

Case studies: How have culture and creativity been supporting people in health, care and other institutions during the Covid-19 pandemic?

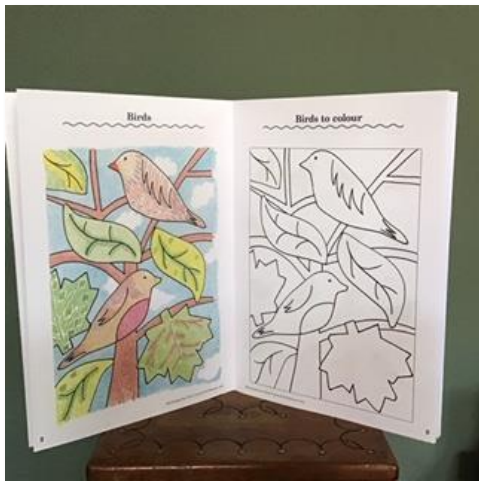
Project: Creative Connections

Organisation: Creative Dementia Arts Network

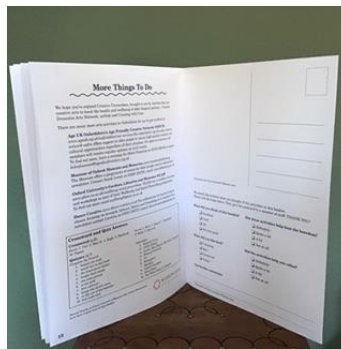
Region: South East

Designed for: Older people in hospitals

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Introduction

Creative Dementia Arts Network is a charity based in Oxford with a national reach. We aim to improve the health and wellbeing of people with dementia and their carers through enabling them to participate in the arts and cultural life of our society. We work primarily with creative practitioners and carry out joint work with arts organisations and venues, with NHS and Social Care staff and those in academia and government agencies. We provide advice, information and specialist resources, carry out evaluation, run projects, seminars, FLOURISH, our specialist arts and dementia training course and a national network.

The national lockdown occurred just after CDAN had begun Flourish Arts in Health: Home from Hospital (FAH) project (see 13) with artlink and Creating with Care who run arts programmes in Oxfordshire hospitals. Crucially, despite hospitals prohibiting external visits by creative practitioners, artlink and Creating with Care coordinators remained in post. They soon reported that in the absence of visitors, arts in hospital, and with staff under pressure, older patients, especially those with cognitive impairment, were exhibiting psychological and behavioural symptoms indicative of boredom and loneliness.

Staff suggested a colouring book could meet these needs. FAH partners responded by designing, commissioning, and producing *Creative Connections, Something to do*. This activities booklet offers pictures for patients to colour, quizzes, a crossword and poetry. In order to deliver on FAH objective of continuing patient activation through arts post discharge, the final page of *Creative Connections* lists contact details for local organisations providing creative activities to encourage older people to maintain involvement. The back cover consists of detachable postcards: one for patients to send and

one to use for feedback about Creative Connections. The booklet is single use and packs of colouring pencils were also supplied for patients.

Funders

St Michael and All Saints charity
Oxford Hospitals Charity
Oxfordshire Health NHS Foundation Trust

Partners

Artlink
Creating with Care

Who is it for?

Older patients (many of whom have mild cognitive impairment) in general and community Hospitals
NB we were aware that in the first COVID wave, most older patients with dementia were transferred into nursing homes to make space for people requiring hospitalisation for COVID.

Are these people you have worked with before, or new participants?

People we have worked with before.

How many people took/are taking part?

We printed 1,000 copies of the Creative Connections, the majority of which were given to patients. However, we know (as we have heard from a number) that ward staff also participated by sharing the booklet with patients, so an estimate might be 1,200.

Where is it happening?

Oxfordshire

For how long has it been happening?

Since May 2020.

What were/are the main outputs?

Creative Connections is a practical output – 1,000 copies were printed and distributed to all Oxfordshire hospitals.

What outcomes were/are you aiming for?

Creative Connections is a time limited single intervention presented as booklet designed to stimulate and meaningfully occupy older patients who would be able to easily access and navigate the format and use it according to personal preference during their stay and take home.

We envisaged that patient outcomes as

- Increased **activation to address loss of autonomy, low self-esteem and low mood** in that patients would be motivated to undertake various mental and physical activities that would help build their confidence in regaining control and independence that are key to self-management and recovery.
- Reduced **boredom, anxiety, and agitation** as a result of engaging with a traditional activities booklet offering visually attractive and interesting pictures to colour and enjoy, traditional word exercises and well known poems. The familiar format and content nevertheless balances accessibility with an element of challenge (see activation), and blends enjoyment and relaxation with self-testing but at one's own pace and time.

Have you adapted existing work to make this happen? If so, how?

Yes, CDAN, Artlink and Creating with Care developed the Flourish Arts in Health: Home from Hospital (FAH) project in response to unmet needs for stimulation, meaningful occupation and social connectedness, poor outcomes of hospitalisation for older people, especially for those with dementia and evidence of benefits of the participatory arts and music for older people.

FAH aims to improve the health and wellbeing of older people including those with dementia, through participation in the arts. The core of the FAH programme envisaged that professional arts practitioners would engage older patients in weekly visual arts, crafts, music, song, dance, drama and poetry sessions in the Horton General Hospital, Banbury and in Witney and Bicester Community Hospitals during their hospital stays. Patient activation through the arts would be supported following patient discharge by providing each individual with a directory of creative opportunities in North Oxfordshire and working with voluntary and community organisations to help reconnect older people to activities they enjoyed before their hospital stay and/ or join new arts and cultural activities in their communities.

