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Celebrating Age

Programme Evaluation: Final Report Executive Summary

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# Executive Summary

**Programme**

* 32 projects received a total of £3M funding for up to 3 years (or, where extended due to the pandemic, up to 4 years), with varying start and end dates.
* Projects worked across a wide range of artforms, and delivered workshops, programmes, events, festivals, exhibitions and performances in arts and cultural venues, housing and care settings, and a range of public spaces. Some commissioned new works of art from older artists, and/or exploring ageing or oral histories.
* The pandemic brought challenges and opportunities, with a noticeable increase in both the range of activities and the media through which they were delivered.

**Participants**

* 31K people participated in over 2.5K activities (with an average of 4 engagements each).
* Nearly three-quarters of participants were aged 65 and over, with 65-69 being the largest participating age group.
* In total, half of participants said that their day-to-day activities are limited because of a long-term health condition or disability (a quarter said they were limited ‘a lot’).
* Diversity in relation to ethnicity and gender identity varied considerably between projects. Overall and across both rounds of the projects:
  + 26% of participants identified as men and 69% as women.
  + 85% were of white British origin and a total of 15% coming from minority ethnic backgrounds (though ethnicity data was missing in many cases).

**Partnerships**

* Funded projects were required to work in partnership, and succeeded in working with a total of 548 partners - an average of 17 partners per project, showing the range of stakeholder interest in this activity.
* Half of projects partnered with their local Age UK, over three-quarters partnered with another arts, cultural or heritage organisation.
* New partnerships resulting from the Celebrating Age project were most frequently with care organisations and with older people’s groups.
* Some projects worked in partnership with care homes and their providers, developing activities which introduced artists or arts activity into those settings.
* These partnerships required adaption to the day-to-day routines of care homes, creating new ways of working, but also challenges. This was especially so during covid, given the lack of access to homes.
* Partnerships benefitted from the 6-months planning at the start of the project, and from review and refresh – many projects were impacted by organisational change and turnover within partner organisations.

**Themes/ impact**

* The programme has highlighted the **huge diversity and individuality** of ‘older people,’ and how the arts can enable people to build and restore their **sense of identity in later life.**
* A common theme in older people’s stories was how projects had **helped redress past exclusion from the arts**, due to direct discrimination, to messages that they were not ‘good enough’, or a perception that they would not be welcome.
* Many projects challenged **ageist assumptions**, however, consistently recognising older people as experts in their own lives is an ongoing journey, as is recognising one’s own role as an older (50+) artist or staff member.
* Many projects worked **intergenerationally,** recognising that this can make a key contribution to tackling ageism, although projects tended to bring young people and older people together, with less involvement for age groups of working age.
* The **creation of communities** was a recurring theme in projects - sometimes this was around an aspect of diversity and/or an artform, however, the particular importance of **connection to place** for many in later life was also clear.
* There was evidence that participation in Celebrating Age projects had resulted in positive impacts on **physical and mental wellbeing**, and on **relationships and social isolation.**

**Implications and Recommendations for policy makers and funders**

* The programme has demonstrated the value of **longer-term funding**. With a 6 month planning period at the outset and up to 4 years’ funding, projects have been able to develop potentially sustainable partnerships, support individuals on longer journeys of self-development, and there is evidence in some of a whole-organisation approach to mainstreaming the inclusion of older people, e.g. within programming.
* The **peer learning and dissemination to the wider sector** through regular Celebrating Age events (run by Family Arts Campaign) and a national evaluation which used participatory methods helped to create profile and community for the developing creative ageing sector. These were welcomed by most projects, however, it is important to **set explicit expectations of projects regarding participation** in peer learning and evaluation activities at the application stage to ensure budget for and commitment to these.
* There has, however, been limited success to date in involving older people in this national movement. There is more work to be done **to develop older people’s voice and leadership in the sector**, and we hope that the Creative Ageing Development Agency will be able to continue working to advocate and build capacity for this to happen.
* The importance of **supporting project staff, and freelance practitioners** emerged as a theme: their skills, relationships and resilience are key to sustainable delivery.
* Having **a range of ‘entry points’ to arts and culture** for people with different life and health circumstances should be considered when designing projects and programmes, including digital, face-to-face, and hybrid approaches.
* The **needs of emerging older professional artists** should be given greater emphasis in policy and development.
* There is clearly potential for further exploration of how intergenerational approaches can be applied in **place-based working**, but without losing some specific focus on older people;
* The importance of working with older people should be **made explicit within Arts Council England’s *Let’s Create* strategy** and its implementation.

