



Case studies: How can the arts and creativity support people who are shielding or vulnerable during Covid-19?

Project:

Organisation: National Archives

Region: National

Introduction

The main project is an online resource which uses 5 images from around the world (Mauritius, Barbados, Grenada, South Africa and Scotland), along with oral history recordings, sound recordings and question prompts to inspire discussion, creative activity and learning for a multinational or white audience. It promotes a multi-sensory experience that people can enjoy, whether working individually, as a group or with a carer/relative. The future resource uses images from this webpage which was the result of an Outreach project working with 3 sheltered housing schemes and a story-teller in 2017:

<https://nationalarchives.maps.arcgis.com/apps/MapJournal/index.html?appid=3b97bc4c938e4bb7b7a3d4c2d73322ab>

Funders

The National Archives

Who is it for?

I've just started working with Arts in Care Homes, which has a national reach. Within care homes, people have physical, mental and emotional needs and the audiences will include those living with dementia or other life-limiting conditions.

I am currently creating a photographic-based resource with links to other parts of the collection. There is a strong BAME focus as the images are international in focus. The aim is to encourage reminiscence and dialogue for the benefit of elders or vulnerable adults working with carers/helpers. These resources will also be relevant and useful for elders who are self-isolating at home as well as in care homes.

A colleague and I also published a blog in May providing colouring activities based upon some of our images, along with some mindfulness prompts

<https://blog.nationalarchives.gov.uk/the-art-of-kindness-using-images-to-improve-mental-wellbeing/>

What outcomes were/are you aiming for?

I am aiming to help BAME and white vulnerable adults to feel more connected with each other, to learn about different places in the world and people's memories of them, to spark conversations that inform and entertain. There are opportunities in this project to help combat loneliness, to offer opportunities for people to engage creatively, share memories and to learn. I hope this will support their mental health.

Where is it happening?

This will be an online resource so will be available nationally as part of a campaign Arts in Care Homes which will launch in September. However, in the meantime, through the same organisation, I am corresponding as a pen pal with Rushall's Care home in Walsall, West Midlands, using The National Archives' material such as podcasts, images, webinars, as well as personal reflections.

Are you working in partnership?

Yes, with Arts in Care Homes <https://artsincarehomes.org.uk/>.

How many people took/are taking part?

The resource I am developing is not available yet. (Approximately 1700 residents from 242 care homes took part in last year's initiative.) The newsletter I write weekly could be read by 36 residents and their carers/helpers.

For how long has it been happening?

The online resource work began in March, shortly after lock-down and will be live for the September deadline. We then plan to build upon it with new content. The newsletters started in early June.

What were/are the main outputs?

- a) A mindfulness activity available for all.
- b) An online resource that encourages reminiscence and discussion about what people have in common as well as exploring difference
- c) Letters to encourage a sense of contact with the outside world for people isolated in care homes

What have been the challenges and successes for you?

Creating a resource differently has been the biggest challenge. Normally I would co-develop a resource by trialling this directly with individuals who know and trust me. The loss of face to face interaction where you build trust is a big impediment.

Instead, I am working with 'gatekeepers' to help identify what will work. Working with new technological challenges is also challenging as is the need to find ways to build online content at a time when everyone is working to create material online.

On the other hand, I feel empowered by working to provide any temporary stimulation or enjoyment for those in care homes at such a frightening and challenging time.

Further information

The National Archives is the official archive and publisher for the UK Government, and for England and Wales. We are the guardians of over 1,000 years of iconic national documents. We are a non-ministerial department with c.450 employees. Our site is open to visitors and researchers and we engage people online and in community settings also.