



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

Project: Camden Carers and Homes for Haringey

Organisation: Royal Central School of Speech & Drama

Region: Greater London

Introduction

Camden Carers

Creating an online creative outlet/community for unpaid carers bringing joy to participants through engagement with the arts to look beyond care work concerns and challenges in the context of the pandemic.

“It really gave people the opportunity to speak out and tell this story about how difficult life can be in lockdown for unpaid carers. Carers felt under-represented amongst key workers and paid carers but in lockdown an additional 4million people became unpaid carers overnight. This project gave people a voice to share their stories”

Helping participants to feel grounded by online interaction and artistic/community engagement. The project used art as a tool to ground the group through artistic expression and online sharing of narratives from unpaid carers. Everyone was paying so much attention to paid carers and not unpaid carers – bringing visibility to an ignored front line of care through a podcast series sharing these experiences.

“I really enjoyed writing to you. I always looked forward to receiving your letters. It’s come to an end much too soon. Waiting eagerly. To see and hear [the play]”

Homes for Haringey

This is a collaborative wellbeing project between older tenants in Homes for Haringey and RCSSD students. The first two weeks were dedicated to creating letters and resource packs. Five-week letter engagement process,

two-week production period creating an audio play created inspired by the details of the letter and an accompanying subtitled film, and transcript for access. The process visuals were atmospheric and dementia friendly. Music to help people focus. It will be shared with the host organisation and shared with the tenants inspired by the letters.

Inspiration for the project started before COVID-19, noted that tenants through previous arts engagement really enjoyed performance and starting to see more watching performance get up and dance, sing and be quite playful. JA spoke to tenants about doing own play working in person every fortnight with JA - only social engagement otherwise alone in flats. Making sure not having to wait every two weeks to be engaged with something. Tenants had experience performing in the past, also responding to people who wanted to try performing and building aspiration for older adults.

Jess Amery Contacting Central to offer projects for older adults as an area of community engagement to add to the curriculum. Breaking stigma of older people and what work with older people looks like - freshening up engagement with older people and making it something exciting to take part in.

Homes for Haringey staff tenant support workers before and during COVID-19, dealing with medical, electricity and access, aren't confident or trained in creative engagement - staff grateful for us providing the project 'wow, this is brilliant'. Inspiring to the staff and helping them to see how you can creatively work with tenants. Staff feeling guilty with tenants and worried about tenants and how isolated they are whereas tenants they were able to deliver letters and get letters back. Helps them to talk about things other than COVID-19 and pandemic and helps the relationship the tenant challenge construct.

Funders

This is a project that formed part of our curriculum. The project was therefore funded by staffing from our course budget. The unit was Collaborative Outreach 2020, the projects were conducted by second year Collaborative Outreach students

Who is it for?

Unpaid Carers through - Camden Carers

Tenants living in social housing alone – often older adults without visitors or communal area access due to COVID-19 restrictions for - Homes for Haringey.

What outcomes were/are you aiming for?

Camden Carers

- Visibility to unpaid carers and/or artists
- Bringing awareness about Camden Carers as a charity
- Helped address loneliness and isolation in the context of lockdown online to make the process more important than the end goal
- Wanted to learn and continue work as artists

Homes are Haringey:

- Serve as an archive of lives, then shifted to wellbeing
- Enable audience and people who were written to feel connection
- Focus on personal connection
- Finding something positive and uplifted wellbeing focus of the letters and nice experience
- Tenants have limited interaction something to look forwards to in the lockdown

Where is it happening?

Camden and Haringey

Are you working in partnership?

Camden Carers hosted by Sharon Hammond 'Working for Carers Project Manager' (charity partnership #1) (Tutored by Dr Deirdre McLaughlin)

Homes for Haringey hosted by Jason Keen and Jackson's Lane

The Together Project hosted by Jess Amery (social housing association partnership #2) (Tutored by Melanie Phillips)

How many people took/are taking part?

Camden Carers: 11 participants, 6 took part beyond the first stage, engaged on Twitter 50 followers, 8.1K impressions

Homes for Haringey: 3 participants exchanged letters, another 2 engaged at points.

For how long has it been happening?

Camden Carers: 29 April 2020 – ongoing, Launched 8-14th June Carers Week 2020.

Homes for Haringey: 20 April 2020 – ongoing.

What were/are the main outputs?

