

Arts in care homes

Sculpture and pottery in care homes



Using different materials to sculpt into shapes and objects provides care home residents with the opportunity to express their creativity.

Doing it yourself

Participation from individuals may vary vastly, from watching the activity to full participation. You don't have to be a master craftsman to benefit from participating in pottery or sculpture-related activities. Pottery can involve the use of various materials including clay. The feel of clay and other modelling materials can be relaxing for individuals, who may start making shapes without even thinking about the end product.

Smaller sculptures can be displayed in an individual's room while larger scale works could be made for the garden. Ceramic art can be made by one person or by a group of people. Stimulating creativity can lower stress and increase relaxation and feelings of happiness.

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 sculpture and pottery sessions in a creative, imaginative and enthusiastic manner
 - Encourage staff, volunteers and family members to join in
 - Create a studio feel using mats, stands, posters and displays around the room
 - Have music playing to create atmosphere
- Provide advance notice to participants so that a potentially new experience is offered in a non-threatening way

- Consider naming the group imaginatively, i.e. Creative Workshop, may be less daunting
- Wash hands thoroughly after modelling or working with clay products
- 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
- In order to encourage a reluctant participant, try starting to soften or mould a piece of clay and inviting them to complete it
 - Taking part in creativity can stimulate the mind as well as developing or maintaining motor skills
- Don't underestimate potential achievements
 - Display finished artefacts on stands, creating a gallery. Stands can be made from cardboard boxes and cake stands

Points to consider:

- The use of air drying clays can be easier than traditional clay that requires firing in a kiln. Different colours and textures are available
- Purchase modelling clays or make it yourself, for example, salt dough
- Junk materials that would be thrown away can be used to make amazing sculptures
- Some ideas for projects
 - Create coil pots. Roll clay into long strings and wind the strings around and around to create shapes. The outside surface of the pot can be made smooth using a finger or spatula
 - Make a magnet sculpture. Drop metal items such as coins, pieces of aluminium foil and nuts on to it

- Use plaster of Paris or papier mache to cover or part-cover a balloon. When the material is dry, pop the balloon. The remaining shape can be used as the base to create a mythical creature or a mask
- Dip a balloon into warm melted chocolate. When the chocolate sets, burst the balloon to make an edible bowl
- Collect materials of different colours, shapes and textures to use when making collages or decorating boxes
- Lightweight shapes or models can be hung on strings to make mobiles
- Buy coloured 'slime'. It's tactile and can be manipulated into shapes
- Other ideas
 - Sessions could lead to reminiscence of sculptures or pottery projects that participants have made or seen
 - Hold a discussion about famous ceramic artists or show a TV programme on pottery
 - Invite others to join in, i.e. family members

Working with others

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

Sculptures can be made from any material – from stuff that is found in a skip to the more traditional stone, glass or clay. Projects which encourage people to use materials from which to fashion objects are likely to be popular in a care home. The chance to form, squish or combine materials is deeply satisfying. Created objects may resemble something else (such as a head) or be diffuse and free-form.

Museums which house objects that have been created over the years, now see it as part of their remit to encourage a wider section of the community. This is done in two main ways: by creating new opportunities for people to come into the museums as well as taking projects to take collections outside the museum walls.

In-reach: Museums open their doors at agreed times for certain groups. This means the place is quiet and there's an opportunity for staff to explain more about the collection. Visitors can handle the exhibits. These sessions enable care home residents to experience and discuss famous and beautiful works of art, to learn new things and to reminisce and share stories.

One project of museum visits was aimed at care home residents who live with dementia and aimed to stimulate creativity, cultural appreciation and social engagement. Monthly visits 'supported' by museum staff who worked with visits provided a social experience within the gallery spaces in addition to sensory-based activities.

Out-reach: Museum staff also go out to residents in care homes and will take objects from the collection with them. One ran a programme of reminiscence about holidays and travel. They then created a map showing places that the residents had visited. Objects from those countries stimulated memories of past visits or connections.

