

## Arts in care homes

### Theatre in care homes



Being involved in a theatrical production or watching one being performed allows people to express and explore what it means to be human. Putting on a theatre in a care home creates an exciting focus.

#### 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 what genre of drama interests the individual in order to involve them. For example, it may not work to put on a pantomime for individuals who enjoy Shakespeare.

You don't have to be a director, writer or actor to benefit from the creative participation in theatre and storytelling. It should be an active, experiential approach that facilitates the individual's ability to tell their story, solve problems, set goals, express feelings appropriately, improve interpersonal skills and relationships.

Drama/theatre maximises the individual's cognitive and communication skills; fosters creativity and individuality; encourages physical activity; builds community; and strengthens self-esteem. You may use dolls, puppets, hats, scarves, photos, copies of artwork, or sensory devices to evoke memories or encourage individuals to use their imagination to create and enact stories. Through use of sound and movement, drama can provide a means of communication and connection for people who have lost capacity for speech or clear verbal communication.

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 drama 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 props and various stories

- Opportunity to dress to suit the occasion
- Have appropriate accompanying 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
- 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
  - Decorate the area to suit the theme of the drama
  - Have food and drink to fit the theme
- Playing music before a session can be helpful in getting everyone in the right mood
  - Replaying the music used in the sessions during the week can also be helpful
  - Could lead to discussions about costumes and music
- The use of props can be effective
  - Scarves, ribbons, flags, etc. can all be incorporated into the drama sessions to support inclusivity
- Ensuring 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

Other ideas:

- Put on your own production
  - Write and produce your own plays or pantomimes
  - Don't start with a script, but have some roughly worked-out scenes around which people improvise
  - Handling props, listening to music and wearing costumes can lead to discussions about a theme enabling stories to be made up and enacted

- Use themes that are accessible and evocative, e.g. 'A Seaside Pier' and 'A Western Saloon'
- Hold an 'Oscar's' ceremony where individuals are awarded certificates and given photographs of themselves taking part in sessions
- Don't underestimate potential achievements
- Engage people using music, storytelling and reminiscence
- Watch TV or DVDs of plays and productions
  - Many are available to hire or purchase
  - Could benefit either a group or an individual
  - Discussion about the actual play could take place
- Other ideas
  - Discuss residents memories of previous theatre attendances
  - Read a play
  - Play charades
  - Hold storytelling sessions
  - Discuss photographs of famous actors and actresses
  - Sound-effect quiz – what does this sound suggest to you?
  - Invite others to join in e.g.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.

Theatre companies may be funded by a charity or award-making body to offer inexpensive seats for residents and staff to attend shows. A backstage 'tour' may be offered so residents can see what goes on behind the scenes. Local schools may offer to do a production in a care home.

Other companies will be funded to work within care homes. A company will stage a famous play or musical in the care home (or part of it). Some companies offer a writer who works with residents to develop a joint production. The play may be based on the life stories of residents, draw on local stories or have a seasonal theme.

Sometimes it will be professional and/or amateur actors who perform in the show in the communal space of a care home. There are also companies which specialise in co-producing shows with residents who become the actors. Puppets are sometimes used as actors. One company makes miniature portable theatres of objects and artefacts. These 'boxes of memories' help older performers to engage with their audiences.

Family, friends of residents and the local community can be invited to attend performances.

## 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.

### [Burwood Nursing Home Theatre](#)

A family run nursing home in Dorset has built a 1930s style theatre to bring the arts to their residents.

### [Collective Encounters Live and Learn](#)

Through Live and Learn older people are offered the chance to get involved in making theatre. This may be through participating in a theatre workshop or watching a performance in the care home.

### [Entelechy Arts Little Boxes of Memories](#)

Life stories of older people are transposed into miniature portable theatres full of objects and artefacts and these Little Boxes of Memories are used by older 'performers' to engage with their audiences.

### [Imagine Nottingham Playhouse Performs](#)

Over five weeks, residents within the care home were encouraged to participate in a series of bespoke performance sessions facilitated by drama specialists and musicians. Familiar stories were enacted each week on the request of the residents.

### [Ladder to the Moon Vibrant Communities](#)

The programme combines staff training, advice and guidance with a series of co-produced creative events for residents in care homes. Theatre, creative activities and arts are used in programmes. For example, at Ashley Gardens care home a project culminated in the recreation of an Oscars ceremony.

### [Small Things Creative The Storybox Project](#)

This project, which is built around residencies in care homes, comprises workshops which are designed around different themes using theatre and stories as a starting point. A variety of music, props and costume are also incorporated into the workshops.

### [Magic Me Artists in residencies in care homes](#)

This intergenerational arts company collaborates with artists and performers to create new artwork and performances in care homes. Artists in residency programmes include projects with Duckie, an 'Arts enterprise, homo-social honky-tonk and performance club for extraordinary populations'. They produced [Palace of Varieties](#) which took place at Anchor's Waterside Care Home in Peckham. Another example is a collaboration with [Punchdrunk](#), in which an immersive experience of a lifelike village green was created for residents in Greenhive care home, Peckham. Magic Me also runs [Cocktails in Care Homes](#), an initiative seeking to aid to loneliness in old age in care homes across London.

### [Spare Tyre The Garden](#)

This is an interactive installation and performance for people with dementia and their carers. Bringing the outdoors in, it takes participants on a multisensory journey through

the seasons. During the performance, Spare Tyre artists create a safe space for communication and creative engagement, particularly focusing on methods of non-verbal communication.

### [Waterside Theatre Telling Tales](#)

Based in in Derry-Londonderry, Northern Ireland, this company ran 'Telling Tales', an intergenerational visual arts project, which linked together care homes, community centres and schools. The project provided an insight into the minds of people living in residential care and demonstrated the transformative power of the arts in bringing children and older people together as co-creators. In: Lynch U., [Not So Cut Off: alleviating isolation and loneliness in older people through the arts.](#)

## **Resources**

### [Magic Me's Artists Residencies in Care Homes programmes report](#)

This is the final report of a two-year programme Artists Residencies in Care Homes, which was set up to show the benefits performance artists can bring to older people and people with dementia in a care home environment. It also aimed to develop new tools and techniques to support artists in this work. The programme was delivered by Magic Me in partnership with Anchor and four leading performing arts companies in the country: Punchdrunk Enrichment, Duckie, Upswing, and performance artist Lois Weaver. (Magic Me)

### [Vibrant communities: the care homes of the future](#)

In this article, the author reflects on the state of activities in the care home sector and the emerging evidence in favour of participatory approaches. Drawing on his experience of the work of Ladder to the Moon, he also looks at what creativity (such as arts and drama), leadership and community events can offer. Ladder to the Moon provide a package of organisational and workforce development services for care homes, Vibrant Communities, which provides coaching, training and creativity training to staff. (Journal of Dementia Care)

### [Igniting transformative change in dementia care: through research-based drama](#)

As part of a longitudinal research project, the authors set out to examine how personal images, understandings, and actions of family members of people with dementia and health care professionals change after the introduction of a research-based drama about the experiences of living with dementia called I'm Still Here. This article focuses on the shorter- (six weeks) and longer-term (12 months) experiences of engaging with I'm Still Here and how those experiences triggered personal transformation. (Gerontologist)

### [The Storybox Project: examining the role of a theatre and arts-based intervention for people with dementia](#)

This report presents the findings of an evaluation of Storybox, a participatory and participant-led theatre and arts based intervention in Manchester. (University of Manchester)

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