

# How can Inclusive Arts Practices support the over 75s to use their hands to promote an increased sense of wellbeing?



**Research by Emma Snowdon**

# Contents

Executive Summary	3
Introduction	4
The Purpose of the Project	5
What is Inclusive Arts Practice?	6
Why the over 75s?	7
The Positive Ageing Agenda	10
Art is Healthy	11
Methodology	13
Thematic Approach	16
The Hands and Importance of Touch	18
Key Findings 1: Accessibility (Time, Space and Choice)	26
Key Findings 2: Hands and Touch	33
Key Findings 3: Multiple Perspectives	37
Key Recommendations	45
Conclusion	46
Bibliography	47
Appendix 1 - Key words used most often in sessions	50
Appendix 2 - Feedback	51
Appendix 3 - Feedback received overall from sessions	52

## About the Author

Emma loves the NHS and dedicates this research to it, along with her fabulous family who have supported her tremendously on her journey and particularly her Nana Kathleen Williams who passed age 96 in March 2019, whose hands in her final years gave her the inspiration for this research.

[www.emmasnowdonart.com](http://www.emmasnowdonart.com)

## Executive Summary

We have an ageing society. Medical progress has extended so many people's lives. By 2050 the number of people in the UK aged 80 years or more is projected to have reached 8 million, more than double the current 3.2 million. We hear labels such as 'ticking time bomb' applied to growing numbers of older people. Yet what does that really say about our society? There is still work to be done to prepare for a more sustainable future; towards one which further promotes age and ageing. This report gives details of the demographic landscape for the over 75s, and sets out some steps towards a more positive ageing agenda.

The report details findings from a comprehensive literature review in relation to the hands themselves, describes the importance of touch for older people, and how it can help alleviate feelings of loneliness and isolation.

Key findings and recommendations from the Inclusive Arts workshops held with a group of over 75 year old people are presented. The difference between Inclusive Arts Practice and Art Therapy is described, along with the methodology used to carry out the research. The report sets out how being inclusive requires compassion, awareness, effort and energy to ensure everyone can be included.

Finally the report sets out how perspective, not age might matter the most and how we can shift the societal perspective to see older age as a beginning rather than an ending.

I hope you enjoy reading it, and would love your feedback. Please go to my website [emmasnowdonart.com](http://emmasnowdonart.com) with any comments or suggestions.

Many thanks

Emma Snowdon

## Introduction

Back in 2018, I felt an urge to draw pictures of hands, similar to the earliest cave paintings. I started to take photographs of my grandmother's hands. I had barely noticed her hands before. The individual lines. The gentle folds and creases of her skin. Her huge knuckles riddled with arthritis. They looked beautiful and serene to me. She had used them busily all her life and was still using them now, whilst all her other senses were failing. It occurred to me that as a society it often feels like we often avoid thinking about our hands despite using them all day long. I wondered if there was potential to find new connections to our hands and for older people in hospitals and care homes to use them to help alleviate feelings of loneliness and isolation.

These observations of my grandmother's hands inspired my research project "How can Inclusive Arts practices support the over 75s to use their hands to promote an increased sense of wellbeing?" I carried out the research as part of my Brighton University master's degree in Inclusive Arts Practice and held six Inclusive Arts Practice workshops with a group of over 75 years old people at the Shoreham Centre, Shoreham by Sea. I studied the participants' hands during the research and observed how their hands responded to different materials and objects. This report sets out my key findings and recommendations.

The journey to becoming an artist and facilitator has taken some bravery. I feel that I've had to stick my head above a parapet to do this, but I am so pleased I decided to take this leap of faith. Juliet Miller's book *The Creative Feminine and Her Discontents*<sup>1</sup> taught me that I was not alone in this. Being creative does take courage. Many women often subvert their natural abilities. Men too. My hope is we can move more towards a society where we are free to be ourselves and express our creativity fully. It feels that with the arrival of Covid-19 our global leaders have some difficult and important choices to make, and I trust and pray they will choose the right path for us.

"I'm seeing strong signals in the zeitgeist that 2021 will be the biggest wave of entrepreneurial energy in the history of civilisation". #GoldenAge<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Miller, Juliette. *The Creative Feminine and Her Discontents. Psychotherapy, Art, and Destruction*. London: Karnac Books Ltd, 2008. Print.

<sup>2</sup> Scott, Simon. Twitter @ScottAdamsSays

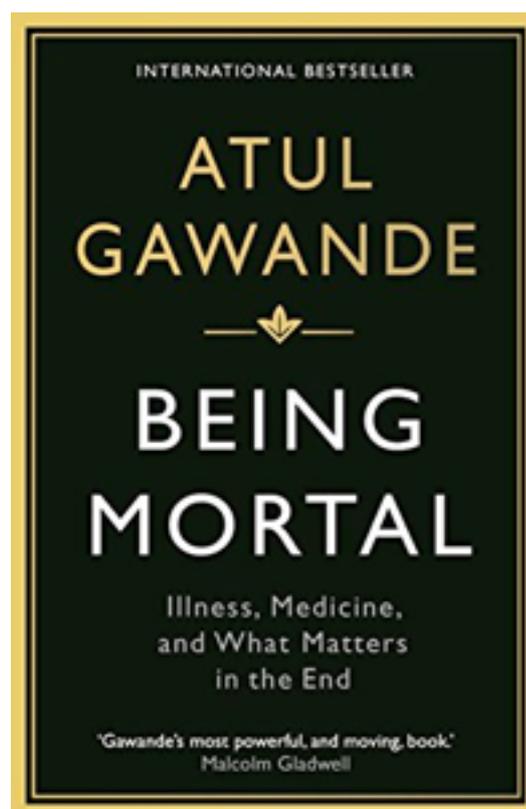
## The Purpose of the Project

The aim of the project was to explore and develop Inclusive Arts Practices (IAPs) that can support the over 75s to form additional connections to each other, materials and space to help enhance their sense of independence, belonging and purpose. During the course of the research, participants collectively agreed that 'wellbeing' was a more suitable umbrella term.

By facilitating various IAPs for this age group, I explored the different ways our hands can be used, either by touch, manipulation of materials or objects, and examined how these can be adapted to suit individual needs. Arts activities included the exploration of: dry clay, sand trays, ink washes, weaving, mark making, drawing in charcoal and pencil activities. Whilst the activities took place, I gently facilitated and documented conversations.

The research responds to the common threads between the rise in numbers of the older people, their needs and continued desire to achieve independence and a sense of purpose and legacy identified by Dr Atul

Gawande in *Being Mortal*. Dr Gawande observed that medical progress has extended our lives, and the numbers of older people are overtaking the numbers of children, but "few societies have come to grips with this new demography".<sup>3</sup> Importantly for my research, Dr Gawande goes on to describe how "making lives meaningful in old age is new"<sup>4</sup>, and one of the ways people's lives can have more meaning is through the connections they make to other people and their surroundings.



<sup>3</sup> Gawande, Atul. *Being Mortal*. London: Profile Books, 2015: 36

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.: 137

## What is Inclusive Arts Practice?

What is Inclusive Arts Practice and how does it differ from Art Therapy?

The book *Inclusive Arts Practice and Research* by Alice Fox and Hannah Macpherson sets out the differences:

*“Inclusive Arts can be understood to be therapeutic because it provides a supportive environment and encourages communication and creative expression of ideas, experience and/or ambitions. Within Inclusive Arts the emphasis tends to be on the artistic product, whereas in Art Therapy the emphasis tends to be on using the art making process for healing and emotional release through work that is not necessarily for public display”.<sup>5</sup>*

Inclusive Arts supports a creative exchange between all involved, which shifts the focus away from being a teacher/expert to being a facilitator involved with participants in a collaboration. Relationships extend

beyond the people involved and encompass the materials, space and interactions. Inclusive Artists value the creative contribution of each participant and recognise that everyone involved will have unique qualities. Within my research, older age is not considered a deficit or a limitation, but brings with it a unique perspective and positive contribution. Older age is considered an asset in the room.

Arts Council England refer to this focus on assets rather than deficits as the ‘creative case for diversity’.<sup>6</sup>

*“When we see assets people are not boxed into social categories, and there is emphasis on the process and the encounter. The art may not be on the paper or in the materials but may be found elsewhere. We might look at what is communicated in the silence and gestures rather than words or marks made on paper. Inclusive Artists select materials that listen and spaces which are conducive to listening...The art might sit in the final product, in the process, in the encounter or in the construction of the idea”.<sup>7</sup>*

---

<sup>5</sup> Fox, Alice, and Hannah Macpherson. *Inclusive Arts Practice and Research: A Critical Manifesto*. Abingdon: Routledge, 2015: 23

<sup>6</sup><https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/diversity/creative-case-diversity>

<sup>7</sup> Fox, Alice, and Hannah Macpherson. *Inclusive Arts Practice and Research: A Critical Manifesto*. Abingdon: Routledge, 2015: 9

*“Effective Inclusive Artists enable choice and freedom, allow time, establish trust, embrace risk... and are open to all forms of communication, and reflect on their practice”.*<sup>8</sup>

*“They do not overlay opinion. The ethic of encounter is about a whole mode of being in the world and letting others be in the world”.*<sup>9</sup>

In order to be inclusive, we would adapt the session to suit the participants. If someone had lost a hand, for example, we would adapt sessions accordingly to ensure they could fully participate. It requires compassion and careful consideration. The aim is to minimise exclusion.

## Why the over 75s?

The demographic landscape of our society is changing and we are an ageing population. Joint Strategic Needs Assessments (JSNA) are carried out by public health and council staff, and inform the commissioning cycle of the NHS. For the purpose of my research I looked to the JSNA for West Sussex, since the participants were from

the Shoreham by Sea area, however the situation is similar nationally.