A care home project that builds on the significance that objects can have for residents explores how to produce 'new' objects in a communal making session. The idea is to generate objects where personal artefacts from the past have been lost, and at the same time, to generate new memories. The new objects could become tokens for exchange and sharing within the care home environment.

A national campaign builds on this idea, taking it out of a museum and into ordinary life. In Do, Think, Share (see the link below), people are encouraged to recognise their inherent creativity and to make drawings or poems or objects inspired by everyday life.

For some people, that will mean working with clay. The soft smooth material provides an opportunity for many including those who are non-verbal to create objects or to enjoy the chance for a playful sensory experience. In another project, white clay is used to make pots, trinket boxes or sculptures and residents paint and glaze their work in a subsequent workshop.

All these experiences could be captured in a new style of book-creator apps. As well as the text and images, the pages contain audio and video triggers. This gives an extra dimension to the reminiscences of residents.

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.

[Alive! Museums](#)

Activity sessions take different forms. In partnership with the Wallace Collection (London), and Russell-Cotes Museum (Bournemouth), two separate programmes of multi-sensory, interactive sessions based on their unique collections are run for residents in care homes.

[Arts Care Gofal Celf Yma a Nawr Project](#)

This project brought professional artists of various disciplines into Gwalia's Mynydd Mawr care home to work with people living there. Residents' families also took part along with Gwalia staff and children from local schools who were invited into the home to take part in intergenerational workshops. Sessions for older people and those living with dementia included [clay therapy](#). The sculptor also was involved in the creation of a sculpture for the care home.

[Edinburgh Museums & Galleries Outreach](#)

Staff use the museum's collection to run sessions with Museum Alive volunteers in care homes. For example at Marionville Court Care Home they ran a session called Maps and Memories which explored holidays and travel. A map was created showing the places residents had visited.

[Emily Hall Pottery sessions](#)

Pottery sessions are run at Nightingale Hammerson's care homes in London three times a week. To personalise the classes, the pottery teacher gets to know the personalities of each resident, as well as their interests and abilities.

[Leicester Aging Together Do, Think and Share](#)

Digital prompts are used to invite older people to take on creative challenges. These could be anything from making a sculpture of what is in the room, to drawing the view from their window. The tasks are designed to be completed without any support from an artist or professional.

[Manchester Museum and Whitworth Art Gallery Coffee, Cake & Culture Programme](#)

The Programme, for people with dementia in residential care settings and supported housing, was developed from a pilot and feasibility study in 2012. The programme of activities promoted access to the collections and participation in cultural activities and it focussed on creativity rather than reminiscence, memory or recall.

[National Museums Liverpool House of Memories Programme](#)

This museum led programme offers training, access to resources and museum-based activities to enable carers provide person-centred care for people living with dementia. This app allows users to explore objects from the past and to share memories together.

[Tangible Memories Outside the Box project](#)

Scarborough Museums Trust and social housing provider Yorkshire Coast Homes have introduced a project, Outside the Box, which runs reminiscence sessions in locations across Scarborough. This is an intergenerational project involving young volunteers – sessions are facilitated through objects from the museum's handling collections. The Tangible Memories Story Creator app will also be used to record oral histories from the local community.

[Purple Potters - Mobile Pottery](#)

Pottery workshops are run alongside activity organisers for residents in care homes throughout the Home Counties, North London and North Cornwall. White clay is used to make pots, trinket boxes or sculptures and residents are also able to paint and glaze their work in a further workshop.

Resources

[An Evaluation of House of Memories Dementia Training Programme: Midlands Model](#)

This third evaluation study of the House of Memories programme captures and continues to assess impact factors that emerged from the previous studies. The evaluation was also inspired by other research undertaken in the museums sector, designed to measure the impact of museums and relevant interventions upon participants' health and wellbeing. (Institute of Cultural Capital)

[Let's Create! Pottery app \(uses digital technology\)](#)

This app can be used to make a virtual pot in a few easy steps – from moulding, to firing, to painting and adding prints.

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