

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

Organisation: Spitalfields Music

Region: London

Designed for: Care homes

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Introduction

Founded in 1976 as an annual summer music festival, for over 40 years Spitalfields Music has been putting music at the heart of East London. We aim to bring artists, audiences and communities together so that everyone can find, explore and share extraordinary music in one of the most vibrant areas of London.

Our mission is to bring diverse communities together in one of the most diverse boroughs in the UK, at a time when our perceived differences are threatening the well-being of our society. We do this through high-quality performances, an industry leading artist development programme and award-winning projects in schools, special educational needs and disabilities settings, care homes and community centres.

Funders

Spitalfields Music and Unmapped would like to thank the following organisations who have made Creative Encounters possible with their generous support:

City Bridge Trust

French Huguenot Church of London Charitable Trust

Garfield Weston Foundation

The Mercers' Company

Merchant Taylors' Company

Postcode Community Trust

The Rayne Foundation

Townhouse Spitalfields

Partners

The first two phases of the project have been run in partnership with Unmapped, a research project co- founded by Hannah Zeilig and Julian West and three Tower Hamlets care homes each operated by a different provider.

Who is this project for?

Older people living with dementia, and vulnerable older people with health conditions; diverse people including care home staff and older people. The families of older people.

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

New participants

How many people took/are taking part?

90-100 care home staff, residents and artists

Where is it happening?

Tower Hamlets, East London

For how long has it been happening?

July 20/21 is the end of the three-year programme begun in 2018

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

The Creative Encounters programme was originally designed to work across three care homes in East London in a series of three phases.

The phased work was delivered by a team of eight artists and an artistic Director and Programme producer to co-create cross arts work (including music, dance and visual art) together with residents in a series of weekly visits. In later phases, artists worked closely with care staff and residents' families to enhance their confidence and skills in co-creating with residents which was found to have positive impacts on their wellbeing as well as that of the residents. The co-creative method of working relies upon making meaning in the moment, rather than revisiting the past or memories, it is about working spontaneously with what is available to us, focusing on what is shared and the connections made.

In recent months, all care homes closed to the public and our concerns were not only with the safety of residents but with care staff and our creative and project team.

Hence, Spitalfields Music worked with Artistic Director Julian West and the creative team to create a series of physical and digital care packages to keep the connections between artists, care staff and residents alive and let them know we were thinking of them. All care homes responded to us where they were able to with great enthusiasm, however, ensuring ready access to online streaming services or devices to show residents the work was tricky, and particularly challenging with social distancing considerations. We responded to this need by sending physical materials and embedding songs into cards and CDs and sending these in the post, as well as taking part in #Artincarehomes day in September. We were sent art from the public and partners in response to our call out. Art sent to us was quarantined and posted to care homes securely. Staff and residents gave positive feedback, but we are aware of the challenges of evaluating remote working and of placing extra demands on care homes at this incredibly difficult time.

We are now realigning the project to create loan boxes for the homes with instructional collaborative creative activities this autumn, as well as scoping out how the project legacy and learning for co-creation between residents and staff can be expanded to other community settings such as supported housing and day groups with older people as well as intergenerational social clubs.

What outcomes were/are you aiming for?

- Residents have improved well-being and quality of life
- The quality of care and care relationships are improved; staff display increased confidence and skills delivering person-centred care using arts and creativity, and staff work together more effectively
- Arts and creativity is embedded into care home culture. Leadership support staff to provide quality person-centred care using the arts and creativity
- More volunteers engage with each care home. Volunteers feel more confident and connected, enhanced relationships reduce isolation for residents
- The creativity and agency of older people living with dementia is celebrated and championed at a local and national level

We are hoping that the shifts in project focus will allow us to gather data with partners that can be shared across the sector in a series of events. We'd like the residents and staff to forge relationships that have a lasting positive impact on their wellbeing both at home and at work.

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

The programme aims to support diverse care staff who are working with vulnerable adults living with dementia.

Evaluation & Feedback

We work with telephone feedback, letters and photographs.

We have only been able to evaluate the first year and a half of the programme, in partnership with Unmapped Research. See below for our initial findings in a series of blog posts from care home staff and artists for the [first year and a half of the project pre-covid here](#).

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

Successes have included:

- The reimaging and strengthening of relationships between care staff and residents
- Increased skills and confidence in using co-creative practice among care home staff and understanding the benefits of incorporating these in their daily work
- Visible positive impacts on engagement and wellbeing of care home residents expressed via verbal and non-verbal communication, confidence to take part, familiarity and ease with the creative team and anticipation of sessions

We are aware that across the sector, creative practitioners are finding it challenging to evaluate the remote working format. Care Home staff are facing enormous pressures especially with regards time and capacity, and compounded with additional safety measures, this means that we are unable to gain as clear a picture of impact as we'd have liked, though we understand that it has been broadly positive, appreciated and very well received.

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

In some respects keeping the relationship alive with care home staff across lockdown has been a powerful experience for us as an organisation to understand where our impact lies and realign what we are trying to do in the community. We haven't reached more people, but we have aimed to sustain relationships and we hope that our care home partners have gained something from this too.

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

Artist teams have recorded and edited films and home recorded sounds – so have become more involved in digital production to create digital packages for the care homes.

What would you say has made this project possible?

Flexibility and understanding from funders, our artist teams and our project partners.

Further information

<https://spitalfieldsmusic.org.uk/type/creative-encounters/>