In West Sussex, current projections estimate an 18% increase in the number of 85+ year olds between 2019 and 2024, and a 20% increase between 2024 and 2029.<sup>10</sup>

The *International Handbook of Positive Ageing* describes a major shift in the demographic landscape in the United Kingdom over the next 20-30 years.

*“There are currently three million people aged more than 80 years, and this is projected to double by 2030 and reach 8 million by 2050. However in the health and care sector, across media outlets, and within society generally, ageing is often approached and described with negative language. Older people are often labelled with words with negative connotations, such as bed blockers, ageing tsunami, ticking time bomb, frail, vulnerable.”*<sup>11</sup>

The book highlights the need for society to move away from stereotypical views of ageing, to one which describes ageing more positively. The book *Communication and Interpersonal Skills in Nursing* highlights the need to put a different lens on how

---

<sup>8</sup> Fox, Alice, and Hannah Macpherson. *Inclusive Arts Practice and Research: A Critical Manifesto*. Abingdon: Routledge, 2015: 26

<sup>9</sup> Ibid: 89

<sup>10</sup> <https://jsna.westsussex.gov.uk/assets/ageing-well/West-Sussex-JSNA-Older-People-Profiling.pdf>

<sup>11</sup> Docking, Rachael Elizabeth and Stock, Jennifer. *International Handbook of Positive Ageing*. Oxfordshire: Routledge, 2017: 3

we view ageing and gives it the name 'Gerotranscendence',<sup>12</sup> which can be described as a new transformational and positive way of viewing life and older age. It notes that as a society, we seem to find it difficult envisioning an alternative future that positively promotes age.

## The Equality Act

The Equality Act became law in 2010, with the aim of protecting people in Britain from discrimination, harassment and victimisation.

There are nine protected characteristic groups under the Equality Act. These are:

- Age
- Disability
- Gender reassignment
- Marriage and civil partnership
- Pregnancy and maternity
- Race
- Religion or belief
- Sex
- Sexual orientation

All people in Britain will find themselves protected by law for either one or multiple characteristics. The Equality Act says no person can be discriminated against because they are in a certain age group. So, for example, if you are over 70 and have been refused access to a venue because of

your age, this is unlawful discrimination. For the purpose of this research I chose to focus on the over 75s because this age category is considered to be amongst the most economically and socially vulnerable in society. From the outset I recognised that not all over 75s will feel vulnerable, lonely or isolated, but at some point this might change, and no one knows when that might be. Many people often put off difficult conversations about age and ageing. It is a relatively taboo subject. However this can delay important and useful discussions about the adaptations we need to make as a society, and there are opportunities missed to change and improve the experience of ageing. Many people are unprepared when the inevitable does arrive, because they have avoided thinking about it.

*"There are potential consequences for a society that faces the final phase of the human cycle by not trying to think about it. We end up with institutions that address any number of societal goals, from freeing up hospital beds to taking burden off families...but never the goal that matters: how to make life worth living when we are weak and frail and can't fend for ourselves anymore".<sup>13</sup>*

Age UK's report *Hidden in Plain Sight* published in October 2016, reported that people over 75 were six times

---

<sup>12</sup>Grant, Alec, and Goodman, Benny. *Communication and Interpersonal Skills in Nursing 4<sup>th</sup> Edition*. London: SAGE, 2019. Print: 145

<sup>13</sup> Gawande, Atul. *Being Mortal*. London: Profile Books, 2015:77

more likely to be on tranquilisers or similar drug therapies, and up to a quarter of older people were estimated to have symptoms of depression that required intervention.<sup>14</sup> Yet fewer than one in six older people with depression ever discuss this with their GP.<sup>15</sup>

Older people can be prone to social isolation as a result of bereavement, retirement and loss of contact with family and friends which can increase the feeling of loneliness and result in poorer mental health outcomes. (Santinni et al, 2016).

Loneliness and social isolation are considered to be one of the most significant issues facing our ageing society. Barriers to engagement still exist, despite older people being the largest group of service users.

While some older people may have family members and hobbies that help keep them active, there are many facing this stage of life alone. It is so important that we continue to find ways to enable older people to feel included. We often see language which perpetuates the stereotype that older age is primarily a medical issue and, as such, a problem, needing to be addressed. The medical model encourages a view that a 'disability' needs to be fixed or cured.

The social model instead empowers people and recognises that it is a

person's activities that are disabled by their environment and the social barriers which are in place. There is more work to be done towards a more inclusive societal infrastructure.

Older people have wisdom and experience to share and stories to tell, which can help shape the future. We can have a more affirmative model for older age, and arts can be a powerful tool to influence, shape and communicate this. As an Inclusive Arts facilitator my personal aim is to bring a group together to see what assets can be realised.

---

<sup>14</sup> Gentry, Tom, and Stickland, Nicolette. Hidden in Plain Sight.n.p. 2016.: 5

<sup>15</sup> Ibid: 8

## The Positive Ageing Agenda

Detailed studies set out in the *International Handbook of Positive Ageing* suggest that society has a generally negative perception of older people, which can in turn influence the behaviour of this population. A recent study found that “attitudes towards ageing held by young adults in the UK were significantly more negative compared to those held by young adults in China (Stock, 2014).”<sup>16</sup> We only need to look to Twitter to find examples of negative language directed towards older people. We could be seeking more ways for older adults to continue to contribute their assets to society. There is growing evidence of the benefits of integrating older people into society and the positive impact it has on an individual’s health.

The *International Handbook of Positive Ageing* describes some of the key elements of healthy ageing, which I believe are helpful to set out.

**Autonomy** - being able to set goals in life and choose the means.

**Independence** - being able to implement one’s goals without the permission, assistance, or material resources of others.

**Enablement** - having access to means of realising goals and choices.

**Safety** - being able readily to avoid pain or harm.

**Privacy** - being able to pursue and realise one’s goals and implement one’s choices unobserved.<sup>17</sup>

Helpfully, the Social Care Institute for Excellence (SCIE) was commissioned by the Care Quality Commission (CQC) to develop a definition of excellence for social care. They too identified some essential outcomes of excellence:

- Having **choice** and control over day-to-day and significant life decisions.
- Maintaining good **relationships** with family, partners, friends, staff and others.
- Spending time **purposefully** and enjoyably doing things that bring pleasure and meaning.<sup>18</sup>

---

<sup>16</sup> Docking, Rachael Elizabeth and Stock, Jennifer. *International Handbook of Positive Aging*. Oxfordshire: Routledge, 2017:6

<sup>17</sup> *ibid*: 206

<sup>18</sup> Cutler, David. Kelly, Des. Silver, Sylvie. *Creative Homes-How the Arts can contribute to quality of life in residential care*. The Baring Foundation. 2011.

We need to capitalise on the vast knowledge, wisdom and experience of older people who can be involved in

finding the solutions to age-associated issues. We can turn negatives into positives.

## Art is Healthy

There is growing evidence and recognition of the benefits of the arts on physical and mental health and wellbeing. Activities can take place in groups, and large numbers can be brought together for relatively little expense. The pleasures of experiencing different ideas, colours, materials, sounds and conversations were all clear to see within the Inclusive Arts Practice workshops, which I facilitated.

The following is written about the benefits of art on wellbeing by the All – Party Parliamentary Group on Arts, Health and Wellbeing:

*“An estimated one in five GP visits is made for non-medical reasons.*

*An analysis of data from more than 15,000 older people published by Age UK in February 2017 found that engagement in creative and cultural activities made the highest contribution to overall wellbeing.*

*The most common outcomes of such community referral schemes are: increases in self-esteem and confidence; a greater sense of control and empowerment; improvements in psychological wellbeing; reductions in anxiety. Arts on prescription is a vital part of social prescribing.*

*One such programme in Gloucestershire and Wiltshire showed that GP consultation rates dropped by 37% and hospital admissions by 27%, representing a saving of £216 per patient.”*

Hopefully these quotes help to set out some of the key benefits of art on the mind, body and soul, but also the benefits to our society and the NHS also.

## Would you like to take part in some research?

How can Inclusive Arts Practice support the over 75s to use their hands to promote an increased sense of independence, belonging and purpose?

A series of six free workshops for the over 75s, which can be adapted to suit people's needs. All abilities welcome.

We can explore different art materials, mark making, textures, collaboration, and the relationship between materials, time, space, process and our hands.



Where:	The Shoreham Centre
When:	18 October - 22 November 2019
Time:	Fridays 10am - 12pm
Cost:	Free - Includes refreshments
Booking essential:	Call or text 07870 812551 (Spaces are limited)
For more info visit:	<a href="http://www.emmasnowdonart.com">www.emmasnowdonart.com</a>

The research project has been ethically approved by Brighton University.

I would like to thank Age UK and Community Works for distributing my flyers locally in West Sussex. I attracted two participants via Age UK. I placed flyers in various locations around Shoreham by Sea.

## Methodology

The Inclusive Arts Practice workshops were held at the Shoreham Centre on Fridays from 18 October to 22 November 2019 in two hour sessions.

There were seven participants during the course of the sessions: two aged 90+, three aged 80-89, and two aged 75-79. Considerations for the workshop included arthritis, and a broad range of complexities associated with older age.

An Inclusive Arts volunteer from Brighton University took photographs for me during the sessions, and I audio recorded sessions, writing up what I heard a few days later.

During the process I kept a reflective diary to capture key moments, and the combinations of materials, actions, inactions, silences and movements.

I used qualitative methods set out within the book *Inclusive Arts Practice and Research* which included “the methods of collaboration, line, brush movement, gesture and facilitating opportunity.”<sup>19</sup>

As an arts based researcher I would simultaneously be participant and stand

outside of the process to examine what the most successful processes or lines of enquiry were. The workshops would evolve in response to the group, and what was/was not working.

