

## Arts in care homes

### Making things in care homes



Improving care home residents' lives by offering options to make things taps into the creative drive that resides in everybody. It just needs to be unleashed in clever and inventive ways that triggers the imagination and inspires the confidence to try.

#### Doing it yourself

Participation from individuals may vary vastly, from watching the activity to full participation, and will provide a feeling of wellbeing. It is important to have a purpose for creating any finished article, rather than just making something for the sake of it. Perhaps consider the finished articles being used as gifts, or for sale, or for entry into a craft competition or exhibition.

You don't have to be an expert in arts and crafts to benefit from the creative participation in making things. The list of what is available to create is, seemingly, endless! For centuries, women around the globe have made crafts to support their families, preserve their cultural heritage and for enjoyment. Now researchers report crafts, can pack important psychological and spiritual benefits.

Not all craft ideas are suitable for all older people. Most can be modified and adapted to suit the special needs of individuals. Many simple crafts make beautiful gifts for family or friends. Often projects that are listed as crafts for kids can make great choices for adults also. Always make sure the craft ideas chosen are appropriate for adults.

The following suggestions could be used for large or small groups, for a one-to-one session, or for an individual to enjoy. Each suggestion can be adapted to suit the needs of all individuals, regardless of their physical or mental health and wellbeing. A risk assessment should always be completed.

Practical tips:

- Deliver crafts sessions in a creative, imaginative and enthusiastic manner
  - Encourage staff, volunteers and family members to join in
  - Create a studio feel indoors using displays, posters and examples

- Provide advance notice to participants so that a potentially new experience is offered in a non-threatening way
- Structure the time of the session appropriately
  - Forty-five minutes is regarded as a good length of time for participants to feel that they have been active without becoming over-tired
- Remove distractions that can break up the flow of the session
  - Participants may have a regular routine and may become anxious if tea-breaks don't happen at the same time
  - Pre-warning about a change of routine or planning the session times to coincide with the breaks may be wise
- Ensure that the sessions are held in an accessible space where people can watch at a distance initially
- Ensure that sufficient staff support is available to assist with the care aspects such as helping participants to join the group, providing refreshments, going to the toilet and other personal needs

#### Jewellery-making suggestions:

- Handmade jewellery is one of the most thoughtful gifts to give; what beats a bespoke trinket that's completely unique
  - It can feel romantic, gothic, kitschy, or iconic – and people of all ages are attracted to it
- Jewellery-making is a hobby that allows you to flex your creative muscles while combining a variety of colours and materials that suit your personal style. If you decide that you don't like what you have made, you can take it apart and use the materials for another item
- Use vintage items to create new jewellery
  - Keys, buttons, scraps of lace, ribbon, fabric or sentimental occasion items – wedding favours, anniversary items
  - Use old jewellery you can take apart for clasps, locket, stampings, beads, etc.
- Decide what materials you want to work with
  - beads, leather, metal, fimo, painted pasta, embroidery cotton, etc.
  - Then decide what to produce: ear rings, bracelets, necklaces, etc.
- Have a session of looking at jewellery magazines

## Mosaic-making suggestions

- Mosaics are pictures or designs made up of pieces of smaller materials; mosaics can be made with pretty much anything – new, old, recycled, or found materials such as tiles, beads, buttons, glass, and mirrors
- Mosaic project ideas
  - Create a gift item such as a mosaic picture frame or mosaic jewellery box
  - Create mosaic stepping stones for a decorative garden pathway
  - Mosaic terracotta pots and planters
- Broken eggshells are perfect for mosaics!
  - Fill some beakers with water and add two capfuls of food dye to each beaker. Wash the eggshells and break them into small pieces
  - Create mosaic stepping stones for a decorative garden pathway
  - Add the eggshells to the beakers and leave them to soak in the food dye. After they have been soaking for a while, take them out and leave them to dry on some kitchen towel. They'll look like pieces of cracked tile!
  - To make the mosaic, draw the outline of your design onto a piece of card
  - Paste some PVA glue onto a small section, keeping to the lines
  - Lay pieces of the egg shell onto the glue. The pieces don't need to fit together perfectly
- The mosaic-making process is both a leisurely activity as well as productive endeavour. After only a few hours of steady work, an incredible mosaic image emerges, thus making it an immensely satisfying activity that appeals to all

## Other considerations

- Celebrating success is an important way of recognising what has been achieved
- This could be a celebratory afternoon tea or an award ceremony or an exhibition
- Talk to the local newspaper or radio station – can residents be involved?

