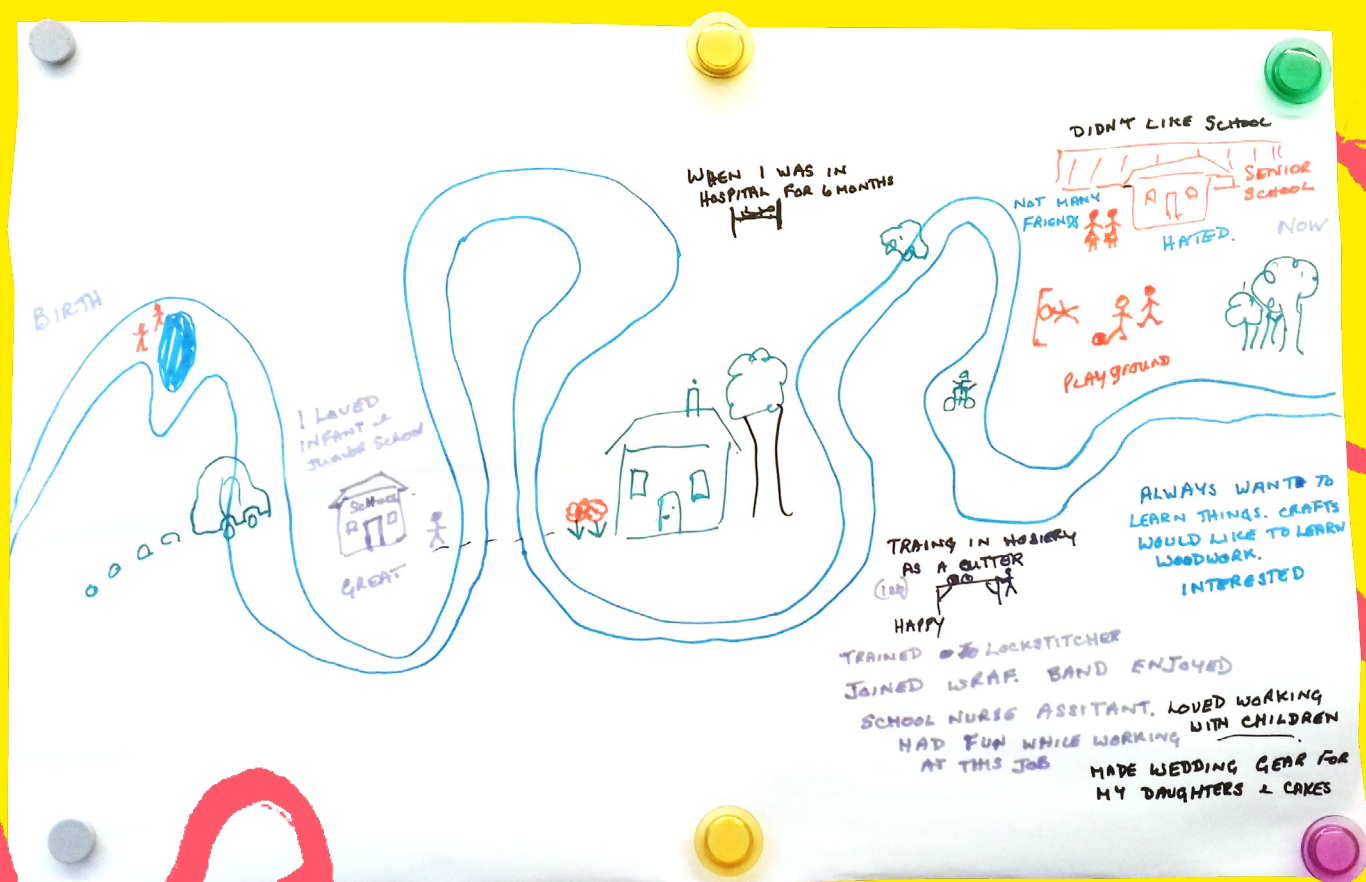


# EVERYDAY CREATIVITY IN LATER LIFE: *art, technology & community*

Dr Jonathan Gross



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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

*Everyday Creativity in Later Life: Art, Technology and Community* summarizes the activity and findings of the Do, Think, Share action research project run by 64 Million Artists in collaboration with Leicester Ageing Together (LAT). The overarching aim of this report is to examine the implications of that project for understanding the roles of creativity and digital technology in later life. The key findings are as follows:

## The Variety of Later Life

- \* There is enormous diversity in the situations and experiences of people in later life.
- \* Later life is potentially a long and varied period. In this study, it included people from age 50 to 108.
- \* Later life can involve considerable sadness and loneliness, as well new beginnings, new connections, learning, creativity and happiness.

