

Engaging with the arts to improve health and wellbeing in social care settings

Introduction

Over 22,000 older adults are living in care homes in Wales and it is estimated that 80% of these live with dementia. The Alzheimer's Society say that less than half of these are being offered opportunities to engage in creative activities.

The arts and health agenda is particularly impactful in a social care setting. Engagement with the arts can facilitate social interaction and enable those in receipt of social care to pursue creative interests. By engaging with the arts, people in receipt of social care services feel and enjoy a sense of personal development; a greater sense of social cohesion; a sense of worth and value; and a general improvement in overall physical and mental wellbeing.



A growing body of evidence shows that engagement in the arts should be considered an integral part of a healthy life. Across Wales, community-based creative and cultural opportunities are being offered to older people as a way of overcoming and preventing social isolation and maintaining good physical and mental health. 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 a person's wellbeing.

Arts-based initiatives in social care settings can take a variety of forms, including: craft activities; dance; story-telling; creative writing; poetry; singing; musical; performance; sculpture; pottery and gardening. Engagement that is tailored specifically to the person, depending on their physical and mental capacity, can demonstrably improve a person's quality of life.

Demand on social care services across Wales continues to rise. If we are to meet the challenge of being a caring nation that is continually learning and transforming the delivery of services, we need to think innovatively about the key role that the arts have to play in supporting people to live full and meaningful lives. This applies to those who receive services across the health and social care system.



This paper showcases some innovative examples of how arts-based activities are being delivered in social care settings across Wales to improve people's physical and mental wellbeing. This briefing is the latest in a series of briefings that have been prepared for the Cross-Party Group on Arts and Health. Previous briefings have showcased how the arts can be used to reduce loneliness and isolation; and the impact of dance on a person's physical and mental health.

Using the arts to improve health and wellbeing in social care settings

Live Music Now

[Live Music Now \(LMN\)](#) trains and supports around 400 professional musicians to deliver thousands of evidence-based music workshops around the UK specialising within music and dementia as well as music and special needs, including at Woffington House.

Woffington House is a privately-owned care home based in Tredegar, Blaenau Gwent in South Wales. It is home to 36 residents, who are cared for by an exceptionally dedicated team of staff specialising in dementia, speech and language issues and palliative care of male and female residents aged 55 years and over.

As with all care homes across the UK, meeting the needs of residents with various health conditions while providing engaging, community building, identity affirming activities to help them maintain a good quality of life is an ongoing challenge for staff. LMN Wales have been visiting Woffington House to deliver interactive live music performances to residents.



Manager of Woffington House care home, Adam Hesselden, says:

"We found when LMN were coming into the home the atmosphere would completely change. Music evokes so many different memories, but it can also be used as a prompt to bring people together."

"I think the biggest impact overall (of LMN's involvement) is a 50% reduction in the use of all sedative medications being administered and 100% reduction of all PRN medication!"

Tom's story

The LMN Wales' musicians' visits had a very positive impact on the life of one resident in particular, Tom Brown. Tom had lived in Tredegar his entire life. He married his wife when he was 25, and when she passed away in 2009, Tom moved into the care home. During LMN's visits, they discovered Tom was a former member of the Tredegar Orpheus Choir (and in particular loved singing the Welsh song Calon Lân). He hadn't performed since he left the Choir years ago, but had enjoyed the live music performances from LMN at the care home. As his favourite music was traditional Welsh brass bands, the charity arranged for brass quintet Blackweir Brass to perform for him and the other residents.

The visits had an incredibly positive impact on his confidence, as he joined the residents' choir to perform at the Ffrind i Mi conference in Newport, and with the encouragement of Adam gave his first ever solo performance, singing at the event at 92 years old.

Sadly, Tom passed away in September 2019, but had achieved new and unexpected heights by then through the partnership between Woffington House and Live Music Now. You can watch an interview with Tom about his life, and his love for music [here](#).



Age Cymru - cARTrefu

[cARTrefu](#) is a six-year programme run by Age Cymru which aims to improve access to quality arts experiences for older people in residential care. It is Age Cymru's flagship arts in care homes project and has been running since 2015. The project seeks to improve the provision of creative activity in care homes and develop artist's skills in running these sessions.

cARTrefu means home. Artists deliver weekly participatory creative sessions with residents, staff and family members, over 8 - 12 weeks, inspiring and re-igniting a passion for creativity. Since 2015, nearly 2,000 two-hour sessions have been delivered in over 25% of the care homes across Wales - making it the largest project of its kind in Europe. cARTrefu is frequently-cited as a best practice example of a creative, relationship-centred approach to improving wellbeing through the arts.

Following the first phase of cARTrefu, a full evaluation was conducted by the [Dementia Service Development Centre Wales at Bangor University](#) to explore the impact of the art residencies on all involved. Some of the key findings were:



- Residents rated 86% of sessions as highly enjoyable (4 or 5 on a 5-point scale);
- There was a statistically significant improvement in residents' wellbeing scores;
- There was a statistically significant improvement in staff members' attitudes towards residents, especially those living with dementia, as well as an increased willingness to design and deliver follow-up creative classes.