Other techniques used included sensory ethnography. Ethnography is a qualitative method where researchers observe and interact with participants over a period of time. Sarah Pink writes:

*“Sensory ethnography is a process of creating and representing knowledge or ways of knowing that are based on ethnographers’ own experiences and the ways these intersect with the persons, places and things encountered during the process...and aims to offer versions of ethnographers experiences of reality that are as loyal as possible to the context, the embodied, sensory and affective experiences, and the negotiations and intersubjectivities through which the knowledge was produced.”<sup>20</sup>*

I acknowledge that I bring something of myself and my own experience to my findings. I embrace my own unique perspective in the collaboration with the participants in the room, and my research will no doubt reflect some of my own sensory bias.

---

<sup>19</sup>Fox, Alice, and Hannah Macpherson. *Inclusive Arts Practice and Research: A Critical Manifesto*. Abingdon: Routledge, 2015:142.

<sup>20</sup>Pink, Sarah. *Doing Sensory Ethnography 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition*. London: SAGE, 2015:5

My aim overall is to embrace both science and art. To embrace all the five senses, simultaneously, as far as possible (sight, hearing, smell, taste and touch).

*"The process of bringing together involves the accumulation of emplaced ways of knowing generated not simply*

*through verbal exchanges but through, for example, cups of tea and coffee, comfortable cushions, movement or performance, odours, textures, sounds and images. The interview and its environment create a place event, where researcher and interviewee are mutually emplaced as they move along its narrative."*<sup>21</sup>



*"Science is one lens, creative arts another; we see more deeply using two lenses".*<sup>22</sup>

---

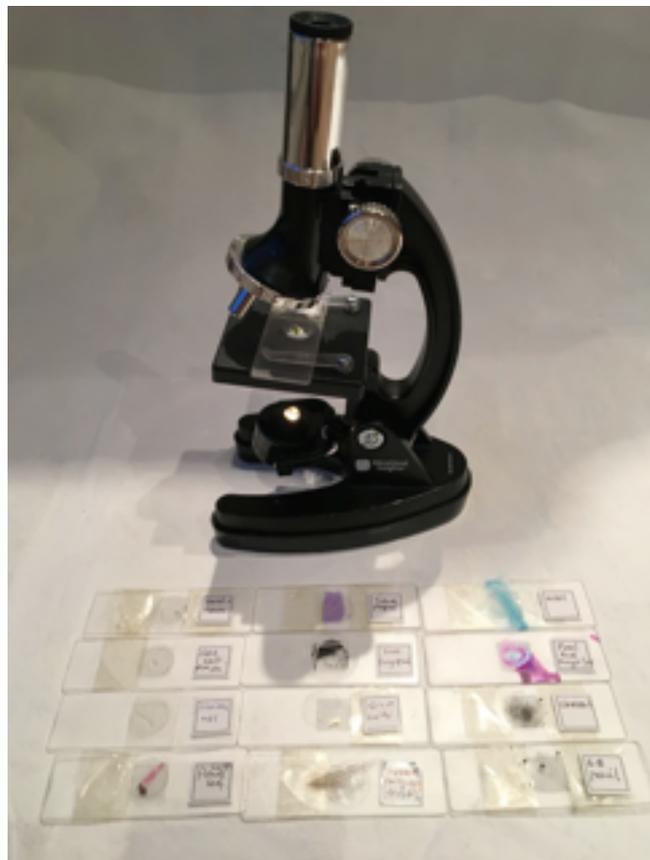
<sup>21</sup>Pink, Sarah. *Doing Sensory Ethnography 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition*. London: SAGE, 2015: 80

<sup>22</sup>Bartlett, Ruth. *Visualising dementia activism: using the arts to communicate research findings*. London: SAGE, 2015, Vol 15, 755-768: 758

Sarah Pink notes that sensoriality is fundamental to the ways in which we learn and is also becoming central within the academic fields of social sciences and humanities. Using our senses fully brings a different type of learning experience.

*“Knowledge is itself unstable, ambiguous and multidimensional, can be emotionally or affectively charged and cannot necessarily be conveyed with the precision of mathematical proof.”<sup>23</sup>*

As an arts researcher, I have been granted the freedom to look through the lens for something that is evolving, and that can't be measured. As such I have moved away from more scientific measurements, and rely instead on trusting my own senses.



Studying materials under the microscope

---

<sup>23</sup>Smith, Hazel, and R.T.Dean. *Practice- Led Research, Research Led Practice in the Creative Arts. Research methods for the arts and humanities*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009: 3

## Thematic Approach

Within the six workshops I chose to use a thematic approach, and found that using a theme gave more focus to the agenda and sessions. I did not plan the full six sessions weeks in advance, but used feedback from the first session to plan the next. Sessions evolved organically and felt better able to be adapted to suit participants' needs.

Key themes included:

- 1) Connections
- 2) Freedom, Choice and Independence
- 3) Creative Potential
- 4) Legacy
- 5) Perspective
- 6) Reflections

The following questions were asked at each session:

- 1) How have your hands given you choice and freedom during the course of your life?
- 2) In what ways do you feel you have reached your creative potential? Have there been any barriers?
- 3) How would you capture your personality in a piece of art?
- 4) It's perspective, not age, that matters the most. Do you agree?

The thematic approach worked well as it gave an overarching structure to

sessions. In my journal I noted that it often felt as if participants did not wish to delve too deeply into the themed questions, and on some occasions they felt best avoided to ensure the atmosphere was relaxed. Just having the theme floating in the ether seemed to give the workshops more focus, and there was more for participants to explore further if they wished. I have included an agenda from one of the workshops to illustrate how the workshops were set out. In general I provided one warm up activity (often carried out in silence to bring our thoughts back into the room), and two further arts activities. This approach seemed to work well throughout the six sessions since activities required less time than an oil or acrylic painting class, and moved participants away from perfect finished results towards experimentation with materials and textures.

Having a theme was useful in the sessions for providing a common purpose and goal, and a really strong theme such as legacy seemed able to provoke a mild reaction, even without words or discussion. It simply gave choice for participants to think inside and outside the room. There was no pressure to discuss it further.

## Session 4 - Theme of Legacy



Hasegawa Tohaku -Pine Trees

Time	Activity	Title
10am	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Welcome</li><li>- Purpose for the session</li><li>- Feedback from the week.</li></ul>	How can you capture your personality (life spirit) in a piece of art?
10.15am	Silent warm up activity	Sand tray drawing
10.30am	First activity	Sumi-e (Japanese Black Ink Painting) The emphasis is on the beauty of each individual stroke of the brush - in attempting to capture the life spirit of the subject.
10.55am	Break with refreshments	
11.05am	Second activity	Portraits in paint, drawing, collage.
11.50am	Reflections	Discussion/feedback
12pm	Close	

**Reflections for the week:** Think about how it's perspective, not age, that matters the most. Do you agree/disagree with this idea expressed in Dr Atul Gawande's book 'Being Mortal'?

**Week 5** - Will explore the theme of perspective.

## The Hands and Importance of Touch

Touch is our first language. It is the first sense we acquire in the womb. From birth new born babies spend 20% of their focus on contact between hand and mouth. It is perhaps our most important sense, yet it is often overlooked in favour of vision and hearing. *"Perhaps touch is woven so deeply into our sense of self that we could not truly imagine life without it".*

<sup>24</sup>

Without touch humans do not develop in the same way. Those born blind or deaf will develop normal bodies and brains apart from within the visual or auditory areas. *However "deprive a newborn of social touch, as occurred in grossly understaffed Romanian orphanages in the 1980s and 1990s and a disaster unfolds...Fortunately, even a relatively minor intervention from a caregiver an hour per day of touch and limb manipulation from a caregiver - can reverse this terrible course if applied early in life."* <sup>25</sup>

Sarah Pink notes that the hand is an important focus in sensory ethnography research, particularly for understanding touch and tactile ways of knowing.<sup>26</sup> I too found the hands to be fascinating

during the research. Usefully my volunteer photographer was able to capture the participant's hands, and I have many photographs of beautiful hands as a result. Hands being used in all variety of ways, with all variety of materials by touching, feeling, and manipulation. I have read books and articles to accompany my research, specifically related to the power of touch. I did not anticipate writing up these findings about the hands during a pandemic, when so much of our day-to-day lives have turned to social media, online forums and networks. However it feels more than ever that the sense of touch has increased in value, since we are now told to be careful of any contact that we make. As our hands have become weapons in their ability to spread disease, it feels all the more reason to acknowledge and marvel at their magnificence.

I noted that participants were surprised by the focus on their hands during the research and acknowledgement of them felt unusual and new. There was rarely much to say about them, but they were there with us in the room all the way through, a continuum for the research that allowed our art to happen. Without them there would have been no research project. There would have been no records, no

---

<sup>24</sup> Linden, David J. *Touch: The science of the sense that makes us human*. London: Penguin Books, 2016: 2

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid*: 4

<sup>26</sup> Pink, Sarah. *Doing Sensory Ethnography 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition*. London: SAGE, 2015: 168

photographs, no drinking of tea, no materials. The hands seemed to hold

the key to unlock the answers.

During the course of my research I have read about a number of benefits of touch which I believe could be useful to the over 75s in general and particularly those who find themselves vulnerable and isolated.