## Conditions of relationship

- \* Within a variety of settings, including care homes and sheltered accommodation, creative activity can have value by providing a structure through which people come together: enabling conditions of relationship, and in which to be heard.
- \* With older people, just as with young people (Wilson & Gross 2017), being listened to is of great value.
- \* For older people, face-to-face interaction remains crucial.

## Digital technology

- \* Digital technology will not solve social isolation and loneliness in later life. It may have a part to play in addressing these major challenges.
- \* Levels of engagement with and proficiency in the use of digital technologies varied greatly across the older people involved in this project.
- \* To the extent that older people are interested in digital technology, their interest is often closely connected to specific purposes: communicating with family, obtaining information for practical tasks, or accessing news, films and music.
- \* Digital training for older people typically requires plenty of time, support and repetition.



- \* For many people in this demographic, separate and additional training in the use of digital technology is needed. However effectively creative workshops integrate digital technologies, such workshops are, by themselves, unlikely to provide sufficient support for the development of older people's digital skills.
- \* During 64 Million Artists' January Challenge 2018, over 20% of online participants were 60 years of age or older. This indicates the potential for some older people to make independent use of digitally provided frameworks for self-led creativity.
- \* Whether large numbers of older people will benefit from the opportunity to share their creative activities online is not yet clear. At the present time, this action research project in Leicester does not, in itself, provide strong evidence in support of this possibility.
- \* However, facilitators of many kinds are likely to benefit from the opportunity to access freely available resources enabling them to support creative activity in the locations in which they live and work. This is a key part of what the Do, Think, Share website - the primary output of this project - offers.

## The Do, Think, Share Method & Website

- \* Engaging with 64 Million Artists' Do, Think, Share method can be a process of "learning new rules" (as one participant put it), providing a specific but open framework within which to engage in new creative activities. It can also function as a structure through which to do, think about and share the outputs of creative activities that people are engaged in already.
- \* In some circumstances in which older people undertake creative activity, employing digital technologies is not appropriate. If particularly

personal experiences are articulated through processes of Do, Think, Share, there may be tensions between the value of this activity - including the bonds developed between the people involved - and 'publicly' sharing outputs and reflections online.

- \* The development of the Do, Think, Share website has tested the principle of providing free and shareable tools that anyone can use: offering a 'platform of platforms' for self-led creativity. The testing of this principle has been a success. However, if this website - and the principle it embodies - is to operate on a larger scale, further development and testing will be necessary.

## A Nested / Cascading Model of Facilitation & Partnership Working

- \* Responding to insights generated within the initial phase of activity, during this action research project there was a shift in focus. Rather than extensive work directly with the beneficiaries of organisations in the LAT consortium, during the second part of the project 64 Million Artists placed greater emphasis on working in depth with LAT organisational staff and volunteers.
- \* This action research project, and its shift in focus, indicate how an approach like Do, Think, Share can operate valuably at scale: via a 'nested' or 'cascading' model of practice. The Do, Think, Share website has the potential to provide resources for facilitators and group leaders of many kinds - employing (and adapting) these resources in working with networks, groups and individuals in their localities.
- \* Iteratively developing partnerships, as took place within this project, is challenging. It requires purposeful leadership and substantial commitments of time and energy. The benefits, however, are considerable: potentially resulting in projects that respond more deeply to the needs of organisations and their beneficiaries, and which are genuinely co-designed.



- \* The organisations within the LAT consortium that most fully engaged with the Do, Think, Share project did so because they saw it as closely aligning with their organisational missions.

will require the involvement and collaboration of multiple agencies, organisations and individuals. It will also require people working on the ground in specific locations – in many cases on an ongoing basis, over long periods of time - as well as the use of digital technologies.

