

Case studies: How can the arts and creativity support people who are shielding or vulnerable during Covid-19?

The View from Here
Magic Me (At Home Together)
Greater London

“[this] has given our residents an outlet to express their thoughts in writing.”

Introduction

Arts & Ages is Magic Me's three-year programme, nurturing partnerships between primary schools and groups of older people in Tower Hamlets through the arts. By working together over a sustained period, Magic Me supports partners to establish a long-lasting relationship and gain the practical understanding and skills to continue bringing older and younger people together creatively.

The View from Here is our response to the constantly changing situations around the Covid-19 pandemic, and is a new format for the Arts & Ages programme over the coming months. The View from Here aims to ease social isolation for all ages through creative intergenerational exchange.



Magic Me's artists will be creating a series of activities around the theme of windows – looking out whilst staying in. Inspired by the many drawings and messages that have been filling up windows up and down the country and how they have become a means of connection with the outside world, as we spend more time indoors.

We have been working closely with our partners to understand how their situation has changed and how we can support them to take part. We recognise that the current situation means that staff capacity to support and engage in activity may be reduced and that access to technology varies for each school, care setting and individual. Our partners receive bespoke and tailored versions of activity packs, ensuring participants can engage at their own pace and in more than one way.

Image credit: Magic Me

Funders

Aldgate and Allhallows Foundation, Allen and Overy, Lucas Tooth Trust, The Worshipful Company of Mercers, The Haberdasher's Benevolent Foundation, Gateway Housing Association, ACE National, London Community Fund.

Who is it for?

Primary school children and groups of older people who live in Tower Hamlets.
Groups of older people who live in extra-care schemes and sheltered housing and living independently – some of those may be living with a dementia or being asked to shield.

What outcomes were/are you aiming for?

The overall aims and outcomes for Arts and Ages are:

- To support younger & older people to become active in their community, building skills and confidence
- To reduce feelings of social isolation and loneliness among older people, increasing wellbeing
- To build long lasting relationships between schools and older people's venues

Outcomes

- Schools and older people's venues connect with their local communities
- Older and younger people present their creative work and ideas, create artworks that reflect what they have to say and challenge perceptions of who they are
- Older and younger people are able to talk and exchange with a different generation, challenging age-related stereotypes
- Staff and activities co-ordinators are inspired to extend their own activities and be more ambitious in the type of work they do with older people and intergenerational groups

In the artists brief for The View From Here we included reference to the above aims and asked artists to consider in their planning (whilst acknowledging some would be harder to achieve in these circumstances). We also asked them to design something which

- Creates reciprocal interactions
- Fosters greater understanding between generations
- Brings a sense of purpose through making and doing for others and oneself
- Supports partner learning

Respond to Magic Me's core principles:

- There is an intergenerational focus
- Relationship building is conscious, not accidental
- Creative and expressive arts activities are central
- Reflection is built in
- There is equality of access to arts activities. The activities are designed to work better with both groups working together

Where is it happening?

London, specifically East London in the borough of Tower Hamlets.

Are you working in partnership?

The partnerships between the older people and the schools are as follows:

- Halley Primary School and Coopers Court
- Osmani Primary School and Rochester Court
- Christ Church Primary School and Toynbee Hall Wellbeing Centre
- Lansbury Lawrence Primary School and Duncan Court

How many people took/are taking part?

204 activity packs have been posted.

For how long has it been happening?

The work is ongoing as it is part of a 3 year partnership between the school and the group of older people. The project has been adapted in response to the Covid-19 pandemic.

What were/are the main outputs?

Participants to respond to the activities creatively, so that they can be shared between the two groups and on the Magic Me website and social media channels.

<https://magicme.co.uk/project/the-view-from-here/>

Feedback:

“The residents have enjoyed *The View from Here* activity booklets. The ‘About Me’ section is the most popular among most residents. This section has given our residents an outlet to express their thoughts in writing. Especially, the ‘What concerns you during this time?’ question.” (Care staff)

What have been the challenges and successes for you?**Challenges**

- Difficult to make the experience intergenerational and create reciprocal interactions – hard to encourage people to consider the experience of another generation, though we have designed all activities around this central concept
- Creating a package which is accessible to people in extremely varied circumstances and with varying access to technology/materials
- Partner capacity – some partners haven’t been able to engage at all, others have to varied degrees (and less so as time has gone on)
- Not possible to build relationships or connections remotely / whilst working as individuals

Successes

- Created activities which are accessible / suitable across a wide age spectrum from 6 - 106
- Have reached participants who we wouldn’t reach in physical workshops - potential for more people to be involved
- Has brought a sense of purpose and decreased isolation for participants – important that they have not felt forgotten
- One partner has communicated independently with their partner school (this hasn’t been widespread though)

General impression

- it’s been hard to design a package which is suitable for the variety of partners we work with all at once. Each partnership and group of participants quite different, and were all at different stages of their journey.
- Overall aim of arts and ages is for partners to continue working together in the long term; although it was an ambition to continue strengthening these relationships during the last few months; this hasn’t really been possible
- We will be bringing artworks and responses together in a film outcome and printed outcome to be shared with contributors and partners, however my impression is that

due to the drawn-out nature of the process, this has been difficult to visualise for participants and not necessarily a motivating factor.

Further information

<https://magicme.co.uk/project/the-view-from-here/>

Magic Me is an arts charity that brings the generations together to build a stronger, safer community. Our projects often link unlikely partners. Young people aged 8+ and adults aged 60+ team up through shared, creative activity. Since mid-March, within the huge changes brought by Covid-19, we have been working with our partners and participants, to find new ways to meet, to make and to party, at a distance. This programme is called At Home Together. Projects are led by our team of freelance creative artists who are creating and facilitating activities for people living individually, in families or in group care settings, where some staff support may be available. Magic Me is a charity employing 6 people full-time, 3 part-time and a pool of freelance artists.