**Conclusions and learning for organisations working with older people**

**Programme design**

* Supporting long-term vision and partnerships through funding which allows for this kind of longevity can lead to stronger legacy, in terms of delivery, design and partnership. It has encouraged many to be more strategic about their approach to partners and commissioning.
* Consider the complex realities of older people’s lives in designing programmes – bearing in mind health, previous experiences of the arts, skills, isolation, social dynamics in communal settings, and other factors: it is important to take account of an older person’s *whole life* (both now and in the past). This is arguably even more important in working with older people than it is doing participatory arts with other groups.
* Being explicit about the desired ‘mainstreaming’ of work for older people that might result from individual projects - bringing ‘older people’ from the education department to main programming/ exhibition room as it were – could be valuable, echoing the Investment Principles within *Let’s Create*.
* In future, programmes such as Celebrating Age are, we suggest, more likely to support hybrid programmes of in person and digital/online activity, or to be specific about desired methods, and will need to reflect this in guidance.
* Building in evaluation and peer learning costs to the expected budgets/grants would encourage wider take up of the learning opportunities.

**Project design**

* Consider, from the outset, what all partners might like to see by the end of the project: better/more relationships? Continued activities? Trained and committed volunteers? Active older artists? New opportunities?
* Think early on about how you might sustain this work or create sustainable legacy activity after the project funding ends;
* Trial activity and don’t be afraid to change tack if responses are not as expected or something does not work.

**Building relationships**

* Share your values about successful ageing.
* Allow enough time to get to know each other’s organisations, and each other, to build good relationships: it’s not just about outputs and outcomes.
* Individuals’ enthusiasm plays a big part in successful partnering: strategic or Board-level partners need to be as motivated as operational staff.
* Find ways to make involvement fun.
* Find out your partners’ long-term goals – identify how working with you on this project can help them move towards those goals.
* Meet regularly and with a focus, to foster good relationships and trust.
* Become a catalyst: be the organisation that acts as a bridge between different partners.
* Be clear and explicit about your assumptions – about older people, about the purpose of the project, the nature of art, the goals, the roles, sessions. Check for unconscious bias about older people and challenge stereotyped age assumptions.
* The importance of supporting project staff, and freelance practitioners in particular.

**Older people as partners and co-creators**

* Involve older people and include their voices in project design and development – either directly or through representative groups such as local forums.
* Make sure people are able to engage – provide enough time (including time to take action between meetings, and report back), recap on previous meetings, provide independent or ‘neutral’ spaces where everyone feels comfortable.
* Find out and listen to the aims, hopes, and wishes of later life participants; be prepared to be surprised; ask all the partners, including the older people, how can we all run with these?
* Support older people to be challenged in return: taking everyone out of their comfort zones can support the project’s development into new areas.
* Work to build confidence as well as creative skills so older people can shape activity and co-create the creative experience or output.
* Support the practicalities of engagement: travel, welcome, breaks, accessibility, communication needs.

**Sharing knowledge**

* Provide arts-related experiences for non-arts partners.
* Explore age-friendly training for artists.
* Pool your knowledge about venues/ physical spaces/ participants/ audiences – value each other’s expertise.
* Be open to being challenged on your project’s art form by the non-arts specialists.

**Communication**

* Find simplicity and a common language across partners, including academic partners – communicate straightforwardly about the project, so it’s easy for everyone to pass this information on.
* Step back every now and then to assess your assumptions and understanding about roles and goals.

**Data Collection**

* The collection of data adds real value to a project by providing details of engagement, impact and quality. Organisations working with older people should get to know the ‘why’ and ‘how to’ of data collection to better understand its purpose.
* Data collection techniques and tools may need to be adapted to the variety of projects, activities and events on offer.
* Collecting and discussing ‘stories of change’ from participants, artists, project managers and partner agencies can generate rich data and insights for change management.