## An Ecological Approach

- \* How to enable community to strengthen and flourish is one of the major challenges of our time (Monbiot 2017). If everyday creativity and digital technology are to play a significant role in addressing loneliness and social isolation in later life, ultimately an ecological approach (Holden 2015, 2016; Wilson & Gross 2017) is needed.
- \* This means recognizing and deliberately cultivating interconnections and interdependencies between various kinds of resources of cultural opportunity for older people: from networks of volunteer befrienders with storytelling skills, to events in local museums, to websites offering creative challenges. An ecological approach

- \* The challenges and opportunities of everyday creativity playing a significant part in addressing loneliness and social isolation in later life raise important questions for current discussions regarding 'cultural democracy' (Wilson, Gross & Bull 2017). In the light of its findings, this report highlights new opportunities for ecological approaches that could be developed in support of cultural and creative agency, across the life course.

*"The creative activities were really interesting. You realised you didn't need skills to get involved. It was generating conversation too."*

LAT Workshop Participant



# INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Background & Overview

### This Report

*Everyday Creativity in Later Life: Art, Technology and Community* reports on an action research project, Do, Think, Share, that took place in Leicester between March 2017 and April 2018. It was a collaboration between 64 Million Artists and Leicester Ageing Together, and was supported by the Baring Foundation and Nominet Trust. The aim of this report is to examine the implications of the project for understanding the roles of creativity and digital technology in later life.

### The Author

Dr Jonathan Gross is a Teaching Fellow and Researcher based in the department of Culture, Media & Creative Industries, King's College London. [www.kcl.ac.uk/artshums/depts/cmci/people/academic/gross/index.aspx](http://www.kcl.ac.uk/artshums/depts/cmci/people/academic/gross/index.aspx)

### 64 Million Artists

64 Million Artists (64MA) is a national campaign to unlock the potential of everyone in the UK through creativity. “We use a simple, fun and free process: Do, Think and Share to support people who’d like to use creativity to express themselves, get a bit more of a spring in their step, or connect better with others.” [64millionartists.com](http://64millionartists.com)

### Leicester Ageing Together

Leicester Ageing Together (LAT) works with people over the age of 50 at risk of social isolation and loneliness. The initiative is supported by the Big Lottery Fund over three years, and is working with five Leicester wards, in particular, whilst two of the sixteen LAT projects are city-wide. LAT has a target of reaching 6500 people, and is largely focusing on socio-economically disadvantaged areas of the city. Approximately 60% - 65% of the people LAT is working with are from BAME communities. The initiative has a three-stage model: locate, engage and connect. [www.leicesterageingtogether.org.uk/](http://www.leicesterageingtogether.org.uk/)

### The Baring Foundation

The Baring Foundation was established in 1969 as an independent funder. It tackles discrimination and disadvantage through strengthening civil society in the UK and abroad. The arts are one of the Foundation’s three funding strands. Since 2010 this has focused on arts and older people. [baringfoundation.org.uk/](http://baringfoundation.org.uk/)

### Nominet Trust

Nominet Trust is the UK’s “leading dedicated funder of socially motivated tech”. As the Trust explains, they focus on “tackling specific social challenges to deliver significant and measurable impact. Investing in organisations that demonstrate what tech can make possible, we create and share transferable models that others can adopt and scale. As part of Nominet’s commitment to public benefit, we actively engage in initiatives that promote digital inclusion.” [www.nominettrust.org.uk](http://www.nominettrust.org.uk)



## 1.2 Aims of the Do, Think, Share project

### Action Research

Do, Think, Share was an action research project: an iterative process of creative problem solving. The findings presented in this report have implications at multiple scales, including:

- \* The LAT consortium, its sixteen partner organisations, and older people living in Leicester.
- \* Wider populations of older people across the UK.
- \* Individuals, groups, organisations, networks, local authorities, funding agencies and policy makers working with older people and/or seeking to enable and promote self-led or everyday creativity.