In the *Power of Touch* <sup>27</sup> health benefits include:

- *Touch helps battle infections and helps the immune system.*
- *Touch strengthens relationships and marks closeness.*
- *Warm touch stimulates the release of cuddle hormone oxytocin.*
- *We self-caress as a calming mechanism.*

---

<sup>27</sup> Konnikova, Maria: *The Power of Touch*. Web <<http://newyorker.com/science/maria-konnikova/powertouch>>

- *Self-massage has been shown to slow the heart rate and lower the stress hormone cortisol, so performing an aromatherapy hand massage could be very beneficial.*
- *Context matters with touch, there are social rules.*
- *Different cultures have different tolerance levels for touch.*
- *Research shows touch is the best way to comfort.*



- *Research has shown that those who are physically touched on a regular basis experience higher levels of the hormone oxytocin.*
- *Hugs, holding hands and other physical gestures of affection have the potential to ease our minds, make us feel less isolated and reduce stress and anxiety.*

*The Importance of Touch for Seniors*<sup>28</sup> notes that studies performed at University of Miami's Touch Research Institute found:

- *Touch lessens pain, lowered blood glucose, slows the heart rate, lowers blood pressure, improves pulmonary functions, improves immune function.*
- *Touch is important for older adults, who may be suffering from lack of social interaction, depression and chronic illness.*

---

<sup>28</sup> The Arbors Blog. Web < <https://blog.arbosassistedliving.com/importance-of-touch-for-seniors>



- *Hugs strengthen the immune system and reduce stress. However seniors receive the least amount of touch of any age group due to living alone or social isolation.*

When you consider that “without the human hand mankind would have no history at all. The human past would have gone unrecorded,”<sup>29</sup> things start to fall into a different perspective. Darwin wrote in *The Descent of Man* that “Man could not have attained his present dominant position in the world without the use of his hands, which are so admirably adapted to act in obedience to his will”.<sup>30</sup>

During evolution there were three key developments which distinguished humans from our closest relatives. 1) Enormous enlargement of the brain, especially in the frontal regions. 2) The remodelling of the hand 3) The balancing of the head upon the neck, the shaping that makes us stand up straight.<sup>31</sup>

It was the opposability of the thumb (the thumb can be placed opposite to the fingers) which made it possible to interact with the world differently. No other

---

<sup>29</sup>Tallis, Raymond. *The Hand. A Philosophical Inquiry into Human Being*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2003: 21

<sup>30</sup> Darwin, Charles. *The Descent of Man, and Selection in Relation to Sex* (second edition). London: John Murray: 35

<sup>31</sup>Ingold, Tim. *Being Alive: Essays on Movement, Knowledge and Description*. London: Routledge, 2011: 33

primate has such movement within their hands. Humans are where we are because of our hands, but how often do we truly consider that? How often do we acknowledge that our entire future is in our hands? The good and the bad. It is a common expression, but rarely it feels do we pause and ask why and how?

Context has always been important for our hands, both social and environmental since the dawn of man. In 2010, a study by Ackerman and colleagues revealed that the physical qualities of objects people touched – their hardness or softness, heaviness or lightness, roughness or smoothness – tilted people’s judgements towards those same abstract qualities.<sup>32</sup> Our perception of a sensory stimulus is dependent upon our expectations, as they have been formed by our life experience up to that moment...context is key in sensory experience...the taste of coffee can be jarring if you expect tea.<sup>33</sup> Evidence from fMRI scans also supports these results showing that people’s reactions depend on whom or what subjects believed they were touching.<sup>34</sup>

“Merely watching a movie of someone’s arm being caressed will activate the posterior insula of a subject in a manner that’s similar to receiving a real arm caress”.<sup>35</sup>

When I think about the objects and materials that were placed in the room with participants, particularly during the first session as we explored them in silence, I realise that I chose objects which were soft, gentle, natural, and peaceful. This was to aid relaxation. I chose leaves, stones and soft feathers because my own experience of those materials had been positive. Session feedback suggested that participants enjoyed feeling them too. I listened to the materials, and I listened to participant reactions, and we explored together. It was a pleasant multi-sensory activity, and we closed our eyes to feel.

“What will make an object pleasurable to touch will depend on the macro and microgeometric properties of the objects themselves as well as on the

---

<sup>32</sup>Chillot, Rick. *Surface Impact. The physical sensations of objects we touch influence our more abstract feelings.* Psychology Today. 2013

<sup>33</sup>Linden, David J. *Touch: The science of the sense that makes us human.* London: Penguin Books, 2016: 94

<sup>34</sup> Konnikova, Maria: *The Power of Touch.* Web <<http://newyorker.com/science/maria-konnikova/poweroftouch>

<sup>35</sup> Linden, David J. *Touch: The science of the sense that makes us human.* London: Penguin Books, 2016: 90

more cognitive/emotional associations that the particular object has to the individual".<sup>36</sup>

What made it enjoyable as we felt the materials was likely to do with our nerve endings as well as the context. "We have two separate touch systems in the skin, operating in parallel, which report fundamentally different aspects of our tactile world, fast A-beta fibres and slow C fibres. Each influence each other, and the entire system is under powerful multi-sensory and emotional modulation relating to situational and social contexts".<sup>37</sup>

Studies carried out at Yale University by John Bargh have found that "the feeling of loneliness can be mitigated by an experience of physical warmth (holding a warm pack)".<sup>38</sup> When I consider that deeply, a number of ideas and thoughts about object use within care homes spring to mind. The impact of holding an art workshop designed to feel and study beautiful soft objects seems very supportive and nurturing within a care home, particularly if a warm pack alone can have benefit. By being inclusive, we can adapt the environment to support individuals, particularly those suffering from isolation and loneliness. The hands are the agents of support.

I was delighted by how participants took to the weaving activity, and gracefully used their hands to thread the wool with various materials. I provided cardboard looms and materials, stepped back and the rest happened organically. The hands were kept very busy during the activity and there was such variety of approach and output. Interestingly this activity also generated what felt to me to be the most natural mixture of discussion and silence. It really flowed. The hands were busy and the minds were active and relaxed, it felt.

Just the act of protension, reaching out and extending the arm to make contact with the world outside of the body, gives choice, and as such there is scope to do more with those who feel that their choices are limited and their autonomy is wearing thin.

"Keeping our hands busy is not a matter of whimsy or leisure, but touches on something at the heart of our embodied existence...Our hands serve us.

---

<sup>36</sup> Chatterjee, Helen J. *Touch in Museums: Policy and Practice in Object Handling*. Oxford: Berg Publishers, 2008: 33

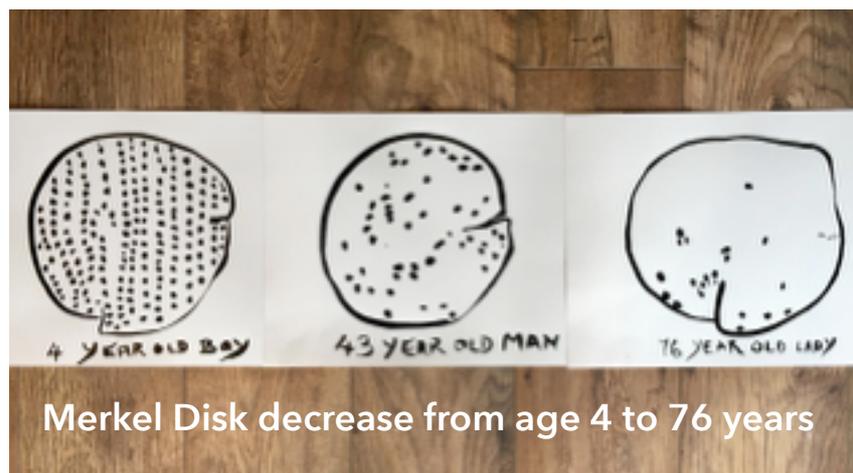
<sup>37</sup> Linden, David J. *Touch: The science of the sense that makes us human*. London: Penguin Books, 2016: 86/87

<sup>38</sup> Chillot, Rick. *Surface Impact. The physical sensations of objects we touch influence our more abstract feelings*. Psychology Today. 2013

They are instruments of executive action, our tools. They allow us to manipulate the world so that our wishes can be fulfilled” <sup>39</sup>

Research has rarely looked at why we often undertake one hand activity in conjunction with something else, as if one action isn't enough. It feels there is scope for more to be done with people who are just lying in a bed, to keep their hands busy and brains active. Some amazing art has been produced by artists who are bed bound. I think of Frida Kahlo and Matisse. All it takes is a simple pencil and paper project.

Interestingly the number of Merkel Disks are significantly reduced in older people. Merkel disks are the nerves which enable us to distinguish individual surface features with our fingertips. “Impaired tactile sensation on the soles of the feet and toes is an important contributing factor to reduced standing and walking stability in the older people, often resulting in falls”. <sup>40</sup>



So when I consider all of these factors in relation to the over 75s and hand use, the potential for how we could move forward differently seems great.

I have found reading about the hands, and the autonomy they give us, to be fascinating. The Covid-19 pandemic currently sweeping the world has touched at the heart of the social isolation issue, and many solutions to social isolation have been found quickly and spontaneously. Communities have been helping support

---

<sup>39</sup>Leader, Darian. *Hands: What we do with them and why*. London: Penguin Books, 2017: 3

<sup>40</sup>Linden, David J. *Touch: The science of the sense that makes us human*. London: Penguin Books, 2016: 72

people unable to leave their homes. People of all ages in their homes have been finding mechanisms to go online and reach out spiritually and mentally with others. Computer sales have rocketed, printers too. 'Zoom' choirs, online church sermons, friends holding online events, and GP's online consultations have catapulted us into a future of healthcare being made available online. It has also opened up opportunities at speed for people who are bed bound, or socially isolated in homes. It is likely there will be directories made up in the future of ways to connect digitally and it is a wondrous and miraculous outcome. The NHS is also being shaped by this new technological revolution. There may be some unintended consequences of overuse of touchscreens, but there are likely to be more positives than negatives for those suffering from social isolation and loneliness. Now more than ever, it feels important that we maintain the tactile and sensory relationship with our hands. Now more than ever, making art and being creative is important.



## Key Findings 1: Accessibility (Time, Space and Choice)

To be inclusive, sessions needed to be designed to fit everyone in the room and to be accessible. I chose a space on the first floor with wheelchair access, close to local amenities, and accessible toilet facilities. I undertook risk assessments and had ethical approval from the university. For the purpose of this research project, participants were required to live independently and be able to travel to the venue. I met with the majority of participants ahead of the sessions to ascertain any needs and special requirements.

