

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

Project: Arts Together for Care Homes
Organisation: Arts Together / Opera North
Region: Yorkshire & Humber
Designed for: Care homes

“Initiatives like these are hugely appreciated at a time like this when both residents and staff are having to adapt to a complex situation. Having Tessa really brightened up everyone’s day and brought them together. It made such a difference being a live performance, and everyone appreciated being given the chance to enjoy a musical interlude from such a talented singer.”



Mattias Reed plays outside Headingley Hall Care Home, Leeds. Photo: Alice Gilmour

Introduction

Arts Together is a collaborative network of arts and community organisations in Leeds, funded by the Esmee Fairburn Foundation and administrated by Opera North. It aims to make the arts accessible to all.

We used funding from the Arts Together project that was earmarked for supporting tickets to live events and social occasions which could no longer go ahead due to lockdown, to pay out-of-work freelance performers to perform outside care homes.

Funders

Arts Together is funded by the Esmee Fairburn Foundation and is a three year project which began in January 2019, managed by Opera North.

Partners

Arts Together is a collaborative network, so we asked all the arts partners in the network (around 35) to suggest freelance performers for the project (Leeds Playhouse, Slung Low Theatre etc)

Who is it for?

Residents and staff in care homes. Also freelance artists/performers who were currently out of work.

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

Opera North has worked with many care homes in Leeds in the past; just last year we had a tour to homes in advance of our first dementia friendly opera. But we worked with the Care Quality Commission to reach new homes as well.

How many people took/are taking part?

10 freelance performers, 280 care home residents, 70 care home staff and 2 event managers.

Where is it happening?

Leeds and greater Leeds

For how long has it been happening?

4 July – 22 September 2020

What were/are the main outputs?

Twenty or so half hour performances taking place outside care homes to entertain the staff and residents.

What outcomes were/are you aiming for?

Improvements in mental health, wellbeing, happiness, togetherness, relief from boredom, a break for staff and an opportunity for staff and residents to enjoy something together.

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

We have toured artists to care homes before so we re-used our knowledge from that and our contacts to create this project.

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

Our work was designed for older people, including people living with Dementia. We know that music provides relief for people living with Dementia so we wanted to bring something that would enrich their lives at such a difficult time.

Evaluation & Feedback

We gathered feedback from the residents after a performance, from care home staff, from the performers, and observations from the event managers. [A full report is attached here.](#)

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

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

We were very pleased to see how well received the performances were and that it was really good to have a varied range of artists; from opera singers, to jazz, to clarinet and cello duets, to classical guitar, to poets. The challenge was just organisational: coordinating performers to go to two homes in one afternoon in fine weather was sometimes tricky. And a lot of homes were having to cancel as they were isolating again, so there were a lot of phone calls.

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

We were glad to work in partnership with the Care Quality team at Leeds City Council to target homes who had been hard hit by COVID-19, or who had less budget for entertainment than others. So we were reaching a wide range of homes across the region, some new, some we had been to before (with Opera North).

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

It was hard at first trying to organise something with care homes when they were so busy grappling with much more important work and this taught us the importance of patience, using phone calls not email, and flexibility.

What would you say has made this project possible?

There was agreement that this was the best use of funds that we couldn't use to support live performances. And there was real agreement on the fact that care homes probably had had the hardest time since lockdown so were the most deserving audiences we could reach. Plus it was a way of putting funds towards performing artists that we would otherwise have been supporting by paying for tickets to see them live in Leeds.

What would have made it easier?

Nothing really. We had the funds and we used them. More staff would have meant we could have had more performances out going out concurrently during the best weather in August and when homes were still open, but that's with the benefit of hindsight.

Further information

www.artstogetherleeds.co.uk