

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

Project: Around the Table

Organisation: Suffolk Artlink

Region: East

Introduction

Around the Table (ATT) uses regular creative sessions led by artists and chefs to explore food, creativity and culture in order to support the wellbeing of family carers. The project had been delivered face to face in community venues in Lowestoft, Claydon, Halesworth with a new group just beginning in Bury St Edmunds as lockdown was initiated.

‘Thank you so much for my edible flower garden pack. This has cheered me so much. Had a difficult day yesterday and to receive these this morning has really made feel better. In all this madness it’s easy to feel forgotten.’ (Carer)



Many of the family carers involved in the project support people who have had to shield within their homes due to Covid-19, exacerbating the sense of isolation that was already often experienced by participants. We have adapted the project to continue to provide activities and support through a remote creative offer using the below phone, post and online methods of reaching people.

- Edible flower garden: Seeds were posted to participants who were invited to grown their own blooms and document the process.
- Foraging fact files: Created by the forager who had previously delivered foraging walks as part of the project. These are available as a download from our website and were posted to participants who may not have online access.

- Calling from the back of your cupboard: This initiative invited participants to come together to explore left-behind ingredients. Using a telephone tree and given a list of questions to start the

conversation, carers spoke over the phone and came up with a list of ingredients which were then turned into recipes. Live zoom cook-a-longs were then set up for groups to join in with some of the food being made.

Image: Artist Mike Knowlden sharing ingredients from the back of his cupboard. Credit: Suffolk Artlink/Mike Knowlden

Funders

Suffolk Community Foundation, Awards for All, Ganzoni Charitable Trust, The Scarfe Charitable Trust

Who is it for?

Unpaid family carers (people who are caring for family members with illness, disability and/or mental health conditions)

What outcomes were/are you aiming for?

Increased wellbeing
Reducing isolation
Increasing confidence and skills

Where is it happening?

Suffolk

Are you working in partnership?

Working with Suffolk Family Carers a voluntary sector organisation

How many people took/are taking part?

39

For how long has it been happening?

Ongoing project

What were/are the main outputs?

The project is made up of yearlong courses ending in a public event. A fashion show and exhibition was planned for July 2020 but has had to be cancelled.

Feedback:

Thank you so much for my edible flower garden pack. This has cheered me so much. Had a difficult day yesterday and to receive these this morning has really made feel better. In all this madness it's easy to feel forgotten. (Jo, Carer)

Thanks for arranging this very interesting and modern way of connecting people who have not a great deal of computer knowledge. (Claire, Carer)

What have been the challenges and successes for you?

The project has become even more important to carers during lockdown when many of them are shielding and unable to access respite services. Carers who had already taken part in face to face sessions have responded particularly well but even those who had yet to take part were appreciative that the offer had been adjusted not cancelled. Carers have been keen to participate to maintain connections with other carers and having a programme that is delivered across different locations has enabled a wider support group to develop that is no longer limited by geography. This whole programme approach has also enabled us to work with artists from further afield, giving them the opportunity to develop new methods of delivery. The resources created can also be shared more widely and we have connected with other carer support organisations and residential care settings in order to extend the reach of the project.

The remote delivery has also come with challenges – the main one being the resource needed to maintain contact and engagement with participants. Making regular phone calls to each

individual has been essential to supporting the carers but this takes more time than when working with a group in a 'live' environment. It has also been difficult to find and engage with new participants. Building trust over the phone or through a video call is much more challenging than face-to face. There is a desire from participants to return to face to face sessions but planning for the future of the project is tricky – changing guidance and the mix of health conditions of family members the carers are supporting, makes it difficult to ensure a safe, inclusive plan for bringing people together.

Further information

You can see one of our online cook-up sessions here <https://vimeo.com/412796534> and details of our other remote delivery activities here <https://www.suffolkartlink.org.uk/around-the-table-at-home/>

Suffolk Artlink is a participatory arts charity. We develop and deliver inclusive arts programmes that support peoples' health and wellbeing.

Our creative projects help people transform their lives through the arts by bringing skills, support networks, confidence and joy to communities in the East. We work in places including hospitals, hospices, residential homes, schools and community venues.

Our work is led by experienced arts practitioners, encompassing a rich variety of art forms, and is delivered in close partnership with care, education, voluntary and community organisations. Suffolk Artlink employs 12 part-time staff (approx. 7 fte) (plus 50-60 freelance artists per year).