Ahead of sessions I made lists of materials, developed an overarching agenda and packed up lots of bags. I took table cloths, pieces of art, cups/saucers, refreshments, aprons, and even flowers. I endeavoured to make the table look as enticing as possible by dressing it each time. I brought items which could create a sense of home and comfort. The attention to detail I believe was important. I felt it to be important with this generation in particular. That was my sense, and my efforts always felt appreciated. This was, I believed, to be about obtaining trust.



Trust that the workshops were going to be enjoyable, relaxing and enhance wellbeing. Trust that I had taken the necessary efforts to enable things to flow calmly.

My packing and unpacking process became a ritual. I would pack up everything into the car the night before, according to my list, and I would unpack ahead of the session. I would pack the bags up following the session into the car and would unpack at home onto the floor as I processed the session. The packing and unpacking process was very much part of the experience for me as an arts researcher. The storing of materials, ensuring they were of the right quality and quantity took time and effort, however it was this practice that I believe generated much of the accessibility.

Expecting participants to bring items would likely have resulted in them having to buy materials and they would have been of varying makes and quality. Going forward I would likely continue providing materials to ensure everyone has access to the same materials. I deliberately chose materials which could go a long way, such as a pack of chalks, a pack of pencils, dry clay, calligraphy ink and brushes, and packs of cartridge paper.

I prepared ahead of sessions to ensure equity of access to materials and was able to transform a relatively expensive and complex medium into an accessible one. For the weaving I spent time measuring wool and placing it into bags. One ball of wool can go a long way around a number of people when measured out. I spent time ahead of sessions preparing cardboard looms. The additional preparation was important to make the activities accessible, I believe.

There was an element of surprise that I had invested so much energy into the sessions. There was so much thanks and appreciation. The hard work I had put into preparations paid off within the sessions. One of the main barriers to art I was told included the perceived expense of materials. However this is likely because the perceived medium most commonly used in arts classes tends to be oil or acrylic paints, which are more costly. I provided water based paints which were more cost effective. My goal was to provide a choice of materials, an accessible venue, a group, time, agenda and then facilitate, step back in order to collaborate.

One key finding was that materials were more accessible when bagged up. For the first session I laid all the materials on the table, however participants were reluctant to move around the room to try new ones. The following week I packed up bags of materials in equal quantity and these were really appreciated, not only giving participants access to different types of materials, but reducing the need to move

around, which was better for the more frail participants. It was also interesting to explore the contents. It struck me that handing out small bags could be really effective at care homes and even in hospital beds.



Each bag only cost a small amount when divided up, and could be reused. Just one piece of charcoal, chalk or pencil could achieve a lot. I also provided beautiful images, of stunning landscapes or colourful birds, which some participants liked to copy. Some chose to work from their imagination. It felt important to provide a choice.

During conversations we discussed obstacles to inclusion, and the theme of self doubt came up regularly. This is helpfully highlighted in *Creative Arts in Dementia Care* as “a sense of inferiority, a perceived lack of talent, bad past experiences and a general sense that the arts are only for those with prerequisite training and skills”.<sup>41</sup>

---

<sup>41</sup>Hayes, Jill and Povey, Sarah. *The Creative Arts in Dementia Care*. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2011: 13

My own experience and time out from doing art was very much caused by a similar psychological block. The participants at the workshops were challenging themselves by being there, but it made me wonder how many others could benefit from doing more art. Breaking down the barriers to art is essential if more older people are going to participate in it. Participants reported relief at not being asked to describe, show or analyse their artwork with each other. Inclusive Arts is a good way of taking the pressure off the final result and making it about the process. All participants seemed pleased however when I did present their artwork back to them in a 'mini show' at our final workshop. The results were excellent which was an added bonus, but just being in a group together making art was potentially the most important element and where the real art lay in the space between us.

Not having enough time is also a barrier to inclusion. This came up regularly as a theme. Not only do you have to invest time to set up for art and pack it away, you have to invest time ensuring you have the right materials. Interesting to me was the idea that just because you are over 90 you still might not find time in your day to make art. I asked participants if they had done any art between sessions and the responses were varied. Some did art daily, others used the visual diary I had provided, and others were too busy. Just because people are over 75 it should not be assumed that time is any easier to come by for making art. It is my strong belief that many people would do more art if there was more emphasis of the health benefits both physical and psychological from using hands themselves rather than the artistic product. It could be looked at as a form of exercise, done in groups.

My finding was that calligraphy ink and brushes were a very accessible medium, and brought great interest and excitement to the room. It was the first time most of the participants had used this medium, and it is very accessible in that it is neat, versatile, the brushes store easily and the ink goes a long way. I also noted that the brushes were very easy to use and manipulate, and were gentle on the fingers. This medium has been used for centuries in the East, and I personally believe it is time to introduce it more to the West. It is a gentle, beautiful medium, and one which can also be done easily whilst lying in bed and it is neat and easily packed away. A set of calligraphy 10 brushes can be bought for approximately £15 and a large pot of ink for £10. One of the best qualities about it is the use of white space, where the aim is not to produce a realistic reproduction, but to capture the essence the artist wishes to convey. It again moves a person to a quiet mindful place away from pressure of a final picture. It is more meditative and reflective. There are many beautiful properties even to drawing an Ensó circle in ink. In Zen, Ensó is a circle drawn in one or two brushstrokes to express a moment when the mind is free. The masters practice their circles daily.



## Quotes:

"I don't have any spare time...to draw."

"I mean to do more art. It's no good saying I haven't got enough time. Even when you don't do anything, you still don't find time."

"Do we have to tell you how it feels?"

"The first part of the session was good, no pressure of the outcome."

"It all felt relaxing... it's better than having someone standing over you... there's no pressure. Good to not have to show it around the room...a small room is really nice."

"It took the pressure off."

"It gives permission to play."

"I enjoyed the fact the workshops are not focused on ailments and discussions around age. It is different to art classes I have been at before with the over 75s."

"Taking part itself was the most important part of the activity."

"I'd rather not take it home to finish, there is too much going on."

"Art materials are so expensive, it puts you off doing anything yourself really."

"I started off having to counteract a feeling that I did not want to make a mess... I was relieved when we got onto the hands because I have done drawing before."

"It must have cost you a lot". "It's nice for us to use the materials."

"I'm not sure I'd want to interact with lots of different ages. Small children would make too much noise. Over 75s works well."

## Findings

- Give the right amount of time to individual activities. Test it ahead. The more effort and thought that goes in to activities the more participants will likely gain from workshops.
- Participants produce art at different speeds. Try to ensure you have another option to offer.
- Don't assume the over 75s want or need to talk about age/ageing.
- Bags with materials are fantastic to hand out to the over 75s, particularly when there are restrictions in moving around the room.
- Some participants like pictures to copy from, others don't. Offering choice is a good idea.
- Dry clay, charcoal, inks, pencil, chalks are all very inclusive from both a financial and group perspective.
- Try Calligraphy Ink and brushes with the over 75s. The brush has control like a pencil. It is gentle. It's exhilarating to try a new medium.



Final collaborative piece in acrylic ink on canvas

## Key Findings 2: Hands and Touch

My research in the room with participants found that the combination of doing hand exercises and making art combined really well. A gentle warm up activity stretched the hands and wrists in preparation for picking up materials.

Here follows an auto ethnographic account of the experience in the room, with participants.

I can hear my heart beating. I welcome everyone to the room. Will they notice I am new to this?...Stop... Let all the fears go.

*It's not about me at all. I look around the room. The faces. Wonderful. I drop my note pad and breathe. I don't need my notes now.*

*Breathe in and out. I start to calm down the moment I shift my focus, my lens. I look out at the details, I see a macrocosm of energy in the room, and light trickling through the window. The focus is outside of my own body. It feels wonderful. I see the smiles. Happiness it feels to be together in a new adventure. We introduce ourselves and speak of why we are here. It's all about the art. The art is the common connector, and our hands.*

*I facilitate a warm up activity of feeling and touching the materials and objects on the table. We can use our hands to hold, to press, to stroke, to explore. We listen to the silence. I stroke a feather on my hand. I close my eyes, but open occasionally to look at my clock and check on the soothing music. We use both sides of our hands. Breathe in and out. Deeply. I feel my feet touching the ground and start to open my eyes. I feel a sense of wonder about the room. We come to a close.*

*Me: "Has anyone ever done that before?"*

*All: "No"*

*Me: "Did it feel good?"*

*All: "Yes"*

*Participant: "It felt relaxing and calming".*

This act of feeling at the very start of the workshops set the sessions in motion. The silence and the connections with the materials demonstrated how we might use our hands going forward.

Within the room participants used their hands at each session in a multitude of ways. One of the most soothing warm up activities we did was using dry clay and gold leaf. Every participant produced a different style pot, but also used their hands in different ways. There was pinching, patting, moulding, feeling, pressing, tapping, stroking, and each move involved the opening and closing of the wrists and use of the muscles in the arms. Art enabled participants to exercise and use their hands in ways that many day to day activities do not. There were reports of the hands feeling improved, and more comfortable. I found dry clay to be a wonderfully versatile and inclusive medium. One bag cost approximately £6, and went around the whole class with some left over. Participants seemed delighted to add the soft gold leaf to the clay, the textures of both materials feeling so different. I also used exercise balls on another occasion, and it was reported that the hands felt more comfortable after this also. The pressure exerted by the hands, along with the enjoyment of the activity and the lack of having to produce a finished piece proved again and again to be a successful way to make art with the over 75s, even those with arthritis in their fingers and hands.



