

Arts in care homes

Puppets in care homes



There's something magical about puppets, knowing that they're not the real thing yet suspending disbelief to enjoy the drama and comedy they can create.

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 discovered whether the individual has an interest in story-telling or puppetry in order to involve them.

You don't have to be a master puppeteer to benefit from the creative participation in puppetry and storytelling. There are four main types of puppet used around the world: glove or hand puppets, rod puppets, marionettes and shadow puppets. Such a performance is also known as a puppet play. The puppeteer uses movements of their hands, arms, or control devices such as rods or strings to move the body, head, limbs, and in some cases the mouth and eyes of the puppet.

The puppeteer often speaks in the voice of the character of the puppet, and then synchronizes the movements of the puppet's mouth with this spoken part. The actions, gestures and spoken parts acted out by the puppets are typically used in [storytelling](#). There are many different varieties of puppets, and they are made of a wide range of materials, depending on their form and intended use. They can be extremely complex or very simple in their construction.

The following suggestions 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 puppetry sessions in a creative, imaginative and enthusiastic manner
- Encourage staff, volunteers and family members to join in

- Create a performance feel using a range of puppets, possibly stage props and various stories
- Have appropriate accompanying music playing to create atmosphere
- The challenge is in allowing the puppets to interact with people and for the puppeteer to take a supporting role
- Provide advance notice to participants so that a potentially new experience is offered in a non-threatening way
 - Consider naming the group imaginatively
- Structuring 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

Points to consider:

- Potential activities
 - Activities range from sand-papering puppet parts; using vintage puppets; making puppets; using common themes; sing-a-long puppets
- Creativity – instructions readily available to find online
 - Make a 2D paper puppet
 - Make a sock puppet
 - Make a finger puppet
 - Make a paper bag puppet
 - Make an Indonesian cut-out puppet
 - Make up stories
 - Put on shows
 - Invite others to see the shows
 - Create invitations

- Have food and drink related to the show
- Storytelling
 - Consider using fables or folklore tales
 - Give each person a puppet and ask the group to tell a communal story going from one person to the next
- Participation
 - Puppets can be used to stimulate memories, celebrate life achievements and promote self-esteem and confidence
 - Engage people using music, storytelling and reminiscence
 - Even in the later stages, when memory, words and relationships are affected, it is possible for people with dementia to express emotions, imagination, humour, sensitivities and personal preferences
 - Don't underestimate potential achievements
- Other ideas
 - Punch and Judy, Muffin the Mule, Sooty and Sweep, Lamb Chop, Thunderbirds, Spitting Image, etc.
 - Watch TV programmes or DVDs of puppets shows
 - Invite others to join in such as family members
 - Make it a regular event

Working with others

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

Puppets are used in care homes to tell stories and have universal appeal. They may resemble a human, animal or mythical figure which when used in care homes, can bring unexpected benefits for residents. Finger, hand and larger puppet figures sometimes bring out qualities of a person that are not typically there. For example, a shy person may develop a personality for their puppet that is confident. People with Alzheimer's or dementia may use puppets to act out their past job or experiences which helps staff to understand more about them. For example, in one project, a woman who was an opera singer started singing opera tunes through her puppet.

Using a puppet may allow a person living with dementia who is non-verbal to communicate, using it to interact with other people's puppets to make a connection. Because puppets require people to animate them, this stimulates creativity, fun and social engagement, enhancing quality of life.

Inter-generational projects recognise the appeal of puppets to all ages. One project worked with older people and nursery age children to create jointly imaginary adventures. Some puppets are used with other art forms such as music and dance. They may be used in street carnivals and festivals.

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.

Now Moments

This creative project, which took place at Beech Court, Nottinghamshire explored how puppets could be used to interact with residents, some of whom had dementia. (Annette Waterfield)

Bright Shadow Dementia and Early Years Zest Workshop

This intergenerational project invited people with dementia living in an extra care unit and children from a nursery in the London Borough of Westminster to join their puppet Tetley on his 'big adventures'. Over the five weeks, they adventured to the great outdoors, Wimbledon, seaside, circus and space.

City Arts Imagine programme (carnival and events)

As part of the Imagine programme, residents at Abbeyfield's Milbeck House care home, Nottingham Hospice and Radford Care Group took part in arts workshops which led to the creation by a renowned puppet maker, of a giant parrot. The parrot was paraded in the Nottingham Carnival and later it went on tour to care homes and care centres in Nottingham. Other City Arts activities also involve the use of puppetry in the care homes.

Imagine Recipe for Life

This particular strand of work began with a series of pilots to establish responses to puppetry in through a series of workshops facilitated by different puppeteers in four care homes in Nottingham (Sycamore and Millbeck Houses, The Firs, Park House and Nottinghamshire Hospice). The concept of this work has been to create a co-produced theatre piece with residents. This process has involved a series of interactive and sensory workshops (20 in total) with a writer and puppeteers.

Magic Me

This intergenerational project was run at the Hawthorn Green Care Home run by Sanctuary Care in East London with pupils from the Osmani Primary School. It was led by a puppeteer and musician and composer. The pupils visited the residents and sessions included the creation of puppets and performance of shadow work using household implements and other objects. Taken from Creative Homes, (Baring Foundation) [Here is another puppet project.](#)

Resources

[Puppetry in Dementia: connecting through creativity and joy](#)

The author, who has a background in nursing, counselling and social care, has spent many years developing frameworks and formats for using puppets with people with dementia in care homes. This book demonstrates her deep understanding of the difficulties faced by people with dementia, their families and carers and it contains instructions and guidance for making a range of different puppets suitable for use with older people in care homes. (Abstract only) (Jessica Kingsley Publishers)

[Puppetry and dementia care](#)

This blog highlights how puppets can prove beneficial to individuals with Alzheimer's or other forms of dementia. (Home Assistance Care)

www.scie.org.uk/person-centred-care/arts-in-care-homes/