Camden Carers: Activities varied between 10mins – 30mins

- Created Forum story starter tasks
- Twitter resources links to how to be creative and easy art projects to try at home
- Masterclasses moving meditation
- storytelling
- creative writing
- song writing
- how to record using your phone
- warm-up guide for concentration, physical activity and emotional wellbeing tasks pamphlet prep participants to be creative
- Website – chat function for further interaction: bandobastcollective.wixsite.com/website
- YouTube videos: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCc4a1wov54SB11nxb0U1R9A>
- 7 podcasts links: <https://soundcloud.com/user-546234585/series-intro>

Homes for Haringey:

- First two weeks planning letters
- Mid-week 3 sent letters
- Next lot of letters send lot two
- Focussing on small numbers returns from tenants week 5 and 6
- Week 8 received final questionnaire and answer, wrote to all tenants to engage with hobbies, music, travel, favourite food, childhood memories, jobs – replied to all questions in a lot of detail
- All three tenants, food, travelling, hobbies, film but as response was lower, deviate from the plan to talk to tenants to follow engagement to learn about topics engaged with previously rather than new. Mainly about travelling.
- Shared own stories and open ended questions, shared stories in Bulgaria – home country and going out, cooking applied.
- Some people collaborated on letters, personal stories.
- Link to the play that is an amalgamation of all stories shared in the project:
<https://youtu.be/n2FtfgtT3bA>

Feedback:

Camden Carers:

‘I listened to them on Friday and they really captured the carers stories and the difficulties they face’ (Project Host).

‘The arts and identifying unpaid carers have a lot creativity to give and that’s brought out more in partnership working with yourselves especially in lockdown for caring for carers. It really gave people the opportunity to speak out and tell this story about how difficult life can be in lockdown for unpaid carers. Carers felt underrepresented amongst key workers and paid carers but in lockdown an additional 4million people became unpaid carers overnight. This project gave people a voice to share their stories’ (Project Host).

‘They felt recognition, they were able to do it and to tell their stories and it was a platform for them to do that and something we want to keep some momentum going for this recognition’ (Project Host).

‘We have a lot of creative carers, the centre aren’t able to do face to face, but the opportunity to work with Royal Central and to have free reign to present their ideas in this way was very important’ (Project Host).

Homes for Haringey:

‘During the COVID-19 outbreak, tenants were so fed up and really lonely and the communal spaces were closed down in all of the schemes. Providing more remote access enabled more timid tenants to take part and they were more comfortable joining in this project than with practical workshops, which are more intimidating. In this way, letter writing and exchange was more appealing for the tenants. Hearing some more diverse voices from the tenants was another very important outcome of the project. The letters created by the students were beautiful, the paper was in different colours, with lovely sketches, this receiving this letter was like a little gift. The students were very personable in their writing, and quickly build a positive connection with the tenants building trust with their letters.’ (Project Host).

Camden Carers

‘Really wonderful and emotional’

‘Thank you for doing justice to the story of my daughter and I’

‘Thankful that the project addressed feeling unheard and invisible – the project helped her come out of a dark place. Welcome distraction’

‘Thank you, it was an honour to be part of this project’

‘It was a wonderful piece’

‘I love what you and others did with my story I felt really heard and valued’

‘Thank you for your effort and the Bandabast team for what they did for carers’

Homes for Haringey:

‘I really enjoyed writing to you. I always looked forward to receiving your letters. It’s come to an end much too soon. Waiting eagerly. To see and hear it [the play]’. – Participant

‘It was lovely writing to Angelina, learning a bit about someone new is always exciting.’ – Participant

‘As you know, this participant had a stroke a few months back so this was an effort for her but she managed it all on her own and enjoyed it. What an achievement.’ – Supporting staff’

What have been the challenges and successes for you?

Camden Carers:

- Engagement was an initial challenge, but creating a website to enable participants to submit their ideas, and a forum for discussion in addition to online masterclasses enabled the participants to engage as and when they wanted to at times that were convenient and allowed flexibility around caring responsibilities.

Homes for Haringey:

- Letter engagement was important but the timing was challenging to write back and get to know participants but thinking about having phone calls to establish rapport to start the relationship.
- Letters are lovely way to interact but are challenging to establish.

- Intergenerational approach of the project was inherent in student-tenant, student-grand-parent interviews to connect with family and positive impact of this process as part of the development of the process.
- Impact of memories being used in the plays for the – bearing witness commemorate the memory.

Further information

The Royal Central School of Speech and Drama is a higher education conservatoire – a specialist college of the University of London which nurtures creative collaboration. Courses include acting, applied theatre, movement, musical theatre, drama & movement therapy, theatre & live performance, puppetry, scenography, actor & teacher training, voice, technical arts & production, and writing for stage & broadcast media. With over 60 academic staff, together with visiting artists and lecturers, Central has the largest grouping of drama/theatre/performance specialists in the UK, an active research culture and is a hub for the theatre and performance industries.