One resident said:

"I haven't done this for years... I don't give myself the permission to still paint and enjoy myself... But this has been the best day I've had for years."



Social Return on Investment (SROI) analysis has shown that the cARTrefu project has created a social value of between £4.53 and £9.08 for every pound of investment. Based on rigorous evaluation and assumptions based on previous research, the estimated Social Return on Investment is £6.48 for every pound invested during the first two years.

The Wales Arts for Health and Wellbeing Network has commissioned a short film to showcase the cARTrefu initiative. To view, click [here](#) and enter the password CARTREFU.

Bangor University - Dementia and Imagination

The [Dementia and Imagination project](#) was a 12-week visual art programme (viewing and making) that examined the impact on people living with dementia and their carers through a mixed-methods longitudinal investigation. Quantitative, qualitative and observational data was collected at three time points to capture the impact 'in the moment' and 'over time'. The key findings were:

- Taking part in a visual arts activity was better for wellbeing than just taking part in a social activity, highlighting the unique contribution of the arts;
- Quality of life scores were significantly higher at the end of the programme compared to the start;
- The programme was a stimulating experience, enabling personal resilience and social connectedness;
- Participants reported the programme as being interesting, friendly, and enjoyable. They reported a high sense of achievement and felt involved in the session;
- The benefits were evident regardless of the setting or stage of dementia;
- For every £1 invested in the arts activities, £5.18 of social value was generated;
- For the carers, the art programme made visible the capabilities of the person living with dementia, enabling them to see the person behind the condition; and
- The art programme inspired the professional development of care home staff.



Building on the public engagement activities in Dementia and Imagination, a 'dementia supportive practice community' has been developed. This is now an established network for people living with dementia, service providers, university research staff, carers, health and social care staff and spreads across North and mid Wales (current membership is 384 people).



This has led to members becoming advocates, representing people living with dementia on international platforms, and becoming an established group of 'dementia educators' working alongside research and teaching staff and students at Bangor University.

Person-centred Creativity (PCC) for Wellbeing training programme

PCC training uses creativity (for example, “River of Life” paintings and drawings; creative writing; ‘moment of change’ clay sculptures to music) as an intervention based upon humanistic principles to improve participants’ self-awareness, self-esteem and wellbeing. In line with the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014, the approach promotes person-centred care, relational work, enriched care environments, strengths-based interventions, outcome-focused approaches and staff wellbeing.

Valley and Vale Community Arts believes creativity offers a unique way of delivering social pedagogy - that is, the idea that each person has inherent potential, is valuable, resourceful and can make a meaningful contribution to their wider community if suitable ways are found to include them. The PCC approach provides health and social care staff with a way of managing the dynamics of care relationships to encourage the voice of, and give control to, the individual.

This training programme is delivered over three days and is supported by the Social Care Workforce Development programme. To date, Local Authorities across South Wales have commissioned over 20 courses. Participants are drawn from all areas of health and social care and include managers as well as frontline staff.

Feedback from participants has shown that this course has had a positive impact on their levels of job satisfaction. Implementation in the workplace has led to enriched professional relationships and improved levels of communication both within organisations and between staff and those in receipt of services.

One member of staff said:

“The training is excellent - it gives you ideas that you can really expand on in work and makes a real change to people’s lives”.



Conclusion

There is strong evidence to suggest that increasing involvement of the arts in social care is having a positive impact on the lives of those who receive social care services. Particularly for elderly and vulnerable people who live with long-term physical and mental health conditions, effective, person-centred engagement with the arts provides an invaluable opportunity to establish and develop relationships between participants and social care staff; experience enjoyment and fun while trying something new; stimulate creative thinking; reduce stress and anxiety; and in some cases, bring about a range of physical health benefits too.

The Welsh Government's long-term plan for health and social care, *A Healthier Wales*, emphasises the importance of achieving an integrated health and social care system that is focused on wellness and preventing illness. The NHS is working closely with partners across the public sector to achieve this vision. Our members are united with local government partners in our message that the benefits of engagement with the arts should be realised not just in the NHS, but in social care settings too. The examples showcased in this briefing demonstrate the range of positive outcomes that can be achieved in this way.

The Welsh NHS Confederation and our members' aim is to build on our Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with The Arts Council of Wales through raising awareness and increasing engagement around arts and health initiatives to achieve a more vibrant, happier and healthier Wales.

How can the Welsh NHS Confederation help you?

Please get in touch if you want further details on any of the issues raised in this briefing. Please contact **Nesta Lloyd-Jones, Assistant Director**, on Nesta.Lloyd-Jones@welshconfed.org

The Welsh NHS Confederation is the only national membership body which represents all the organisations that make up the NHS in Wales: the seven Local Health Boards, the three NHS Trusts and Health Education and Improvement Wales (HEIW).

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