### 64 Million Artists articulate the project aims as follows:



- **Social Challenge:**  
Older people can often feel socially isolated and a lack of creative agency. Volunteers working with older people seek resources and inspiration to creatively enrich their relationships with them.
- **Solution:**  
An online resource that brings together ideas for people to do, think about and share with each other, using creativity to help connect and motivate.
- **Value Generation:**  
The digital resource will offer a suite of shareable and adaptable creative tools, as well as a space for community sharing. New tools can be prototyped and added over time.
- **Social Value:**  
Older people better connected, services have simple and usable tools to run their own activities, enabling cost-savings on external providers and providing more social opportunities for older people and volunteers.
- **User Value:**  
Developing personal connections. Engaging in new activities that promote a sense of agency and wellbeing. Inspiration and resources for carers and volunteers.

### Pre-Existing Cultural & Creativity Activity Within LAT

Across the sixteen LAT projects, there was already a range of cultural and creative activity taking place. Within the Confederation of Indian Organisations (CIO), for example, regular opportunities are offered to take part in Indian folk song. Singing takes place at the Monday Club the CIO offers, where there is often karaoke, which is popular. Indian folk performers periodically come to work with CIO participants when visiting the UK. The CIO also offers Singing for the Brain sessions, in collaboration with the Alzheimer's Society. Elsewhere in LAT, there are craft and poetry groups,





such as those offered by the Workers' Educational Association (WEA). Beauty & Utility Arts, a social enterprise based in the area, undertakes a range of creative activities with older people, including the Book of Me project, working with people living with dementia. Learning for the Fourth Age (L4A) runs story-telling in care homes. These examples are just some of the cultural and creative activities taking place within LAT.

### **Project Activity**

The Do, Think, Share project began with the idea of developing an online 'tool' to support creative ageing - the development of which would be informed by collaboration with LAT, and by working with Dr Ceri Gorton and Alyson Fielding, who have acted as critical friends throughout the process. A key part of the project has been to explore user need: to ask what such a digital tool should consist of, and how it could help meet the needs of people in later life. These questions have been addressed via workshops with older people participating in the LAT network and the staff who run the LAT partner organisations, as well through the involvement of the Derby branch of Parkinson's UK, who enthusiastically took up the Do, Think, Share approach and were keen to be involved in the initiative. The levels of involvement of the sixteen LAT organisations varied, with some getting very deeply on board, and others not taking up the opportunity. Whilst some project activity involved multiple LAT organisations simultaneously - such as the creativity and wellbeing workshop offered to all LAT staff in November 2017 - project activity largely took place via bilateral relationships between 64MA and individual organisations within the LAT partnership.

A key interim finding of this action research - which fed into how project activity then developed - was that working directly with older people themselves needed to be complemented by working in depth with organisational staff and volunteers. In a variety of ways, discussed in Chapters 2 and 3, this 'nested' or 'cascading' approach to working with older people within LAT was essential, and has wider implications for supporting the self-led or everyday creativity of people in later life. Working directly with older people was a crucial part of the project, to explore what kinds of digital tools would be valuable to this demographic and, as far as possible,

to co-create digital tools that would meet their needs and interests. But to realise the value of these digital tools, and of the Do, Think, Share method, it became clear that the most effective approach was to enable the enablers: the staff and volunteers already deeply engaged in working with older people.

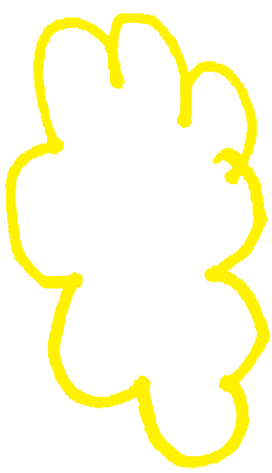
Each of the workshops that 64MA held during the project involved a variation on the Do, Think, Share method that 64MA has employed in many contexts around the UK over the past few years, from a toothpaste factory in Folkstone, to a large university in London, to Hull City of Culture. The workshops in Leicester were designed to support the self-led creativity of the participants, to explore their current digital skills and experience, and to investigate the potential value of a digital tool supporting everyday creativity for older people more widely.

