

Case studies: How have culture and creativity been supporting people in health, care and other institutions during the Covid-19 pandemic?

Project: Zest

Organisation: Bright Shadow

Region: South East



Bright Shadow: Court Regis care home session

“This afternoon some of our residents joined in with a zoom workshop from Bright Shadow. The session was so much fun and left those who took part invigorated and excited to talk about what we had done ... After the session we sat around the table to have tea and cake, and everyone spoke about it for ages. We have 2 more sessions over the next two weeks, and can’t wait ’til next week...”

Introduction

Established in 2009, Bright Shadow is a multi-award-winning arts organisation offering creative opportunities to people living with dementia and their loved ones. Our mission is to use the power of the arts to enable people living with dementia, and those affected by it, to live well and to thrive. We do this by delivering high quality creative sessions led by professional artists in care homes and the community for people living with dementia, their friends and family. We also deliver training and resources for care, arts and community organisations on creative approaches to supporting people living with dementia and we create platforms to advocate for more creativity in the care of older people and people living with dementia.

During lockdown, we used charity reserves to offer free of charge Zest arts sessions for residents and staff of ten care homes using the video conferencing platform, Zoom. Each care home received a series of three sessions. A parcel of sensory props for each themed session was sent in advance to the homes, and residents came together in their lounge to enjoy music, movement, story-making, etc. on themes such as USA Roadtrip and Desert Island, led by a professional artist from home and supported by care home staff.

The sessions provided stimulation, fun and engagement in the here and now and were very well received by all who participated. Posts on the Facebook pages of homes, showing the enjoyment and engagement of their residents received warm responses from family members who were at that time unable to visit their relatives. They felt relieved and happy to see their loved ones looking happy and meaningfully active.

In addition to this, for twelve weeks we provided weekly creative newsletters suggesting simple visual art activities that residents could do with support from carers using items freely available in their care home. These could either be led as group or 1-1 activities.

Funders

The pilot was funded through our minimal charity reserves. We also received emergency funding for the charity during lockdown from Kent Community Foundation/National Emergency Trust, CAF and Arts Council England.

Partners

Not formally, but Kent County Council assisted on promoting the project at speed to all care homes in Kent.

Who is it for?

People living with a dementia in care homes, and the staff who support them. Indirectly, their loved ones.

In addition to this, as the project was promoted by Kent County Council direct to care homes, some care homes that were not for older people living with dementia requested sessions or got involved with the activity sheets. We therefore ran sessions for a respite centre for children and young people with profound and multiple learning disabilities and provided activities for the National Autistic Society. Whilst we would never usually work in this way without directly targeting work for its intended audience, it was interesting that the work broadly met the needs and could be adapted for a wider range of participants who were also experiencing a challenging lockdown.

Are these people you have worked with before, or new participants?

People we have worked with before.

How many people took/are taking part?

Zest sessions – 120

Activity Sheets – up to 1000

Where is it happening?

Kent.

For how long has it been happening?

The pilot took place in April -July 2020, and will resume in November 2020 until April 2021.

What were/are the main outputs?

None per se. With these sessions it is all about the participation in the here and now and the emotional legacy of the sessions i.e. feelings of happiness, achievement, positive relationships that remain after the session.

What outcomes were/are you aiming for?

- Stimulation – combatting boredom and decline in dementia
- Engagement – delivering positive wellbeing and mental health outcomes
- Strengthening Relationships – between residents and between residents and staff, also providing remote comfort to families that their relatives are thriving
- Supporting Staff – providing practical support and modelling ways of working that staff could both enjoy in the moment and re-use at other times

Have you adapted existing work to make this happen? If so, how?

Yes, originally Bright Shadow developed Zest arts sessions in care homes eleven years ago and we have been delivering these sessions ever since. Using Zoom to deliver the sessions was a new iteration, and a remarkably successful one, thanks to the simple theme and structure and the use of carefully curated sensory props.

Does your work support people who identify with one or more of the protected characteristics¹?

By delivering a practical creative offer for older people and older disabled people we wanted to make a positive difference at a time of crisis for these individuals.

Evaluation & Feedback

We sought feedback from care home staff, asking for their observations on the benefits for residents. We have used questionnaires and interviews.