## Working with others

Here are some ways in which other organisations can support the art activity. Start by searching locally for what's available.

Painting hens on cards, knitting and quilts, there are endless things to make and create with the support of an arts organisation. Find out what's happening in your area.

One project involves hens, looking after them as well as encouraging residents to decorate cards and calendars with the feathered creatures. Some organisations will 'place' an artist in a care home to work directly with residents so each individual is

supported to create something meaningful to them. Or the artist will use conversations with residents as a stimulus to, for example, produce a piece of mosaic design which is displayed in the care home garden. One project involves young artists conversing with residents and then creating a conversation 'collage' as a result. These included textile tapestries, photography, oil paintings and illustrations. Each person was given the art work inspired by that personal talk.

Arts organisations can extend the range of objects it's possible to make in a care home. In one South London home, residents made necklaces and earrings from semi-precious stones and then polished the pieces of jewellery. In another, a museum and a local artist involved care homes residents in reminiscence work which was then used in the creation of multi-sensory interactive memory blanket.

It may be about 'supporting' people to find the confidence to be creative. One project helps this process by recruiting 'creative friends' who act as a stimulus to an older resident to find shared creative interests. In another, a relaxed shared space where people can talk and sew, fosters the chance to work together and in one project they made a quilt.

Most museums are keen to make their collections widely accessible. Some organise visiting sessions for certain groups, providing the opportunity to touch and feel objects of interest, or have virtual tours of collections that can be accessed so less mobile people can still be involved. Some museums will arrange for objects from the collection to be brought into community settings.

### **Examples of good practice**

Here are some examples of how the art activity is used in practice. Search locally for what's available in your area.

#### [Imagine Garden Mosaics](#)

As part of the Imagine programme, patients at Nottinghamshire Hospice were involved in the selection of an artist to help them create a permanent piece of artwork at the hospice. Workshop sessions with Zantium Mosaics resulted in patients creating a series of three-dimensional mosaics that have been housed in their recently re-landscaped garden.

#### [Engage Conversation Collage](#)

This project, run in care homes in North London aims to help social interactions within care homes. The collages are commissioned pieces of art given to care home residents as gifts by friends and families. Young artists develop the artwork based on conversations with the participating older person. The piece of art can vary from textile tapestries and photography to oil paintings and illustrations.

#### [Equal Arts Creative activities](#)

Equal Arts is a creative ageing charity supporting older people and those living with dementia in Gateshead, Newcastle and across the UK. It works to improve the lives of older people through creativity and arts activities around the North East.

### [Equal Arts HenPower project](#)

Creative activities for residents at Shaddon House, run by Gateshead Council, include the 'hands-on' keeping of hens and arts and crafts sessions hosted by Equal Arts, which are often themed around the hens. Activities include designing cards, calendars and tea towels. [Article about Shaddon House](#)

### [Flux Studios Jewellery design](#)

Professional designers from Flux Studios in Camberwell, London run courses at Love Walk care home. The latest course involved residents in designing their own pieces which were made into necklaces and earrings.

### [Freeman House and First Garden City Heritage Museum Mapping Memories project](#)

This project, a partnership between the care home, museum and a local artist involved reminiscence work with residents, which informed therapeutic creative craft and textile work. The outcome of the project was a multisensory interactive memory blanket.

### [The Courtyard The Red Suitcase project](#)

This partnership, between Hereford College of Arts (HCA) and the Courtyard's Arts and Older People Project involved degree students on placements in residential care homes across Herefordshire. The students took a red vintage suitcase with sample quilts and inspiration items into the care homes and the students and residents worked together to create new quilts.

### [Memory Boxes](#)

For a small fee care homes are able to borrow 'reminiscence' boxes from Chesterfield Museum. The boxes are themed and include topics such as 'What we did for fun' and 'Our working life'. Staff say that seeing the objects brings pleasure to the residents, increases self-esteem and stimulates conversation.

### **Resources**

[An evaluation of 'HENPOWER: Improving Wellbeing & Social Capital in Care Settings \(Equal Arts\)](#)

[www.scie.org.uk/person-centred-care/arts-in-care-homes/](http://www.scie.org.uk/person-centred-care/arts-in-care-homes/)