Sand Trays were also a popular warm up activity. Participants dipped their hands into the sand and played. Pinching shapes, patting, scraping, and wiping the space clean. It was an excellent activity to busy the hands, and make marks. The process itself seemed to be where the art lay. We listened to recordings of the seaside and gentle waves. It was soothing, and prompted pleasant memories, I learned. In earlier sessions I had found some participants reluctant to make marks with their hands and certainly a reluctance to make mess. The sand trays and mark making activities across stretches of paper really opened things up. Hand use became more and more relaxed and free over time, it felt. It was noticeable to me sensorially. It was a step in a new direction away from art which followed more traditional methods and etiquette. I gave encouragement to move towards experimentation. The results were no less pleasing, just different.



The following quotes are from participants during sessions, and offer an insight into how much enjoyment came from using clay, exercise balls, hand massage, and sand trays. Part of my research was to see what worked and what did not, and whether any discomfort resulted.

### Quotes:

"I'm hopeless at art, but I can move my hands."

"I was thinking about how much we take them for granted. It's only when something goes wrong with them, that you notice them. Otherwise you assume they will always be there."

"I've been thinking about how hands have given us freedom. They are very much the instruments."

"I enjoyed shaping the clay, and using my fingers."

"I liked working with the hand exercise balls."

"My hands felt more comfortable after the hand massage/warm up exercise activity."

"I've never done that before. I know someone who does sand therapy. I wasn't considering this to be a therapy, but was interested how it feels to explore the sand with your hands. All nice. Good. Relaxing."

"It's like being a child again doing sandcastles on the beach."



### Findings

- Exercises for warm up activity, ahead of art sessions.
- Draw attention and show appreciation to the hands and the freedom they give us all.
- Increased provision of hand or foot massages for people particularly those who do not have much contact with friends or relatives can be positive.
- Dry clay is excellent for exercising hands, pressing, shaping and moulding.
- Combination of art and exercise is a good way of soothing arthritis using both dominant and non dominant hands.

## Key Findings 3: Multiple Perspectives

Dr Gawande describes the changes that occurs psychologically as people grow older: "As people grow older they focus on being rather than doing and on the present more than the future. Understanding this shift is essential in understanding old age." <sup>42</sup>

Dr Gawande also notes that "it is perspective, not age that matters the most". <sup>43</sup> We cannot change the age and ageing process, but we can shift how we perceive it. No matter how much we dislike the idea, our lives are all dependent on others. When we are small children, or older and frail, it becomes more noticeable, but the reality is that we are all dependent on someone and "the amount of freedom you have in your life is not a measure of the worth of your life." <sup>44</sup> Once society fully accepts this, something may likely shift. Old age can be perceived as a time of opening, not of closure.

During the research I read about individuals having a diverse range of ideas, attitudes and beliefs. It is what makes us human. People wish to avoid being put into a category or a box with the lid being closed.

*"People change and people want different things as they change. Participation, for me, is like the colour wheel, and where you are at a given time is neither where you stay nor is it judged as in any way better."* <sup>45</sup>

I find this concept of not being judged according to who you are today, but who you could be tomorrow very exciting, particularly in relation to age. It would be easy to assume people over 75s had already made their main contribution to society. But what if it were the opposite? What if the older years were re-envisaged and repositioned? *"When we stereotype others we place them in general categories and ignore their individual characteristics. The cost of this is we fail to appreciate the complete uniqueness of the whole person."* <sup>46</sup>

---

<sup>42</sup> Gawande, Atul. *Being Mortal*. London: Profile Books, 2015: 94

<sup>43</sup> Ibid:99

<sup>44</sup> Ibid: 140

<sup>45</sup> Tiller, Chrissie. *Power Up Creative People and Places*. n.p. 2015:4

<sup>46</sup> Grant, Alec, and Goodman, Benny. *Communication and Interpersonal Skills in Nursing 4<sup>th</sup> Edition*. London: SAGE, 2019: 45

*Communication and Interpersonal Skills in Nursing* describes confirmation bias which leads to building an opinion about someone that is inaccurate, because it assumes someone's behaviour is what they are like all the time, when in fact it may be the situation that has triggered the response. It then puts that person in a box and may lead to a defensive response.

When you don't put people into boxes you give them space to write their own story. Dr Gawande notes "All we ask is to be allowed to remain the writers of our own story. The story is ever changing".<sup>47</sup>

Dr Gawande notes that "the chance to shape one's story is essential to sustaining meaning in life: that we have the opportunity to refashion our institutions, our culture, and our conversations in ways that transform the possibilities for the last chapters of everyone's lives".<sup>48</sup>



---

<sup>47</sup> Gawande, Atul. *Being Mortal*. London: Profile Books, 2015: 141

<sup>48</sup> Ibid: 243

During the fifth workshop we explored perspective, and looked at the two different definitions of perspective:

noun:

- 1) the art of representing three-dimensional objects on a two-dimensional surface to give the right impression of their height, width, depth, and position to each other.
- 2) a particular attitude towards or way of regarding something: a point of view.

The session on perspective was one of the most fascinating, as I realised I was lifting the lid on some of the assumptions that I too had been making in relation to older age.

Here is an extract from my session diary:

*We started out by discussing perspective. I asked if participants had heard of the rules of perspective drawing. It was a majority "no". I delved in deeper, conscious that this was a complex topic. I spoke of the two types of perspective, both perspective in drawing and perspective in attitude, and presented a hand-out which explained it further. We started the first activity turning a two dimensional square into a three dimensional box on the paper in front of us.*

*Participants asked me for more individual demonstrations. I considered the sharing of ideas, thoughts, and despite this being the most complex and potentially least inclusive activity I had facilitated, it felt inclusive to share learning and ideas.*

*A fascination of mine is how to break down more complex information and make it accessible.*

The reaction from participants was a real pleasure to behold. I noticed eyes were lighting up in the room. I only wished for more time in the session. Opening the lid on one and two dimensional drawing ignited many questions. Questions I was slightly apprehensive to answer, but I will try it again in future. I held up some pictures of Van Gogh's *Cafe Terrace at Night*, and showed the point of perspective on the horizon. The connections were made. It is never too late to find joy in knowledge and to find ways to make that knowledge accessible and put a unique point of perspective onto it. I would love to have facilitated a workshop on The Golden Mean and The Golden Ratio. Life's formula for beauty. I will save it perhaps for a future session.

I have found my artwork and creative response to the sessions very linked to the concept of multiple lenses and multiple perspectives. The telescope and the microscope. The two ways of seeing the micro and macro properties of the research, and movement being central to this concept. The simultaneous movement of opening and closure, of breathing in and out, taking in new knowledge and sharing knowledge, contracting and expanding. I gave out a Torus at my first session, which was a curious object of fascination. You can put your hand right through the centre of it, as it moves up and down your arm in a continuous motion. They are aptly named infinity rings, Torus spring. The movement as it crosses your arm is smooth and gentle.



"Basic geometry is radial, like the body of a sea urchin or starfish. Every graph spirals out from the centre".<sup>49</sup>

I have also found multiple links to Élan Vital throughout my literature review and research, since it links so much to the concept of age and ageing. Élan Vital is a vital living force and impulse of nature which makes nature do or form something new. Élan Vital, is the "inner directing principle...the tremendous internal push of life... the impulse which thrusts life into the world and Élan Vital self directs as it flows,

---

<sup>49</sup> Ingold, Tim. *Lines. A Brief History*. London: Routledge Classics, 2016. Print.

dispensing itself without losing anything of its force, rather intensifying in proportion to its advance.”<sup>50</sup>

You may wonder why I raise this splaying out of life and life force. Firstly because it links heavily to my creative response during the process. The visits to the ocean. The focus on waves, nature, expansion and contraction. The idea that ageing is part of a process, and that new forms can press at the end to form a new beginning.

*“Life is not susceptible to quantification, though Bergson ascribes life’s immunity to “mathematical treatment” to its nature as a moving flow. Life “splay” itself out in new forms that are not even conceivable before they exist, says Bergson, and were they to be quantified and measured, it would already be too late, for life will have moved on.”*<sup>51</sup>

Ageing is part of a process which is generally considered to be leading towards an end, and an ending that we put off thinking about it. However if we put a new perspective on that, and see it with a different lens, one of expansion rather than contraction, even when all your other senses are shutting down, we can see beyond. We can re-position the point of perspective. We can fear the unknown less.

When I revisit the room with the participants and look to remember moments of pleasure and satisfaction, they often felt to be found in the moments of silence. At the points when the activity had commenced and a choice could be found whether to use the hands and be silent or to connect verbally. These were moments of flow state. Times of movement which were relaxed and harmonious. Times of doing and making.

In terms of having life satisfaction, the concept of flow is extremely important. “Flow is the state in which people are so involved in an activity that nothing else seems to matter; the experience itself is so enjoyable that people will do it at great cost, for the sheer sake of doing it”.<sup>52</sup>

---

<sup>50</sup>Bennett, Jane. *Vibrant Matter. A Political Ecology of Things*. USA: Duke University Press, 2010: 78

<sup>51</sup>Bennett, Jane. *Vibrant Matter. A Political Ecology of Things*. USA: Duke University Press, 2010: 72

<sup>52</sup>Csikszentmihalyi, Mihaly. *Flow. The Psychology of Optimal Experience*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2008 : 4

Fascinating to me is that “The best moments usually occur when a person’s body or mind is stretched to its limits in a voluntary effort to accomplish something difficult or worthwhile. Optimal experience is thus something we make happen”.<sup>53</sup>

This concept of flow, and contracting and expanding our mind, fits completely with my findings during the session of perspective drawing. The quotes I captured during the session highlighted this shift, and hopefully evidence the flow process that was going on, the expansion of minds, the movement and contraction of thinking. Age and time were irrelevant. Perspective and hands were essential.

Once we start lifting the lid off boxes, we can start to see a story that is open ended, one that goes past the point of perspective on the horizon. We can expand the horizon line to one which brings joy and awakenings even to those who may have lost hope in their own unique autonomy. For if you have hands, and hands alone, you can still use them. If you don't have hands, or your hands are sore or in pain, there are other inclusive arts practices to consider. Inclusive arts requires thinking about how to meet every unique person’s needs. It requires additional efforts, just as an inclusive society requires careful planning and considerations to the environment. It requires a new perspective.