“All residents and staff at Belmont have really enjoyed the activity sheets. We are so grateful for the additional ideas! Thank you so much. Kind regards, All at Belmont.”

“This afternoon some of our residents joined in with a zoom workshop from Bright Shadow. The session was so much fun and left those who took part invigorated and excited to talk about what we had done.....The theme today was gardens. We identified flowers and shrubs, named our favourites, wrote a story together prompted by a picture, wrote an acrostic poem, identified herbs by their fragrance, exercised, sang and learned to Morris dance! Phew! It was such fun. After the session we sat around the table to have tea and cake, and everyone spoke about it for ages. We have 2 more sessions over the next two weeks, and can't wait 'til next week when we're 'off to the USA!'”

“We had another zoom workshop this afternoon with Bright Shadow, and went on a virtual trip to London. Such fun, but I don't think our singing will win us the top spot on the X Factor! We had fun trying to sing though and we moved to music... and between us we wrote a short romantic story. The last of the workshops and we hope to be able to do more some time. After today's session we chatted whilst enjoying refreshments, and then some of us played dominoes together.”

“My Registered Manager forwards your information sheets to me and I enjoy browsing through for ideas/activities. We are a private company, who visit clients in their own homes. I have been circulating some of your 'Activity' ideas to our PAs. We work 1-2-1 with our clients so some of the activities are ideal for them as all our clients have various abilities. Keep up the good work.”

“The most memorable part has been the children being able to take part in the session virtually which is different to the norm. The children really enjoyed using the props provided which supported them to relate better with the activities. Two of the children in particular were really engaged and said they enjoyed the session. I think one thing we will take away is the opportunity to have this delivered for our Children and in particular during this COVID-19 period, to be able to still have sessions booked for the children was great. Thank you so much.”

“Yes the sheets are great. They have two activities on, one of which is always suitable for the guys, the other is sometimes a little too much of an abstract concept for our guys but altogether really nice to have. I have been doing the activities at some of the houses and at the moment we are still working on

¹ Protected characteristics are age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation (Equalities Act 2010).

the last activity, all of the guys have been working on a section of a wall hanging which I am going to sew together and hang either at Artrack or at SAND.”

What is your own impression of how it has worked? What have been the challenges and successes for you?

The greatest challenge was technical – and there were a few hitches with video conferencing, but far fewer than anticipated. Liaising with staff in care homes is always a challenge at the best of times, due to their shift patterns and being so busy, and this was no exception. There were homes that sadly couldn't get the scheduling and technology together in order to take part. Getting feedback can also be difficult for the same reasons.

The value of running Zest sessions remotely was unknown and would never have been experimented with had the pandemic not made that the only option. Overall, the engagement levels were very satisfying, perhaps due to the use of props, and the staff being carefully prepared and really looking for additional enrichment during the lockdown.

One challenge is that working in this way, i.e. remotely or using activity sheets, places the onus on the supporting staff (carers usually) to interpret and adapt the work, and also the work may end up being distributed to people for whom it was not originally intended, and therefore it may not fully meet their access needs. During sessions it is harder to 'read the room' and adapt to the same extent that an artist usually would. However, this made the sessions more of a collaboration and learning exchange between Bright Shadow and the care homes, which may have positive outcomes e.g. staff feeling more confident to run arts activities themselves.

Are you reaching more people/fewer people/different people?

Overall as a charity during lockdown we are reaching more people – we are reaching people in different ways and extending our reach using digital routes.

What new skills have you or your colleagues had to develop to deliver this work?

Primarily facilitation via Zoom skills.

What would you say has made this project possible?

Financially – that we had a small reserve built up.

What made it possible was our decade of skills and experience of developing and running sessions for residents and staff of care homes and the resources we could bring to the project very quickly, including skilled arts facilitators.

We had a strong moral feeling that we had to do something to support those living and working in care homes during lockdown.

What would have made it easier?

Of course, starting from a firmer financial base. The last ten years have been tough and so there wasn't a huge amount that we could invest at speed.

A functioning arts network for care homes would be great – a trusted route through which professional arts opportunities designed for those living with dementia could be quickly communicated to care homes.

More availability of digital equipment and the skills to use it in the care sector.

Further information

<https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=619792912299779>