We had to find alternatives to socially engaged arts and music practice that would deliver the same or similar outcomes for patients whilst also using this crisis as an opportunity to support staff and employ local freelancers who had lost their livelihoods. We listened to staff and produced a booklet.

Does your work support people who identify with one or more of the protected characteristics¹?

The booklet was specifically developed for older patients, many of whom will have mild cognitive impairment and co morbidities. People aged over 65 account for some 60% of all hospitals admissions and have longer stays: the average stay of those aged 75 and over is 9 days compare to 5 for all other patient groups whilst 81% of people aged 75 years and older had at least one hospital admission in their last year of life. Older people with dementia have poorest outcomes, longest length of stay and highest risk of readmission.

Evaluation & Feedback

We are evaluating informally via discussions with staff and patients. The Creating with Care Coordinator continues to lead an arts programme in community hospitals and the Artlink coordinator liaises with ward staff especially now that the music programme has restarted (virtually) in 2 Oxfordshire hospitals.

A few completed postcards have been passed onto ward staff who passed them onto Artlink and Creating with Care, as well providing their own feedback. Artlink and Creative Connections have sent copies of postcards and staff emails onto CDAN.

The postcards received (10) suggest that the booklet was rated as excellent/good; the most highly rated activities were colouring followed by the crossword and quizzes; and that respondents felt the activities helped them beat the boredom and relax quite a lot/a bit.

“Just so you know we received our activity books today (2 boxes) 215 books.... I have shown these to the team who all thought they were great. I really like this new version and think it's perfect :)” (Nurse)

“Positive feedback from the nursing assistants re: the booklets - they all seemed to be familiar with them and said the word-search and colouring pages were particularly popular” (Nurse)

“Thank you. I had a lovely time” (Patient)

“More quizzes please, Thank you” (Patient)

¹ Protected characteristics are age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation (Equalities Act 2010).

What is your own impression of how it has worked? What have been the challenges and successes for you?

My impression of how Creative Connections has been received is positive. CDAN's partners: Artlink and Creating with Care received and passed on feedback from nurses and nursing assistants in Oxfordshire hospitals. Interestingly responses have come from nurses across all departments/specialities – as older people are as likely to be nursed in trauma as in gerontology wards in general hospitals.

Challenges

Notwithstanding what on the face of it is a 12-page A4 activities booklet, a small editorial team nevertheless had to make innumerable decisions about style, format, content, font, etc. besides commissioning artwork and dealing with copyright. Perhaps the single biggest challenge was in producing a picture/activity booklet for older patients that acknowledged their adult status whilst being accessible (but not patronising or simple) for a group with different kinds of impairment or disability.

Successes

Creative Connections is a colourful and visually attractive booklet printed to a high standard on thicker paper so that it can be better handled by those with poor grip and visual impairment. It is pleasing that it has been well received by patients and by staff amongst whom it has triggered interest and discussion about arts and activities with one nurse who champions arts for health becoming pro-active in making suggestions for the development of other resources and in particular more dementia friendly activities and staff guidance re engaging patients in arts activities.

It's always pleasing to discover unexpected success – in this instance Creative Connections sparking staff interest in creative activities that enable them to engage (briefly) with patients and their training needs. Given the continuing crisis and pressures in hospitals, the project has highlighted the therapeutic value of using pictures and words to promote mutual wellbeing for patients AND ward staff.

Are you reaching more people/fewer people/different people?

Creative Connections has enabled the FAH project to reach more people than those whom we aimed to work with on particular wards in the Horton and Bicester and Witney Hospitals. In many ways Creative Connections has added value to the FAH project as not only have we been able to continue the FAH music sessions online (see the [Music on Wards case study](#)) but also develop what is essentially a traditional resource to meet the needs of older patients, and (see above) ward staff.

What new skills have you or your colleagues had to develop to deliver this work?

CDAN has learnt more about commissioning artwork from a professional artist and copyright!

What would you say has made this project possible?

Partnership working has been absolutely crucial at every stage of the development and production of Creative Connections. Artlink and Creating with Care liaison with front line staff led to early identification of the unmet needs of older patients and confirmation that an activities booklet would help meet these needs.

We worked intensively with our partners as an editorial group on all aspects of the booklet using email and regular Zoom meetings, joint writing, commissioning artwork, critiquing numerous drafts. Artlink and Creating with Care then sent a final draft to ward staff for comment. Amidst a generally positive response with feedback about fonts etc. however was a strong request that we substitute one of the pictures to colour which was a picnic scene featuring a bottle of wine, a glass, cheese, and grapes. Staff did not want to encourage alcohol use as alcohol abuse is implicated in a large number of hospital admissions (falls etc.) and the poor physical and mental health of some older people admitted.

Artlink and Creating with Care were able to organise distribution of Creative Connections through the Oxfordshire hospital delivery systems and to gather feedback and share this with CDAN.

What would have made it easier?

CDAN is a small charity and striking out into a new project activity and output i.e. the design, development, commissioning artwork and writing an activities booklet ultimately required additional resources beyond the original FAH budget. However, partners were committed to the work and pooled funds from different charitable and statutory sources (see below) that enabled them to cover the substantial production and printing costs of 1,000 single use booklets) (which cannot be used again due to NHS COVID safety rules).

Further information

<https://www.facebook.com/CreativeDementiaArtsNetwork/>