this already'. The fact that the staff of the pilot organisations are also considering (some for the first time) what 'older' might mean (and that they might, horror of horrors, actually be 'older' themselves), is also something that has been raised. Interestingly, fear of getting the language 'right' around older age/people etc., a not insignificant fear in the cultural climate in which we work, has also been raised.

Ultimately, though still evolving, the pilot has confirmed the need for proper support to meet the eight commitments of the Charter, including basic information, training, policy documents and possibly funding (transport issues for older people accessing venues was also a concern though possibly outside the scope of our work). As such, alongside the functional aspects of development signing up processes, we intend to develop a suite

of training options and run a Charter network of information exchange, taking the role of a listening ear (and perhaps critical friend at times), rather than ensuring compliance or taking a monitoring role. This decision relates not only to capacity, but the view that a partnership approach would yield stronger results and more buy-in.

One of other functions we hope the Charter will serve is that of representation. By simply existing, the Charter sets down a visual and conceptual marker of how we all matter equally, regardless of our age. As such, when people see the Charter poster, we hope they feel that sought-after 'welcome' that has been identified as critical to many older people. Finally, and fundamentally, we hope we have done justice to all those people who outlined the kind of world they wanted to live in through their contribution to the Charter, and thus supporting older people to realise their creative potential.

The Charter is expected to be launched nationally in 2024.

Further reading

Ageing & ageism

What dementia teaches us about love

Nicci Gerrard, Penguin
2020

This chair rocks: a manifesto against ageism

Ashton Applewhite, Networked Books
2016

How to age

Anne Karpf, Pan Macmillan
2014

Somewhere towards the end

Diana Athill, Granta
2008

The long history of old age

Pat Thane, Thames & Hudson
2005

The view in winter: reflections on old age

Ronald Blythe
1979

The coming of age

Simone de Beauvoir
1970

Resources on ageism

Centre for Ageing Better
ageing-better.org.uk/ageism

Ageism & the arts

Creative lives: Dismantling ageism in the professional arts world

University of Sheffield
2021

creativelivessheff.org/report

Older artists

Immortal thoughts: Late style in a time of plague

Christopher Neve, Thames & Hudson
2023

The Artist in Time**

Chris Fite-Wassilak
2020

Late style*

David Cutler
2018

Winter Fires*

François Matarasso
2012

Creative ageing practice

Every care home a creative home**

David Cutler
2022

Visionaries: A South Asian arts and ageing counter narrative
Arti Prashar and Elizabeth Lynch
 2022

cadaengland.org/our-projects

Older people – culture, community, connection: research digest

Centre for Cultural Value and Connecting through Culture as we Age
 2022

www.culturehive.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/Research-digest-older-people-v1.pdf

Love in a cold climate: creative ageing in Finland*

David Cutler, Raisa Karttunen and Jenni Räsänen
 2021

Older and wiser? Creative ageing in the UK 2010-19*

Dr Rebecca Gordon-Nesbitt, King's College London
 2020

On diversity and creative ageing*
The Baring Foundation
 2020

Around the world in 80 creative ageing projects*

David Cutler
 2019

Art and dementia in the UK South Asian Diaspora*
Elizabeth Lynch with Spare Tyre,
 2019

Creative and cultural activities and wellbeing in later life
Age UK
 2018

www.ageuk.org.uk/our-impact/policy-research/wellbeing-research/creative-wellbeing

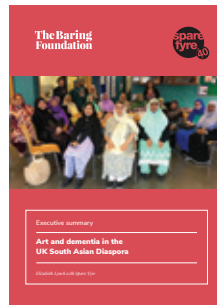
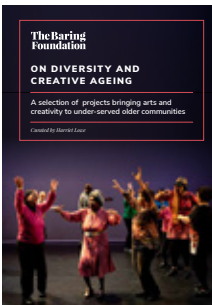
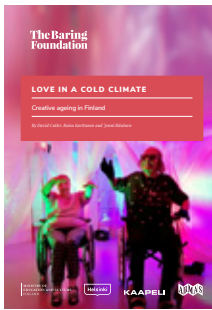
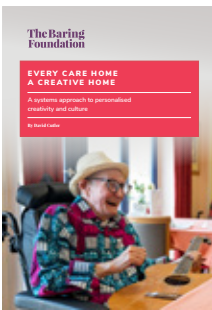
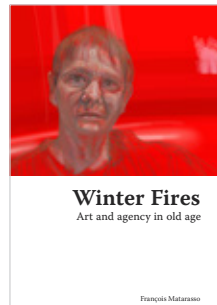
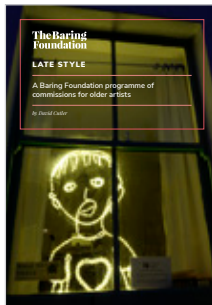
A handbook for cultural engagement with older men*
Ed Watts
 2015

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

**Hard copies available on request.

Selected publications from the Baring Foundation

See pages 80-81 for detail.



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October 2023
978-1-906172-66-4