Quotes:

"I've never seen anything like it before."

"I found the drawing difficult, but I enjoyed trying it."

"I looked forward to coming. It is a really good place to come, and the right environment for making art."

"It is most unusual, there is so much individual attention to these activities, which is not normally the case."

"It was interesting to discuss perspective."

"Thank you so much for this morning. It has been so interesting."

"The work on perspective finished too soon!"

"When you did that [points to a section I had demonstrated one point perspective on] that taught

me a lot. You made us hear about it. To know it exists. Even your pamphlet is about expanding people's experience. To know about different ideas."

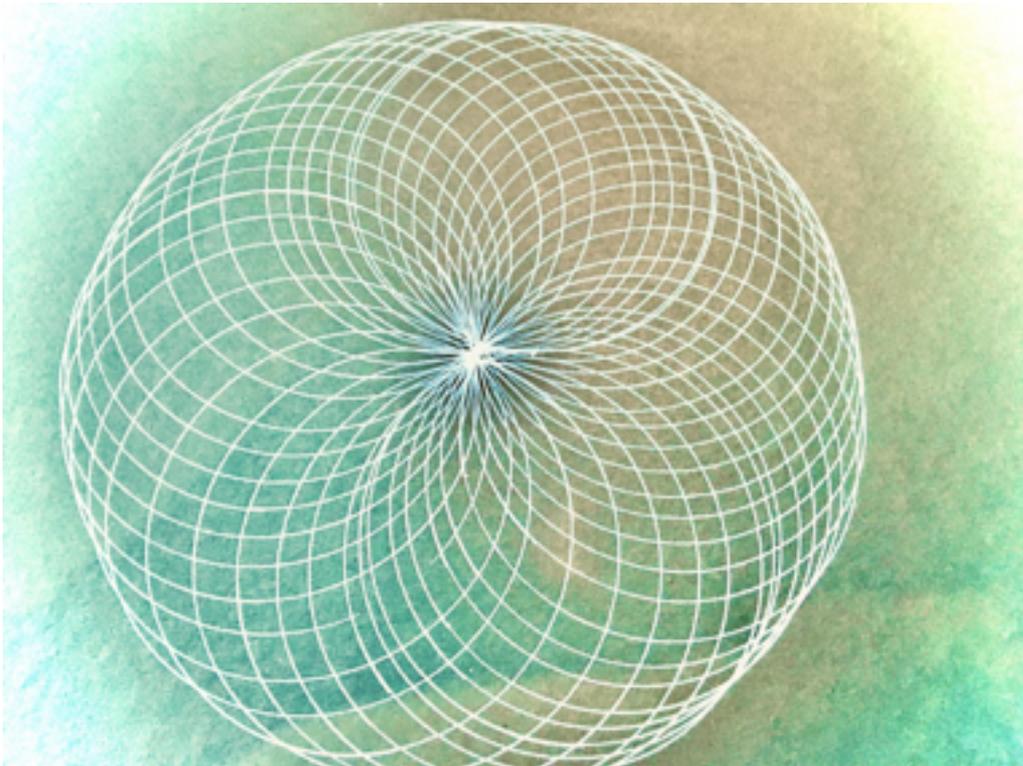
"The session was very relaxing and life enhancing."

"I've achieved a broader understanding of art."

"I must say before we all go away that you've put a lot of effort into the art, but an awful lot of effort into us all as well. We have really enjoyed your company as well."

"In future you would probably find more people coming because we have been to it and said how good it is."

"I've spoken to quite a few people about it. One or two were not quite old enough. Do you have to be over 75?" (The answer to this is not for future sessions I am planning).



### Findings:

- Never underestimate that we are all constantly evolving and moving forwards along different paths. We change from the moment we leave a room, so ensure you constantly re-evaluate your perspective and conclusions.
- Never underestimate anyone's desire to learn new ideas and concepts. Don't put anyone in a box... you are never too old to learn new ideas and concepts. Some of the most extraordinary thinking may come in later years.
- Using a relatively unknown and untried medium with over 75s can give freedom to move away from accurate representations of an image.
- Half the participants were comfortable with mark making, others were not. In fact within all the workshops there was always a mixture of preferences, as you would expect. However it would indicate that you should not stop doing an activity for fear some may not enjoy it.
- What appears uncomfortable and unsettling can awaken new ideas.

## Key Recommendations

- More opportunities to exercise the hands daily, whether it be squeezing an exercise ball, or simply opening and closing the hands and wrists.
- Increased provision of hand or foot massages for those who do not have much social contact with friends or relatives.
- More provision of inclusive arts workshops specifically for the older ages, in local communities. More focus on facilitation and collaboration, providing an opportunity to explore materials and exercise the hands together.
- More drawing out of the assets in the room and seeing the creative diversity that all the different hands can bring. Less focus on ailments, more on positive ageing.
- Increased use of unexplored and untried mediums with the over 75s and focus on mark making, to move away from more accurate representations of an image to awaken new ideas.
- More investment and energy into activities ahead of sessions to ensure they are accessible to all.
- Increased use of calligraphy brushes, ink and paper. Calligraphy is a wonderful, gentle and expressive medium. Offering small bags of materials where possible.
- Never underestimate that we are all constantly evolving and moving forwards along different paths. We change from the moment we leave a room, so ensure you constantly re-evaluate your perspective and conclusions. Never put anyone in a box. Think who a person could be tomorrow rather than who they are today.

## Conclusion

My creative response to many of the key findings that have emerged from the workshops involves my desire to interact and collaborate with the materials which were in the room during the workshops. The materials themselves have enabled me to re-connect with the participants and the memories made. I've enjoyed studying the materials through the microscope, interacting with them, and photographing them. Being in contact with the materials has felt like traces of remembering.

Inclusive Arts can support the over 75s to use their hands to promote an increased sense of wellbeing, because it offers choice, freedom and time to take the pressure off. It sees assets, and requires additional thought to be put in to enable everyone who wishes to be involved to take part. Inclusive Arts brings participants and materials together in a sustainable and more affordable way, and inclusive thinking and planning is involved. All abilities are welcome, and assets can be realised and celebrated in a non pressured or judgemental environment.

I have learned a great deal during this research project, but I would say that it's the pure life force itself that pushes the present against the future that excites me the most. The Élan Vital. The end point is where the present pushes the hardest and may be at its most glorious, for transformation is found there. New openings. New insights. The Torus in my opinion holds many answers. Time does not exist in the formula for the Torus and yet remarkably we can drive our hand right through its centre. How we use our hands to drive us forward is potentially one of the most important questions on this planet today. Since Covid-19 it has felt very much to me as if a new age has dawned. A new order of things has emerged. We can use our hands to drive the change for good and can work as a team. The choice is ours to reach out to the assets before us. Perhaps it really is perspective, not age, that matters the most.

As you reach the end of this report, I'd like to invite you to pick up an object, perhaps one of significance, and place it in your hands. Use all your senses to explore its texture, its shape, its beauty. Take ten minutes. Be mindful. Think about the unique perspective that you bring to it. Why have you chosen it? This very act, as I have explained, is good for the soul and for your wellbeing. If you choose something that you love, you can feel the love through your hands. By seeing the object as a collaborator, we can use our hands to enable new ways of feeling to emerge. We can look beyond the object in our hands with compassion for ourselves and each other.

## Bibliography

### Books

- Bennett, Jane. *Vibrant Matter. A Political Ecology of Things*. USA: Duke University Press, 2010. Print.
- Bloom, Paul. *Against Empathy. The Case for Rational Compassion*. London: Vintage, 2018. Print
- Chatterjee, Helen J. *Touch in Museums: Policy and Practice in Object Handling*. Oxford: Berg Publishers, 2008. Print.
- Csikszentmihalyi, Mihaly. *Flow. The Psychology of Optimal Experience*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2008. Print.
- Docking, Rachael Elizabeth and Stock, Jennifer. *International Handbook of Positive Aging*. Oxfordshire: Routledge, 2017. Print.
- Finley, Susan, et al. *Arts Based Research. Handbook of the Arts in Qualitative Research*. London: Sage Publications, 2008. Print.
- Fox, Alice, and Macpherson, Hannah. *Inclusive Arts Practice and Research: A Critical Manifesto*. Abingdon: Routledge, 2015. Print.
- Hull, M. John. *Touching the Rock. An experience of blindness*. London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2013. Print.
- Gawande, Atul. *Being Mortal*. London: Profile Books, 2015. Print.
- Grant, Alec, and Goodman, Benny. *Communication and Interpersonal Skills in Nursing 4<sup>th</sup> Edition*. London: SAGE, 2019. Print.
- Hayes, Jill and Povey, Sarah. *The Creative Arts in Dementia Care*. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2011. Print.
- Howie, Paula, Prasad Sangeeta, and Kristel, Jennie. *Using Art Therapy with Diverse Populations: Crossing Cultures and Abilities*. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2013. Print.
- Ingold, Tim. *Being Alive: Essays on Movement, Knowledge and Description*. London: Routledge, 2011. Print.
- Ingold, Tim. *Lines. A Brief History*. London: Routledge Classics, 2016. Print.
- Lacy, Suzanne. *Mapping the Terrain. New Genre Public Art*. Seattle, Washington: Bay Press, 1996. Print.
- Leader, Darian. *Hands: What we do with them and why?* London: Penguin Books, 2017. Print.
- Linden, David J. *Touch: The science of the sense that makes us human*. London: Penguin Books, 2016. Print.
- Miller, Juliette. *The creative feminine and her discontents. Psychotherapy, art, and destruction*. London: Karnac Books Ltd, 2008. Print.
- Pink, Sarah. *Doing Sensory Ethnography 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition*. London: SAGE, 2015. Print.
- Roberts, John. *The Intangibilities of Form*. London: Verso, 2007. Print.

Smith, Hazel, and R.T.Dean. *Practice- Led Research, Research Led Practice in the Creative Arts. Research methods for the arts and humanities*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009. Print.

Short, Nigel P, Turner, Lydia, Grant, Alec: *Contemporary British Ethnography*. Rotterdam: Sense Publishers, 2013. Print.

Tallis, Raymond. *The Hand. A Philosophical Inquiry into Human Being*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2003. Print.

## Articles

Bartlett, Ruth. *Visualising dementia activism: using the arts to communicate research findings*. London: SAGE, 2015, Vol 15, 755-768. Print.

Beresford, Peter. *Beyond the Usual Suspects: Towards Inclusive User Involvement. Shaping our Lives* 2013. Print.

Chillot, Rick. *The Power of Touch*. Psychology Today. 2013. Print.

Chillot, Rick. *Surface Impact. The physical sensations of objects we touch influence our more abstract feelings*. Psychology Today. 2013. Print.

Cutler, David. Kelly, Des. Silver, Sylvie. *Creative Homes-How the Arts can contribute to quality of life in residential care*. The Baring Foundation. 2011. Print.

Gentry, Tom, and Stickland, Nicolette. *Hidden in Plain Sight*.n.p. 2016. Print.

Gordon-Wilson, Sianne and Modi, Pratik. *Personality and older consumers' green behaviour in the UK*. Elsevier Ltd. 2015. Print.

Noice, Tony, Noice, Helga, Kramer, Arthur. *Participatory Arts for Older Adults: A review of Benefits and Challenges*. Oxford University Press on behalf of The Gerontological Society of America, 2013. Print.

Swain, John, and French, Sally. *Towards an affirmative model of disability*. *Disability and Society* 15.4 (2000): 559-582. Print.

Tiller, Chrissie. *Power Up Creative People and Places*. n.p. 2015 Print.

Wickremaratchi, MM and Llewelyn, JG. *Effects of ageing on touch*. The Fellowship of Postgraduate Medicine, 2006. Print.

## Websites

### **Engaging with Older People Evidence Review, Age UK.**

[https://www.ageuk.org.uk/documents/en-gb/for-professionals/evidence\\_review\\_engaging\\_with\\_older\\_people.pdf?dtrk=true](https://www.ageuk.org.uk/documents/en-gb/for-professionals/evidence_review_engaging_with_older_people.pdf?dtrk=true)

### **Age UK**

<https://www.ageuk.org.uk>

<http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/how-we-make-impact/diversity-and-equality>

**Joint Strategic Needs Assessments for Brighton and Hove**

[www.bhconnected.org.uk](http://www.bhconnected.org.uk)

**Leader, Darian. How technology is changing our hands**

<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2016/may/21/darian-leader-how-technology-changing-our-hands>

**The Arbors Blog**

<https://blog.arbosassistedliving.com/importance-of-touch-for-seniors>

**The Power of Touch**

<https://www.newyorker.com/science/maria-konnikova/power-touch>

**The Power of Human Touch**

<https://www.agingcare.com/article/the-power-of-human-touch-189302.htm>

**Elan Vital** <https://youtu.be/qv-nY4QNZUk>

**Pi, the Torus and Consciousness** <https://youtu.be/8gu7c70t9pc>

**Film**

About Schmidt, Directed by Alexander Payne. Based on Book by Louise Begley, 2002.

**Twitter**

Key to inclusion is compassion. Michael West on Vimeo

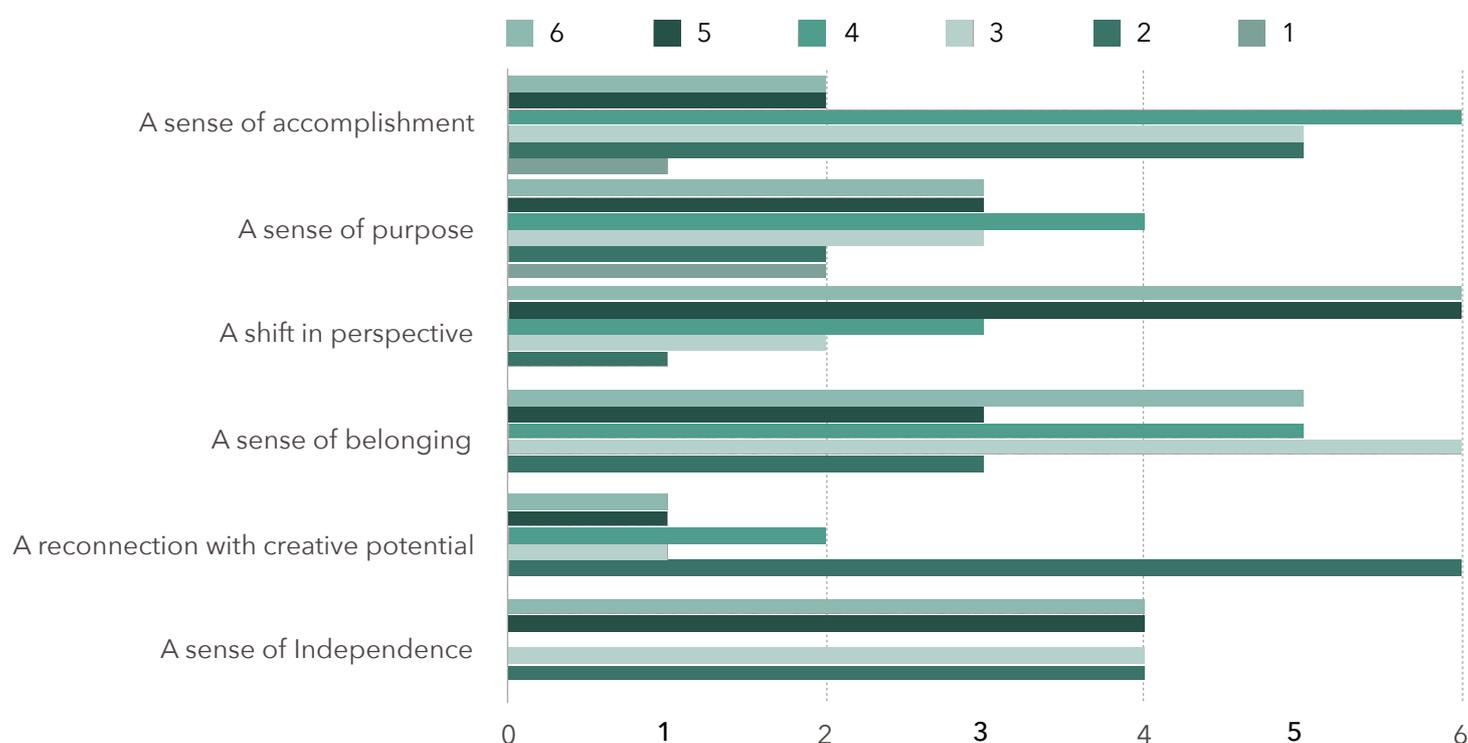


## Appendix 2 - Feedback

I asked the following question during an engagement activity at the final session 'Whilst doing Inclusive Arts Practice workshops, have you experienced any of the following?'

I gave out some small cards to the six participants to rate the questions from 1-6 (1 Most - 6 Least).

Results were completely varied since everyone had their own unique perspective and evidenced to me that they had gained an enhanced sense of wellbeing overall from doing the sessions.



*'No-one has the monopoly on truth. Each person has his or her own truth, own story, own emotions. The arts provide an outlet for these truths, and do not try to make them permanent or to interpret them or to stamp them with a moral label. The arts simply allow expression without judgement.'* <sup>55</sup>

<sup>55</sup> Haynes, Jill and Povey, Sarah. The Creative Arts in Dementia Care. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2011: 44

## Appendix 3 - Feedback received overall from sessions

In terms of the sessions overall the following feedback was received:

### 1) What was your favourite part of the whole experience?

- *Just being in a group, mixing, talking.*
- *Liked doing the painting with others in the group, and the Calligraphy inks.*
- *To have the opportunity to use materials/media I was unfamiliar with.*
- *Taking part in everything.*
- *Taking part.*
- *New outlook on little previous contact area.*

### 2) What do you feel you have achieved?

- *It has given me confidence to carry on with my art.*
- *A bit more confidence and knowledge of art.*
- *Encouragement to develop further.*
- *Trying to be patient.*
- *Ambition to continue.*
- *Expanded my small world.*

### 3) Has your perspective changed in any way as a result of the workshops?

- *Reintroduction to art in general, which I will use.*
- *Yes, they have given me courage to be imaginative and a bit more spontaneous.*
- *More ambitious.*

### 4) Would you recommend these workshops, and why?

- *Yes – fun, meeting people with own interest.*
- *Yes definitely. Great for older people to get together in a workshop.*
- *Yes, because I met new people. Lovely to see how differently they worked.*
- *Yes, they are fun and you learn a lot.*
- *Yes, it helped to extend my ability.*

### 5) Have you experience and enhanced sense of wellbeing?

- *Yes, it's been really enjoyable and I've looked forward to Fridays.*
- *Yes, a very welcome chance to step outside myself for a while.*
- *It helped.*

**6) Is there any particular art practice you will continue after the course?**

- *Every direction*
- *Yes Japanese inks and watercolours.*
- *Portrait sketching in pencil.*
- *I hope so*
- *Drawing people*

**7) Have you formed any meaningful connections?**

- *Emma*
- *Yes, it was good to meet and interact with new people.*



Many thanks to all participants who took part in the research, my biggest hope is that they enjoy reading this report. I also thank the lovely gentleman (then in his 90s) who handed me an extract from *Being Mortal* at an NHS engagement event, and said I might find it useful.

A big thank you to all participants and collaborators.