During the project, 64MA drew on the insights of these workshops to feed into creative campaigns related to older people that extended in their reach beyond the specific location of Leicester. Setting 'creative challenges' that anyone can respond to, distributed digitally, is a key strand of the work that 64MA does - including its Weekly Challenge every Monday, and its annual month-long campaign, the January Challenge. Typically, this involves the provision of a simple guide: to 'do' an activity in response to a creative task, 'think' about the experience, and, finally, to 'share' the output of the activity or reflections upon the process. On the basis of its activities in Leicester, 64MA developed a series of creative challenges for Dementia Awareness Week, offered online every day for a fortnight. They also launched a new initiative, the Generation Games, a 30-day challenge, encouraging people in different generations to undertake creative activities together.

### Project Outputs

The project has involved the development of a website, Do, Think, Share. <https://dothinkshare.com/> As one member of 64MA staff explains, this is intended as a platform for sharing: "we don't want the site's functionality to be shaping or moulding people's personal creativity." Rather, "the metaphor is more of a gallery, shop window, or podium." It's not "a paint box or an art tool in itself." The website has sub-pages, including Session Plans, The Inspiration Bank, 'How To' videos, and 'An Exhibition of Yourself', in which users (whether individuals or groups) are invited to curate a collection of items - including images and written texts - that have significance for them, and to provide labels and short commentaries on their selections.

This website has been developed through the Do, Think, Share action research in Leicester, and is its primary output. However, the range of insights generated on the ground also constitutes a key output of the project. Much of that learning is documented in this report. However, to understand the significance of these insights, the project first needs to be located within a wider context of current debates and initiatives regarding art, digital technology and ageing, and regarding the nature and significance of cultural opportunity in later life.



*"When I do creative things it makes me feel more wanted. You can mix in with people."*

L4A Workshop Participant



### 1.3 The wider context: art, digital technology & ageing

#### Loneliness is a Public Health Issue

The UK population is ageing. This is just one factor contributing to a growing crisis in health and social care. Age UK estimates that 1.2 million older people in the UK are chronically lonely (Age UK 2016). As the Baring Foundation's David Cutler has noted, "the deleterious effect of loneliness and its particular impact on older people is becoming increasingly recognised and understood. [...] These effects can be as threatening to health as obesity and heavy cigarette smoking." (Cutler 2017a: 5). Loneliness and social isolation needs to be recognized as a social and political issue, and as a matter of public health.

The major report of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on the Arts, Health & Wellbeing (APPGAHW) makes clear that as far back as 1948 the World Health Organisation defined health as a "state of complete physical, mental and social wellbeing and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity". (Quoted in APPGAHW, 2017:16). Physical health is inseparable from mental and social wellbeing – which, in turn, is not a passive state, but characterised, in part, by agency. As the Foresight Mental Capital and Wellbeing Project puts it, mental wellbeing is a "dynamic state, in which the individual is able to develop their potential, work productively and creatively, build strong and positive relationships with others, and contribute to their community. It is enhanced when an individual is able to fulfil their personal and social goals and achieve a sense of purpose in society." (Quoted in APPGAHW 2017: 17).



The evidence is clear that our health and how we age is strongly conditioned by our socio-economic circumstances. Whilst “many older people lead satisfying and fruitful lives, health in older age is determined by income and by current and previous experience. Educational level predicts life expectancy, and disability-free life expectancy is unevenly distributed across the social gradient.” (APPGAHW 2017, 122) These inequalities apply to indicators of loneliness specifically, as well as to indices of physical and mental health more broadly, as people on low incomes are “twice as likely to feel trapped and lonely than their more affluent counterparts” (APPGAHW 2017: 126-7). This, of course, has a series of knock-on effects, as isolation, which accounts for up to a third of GP visits, is associated with poor physical and mental health, and an increased risk of dementia.

But whilst the APPGAHW aligns itself with this social conceptualization of physical and mental health, it also acknowledges that within UK public policy there is not yet a consensus on how to define and study mental health and wellbeing. Nor, of course, is there a consensus on how best to meet the practical and policy challenges of a health and social care system under increasing strain.

### **The Health Benefits of the Arts, Culture and Creativity in Later Life**

Within a context in which there is strong and ever-growing evidence for the social determinants of health, including recognition across a wide range of UK policy documents, there is also growing if uneven evidence of the significance of art, culture and creativity in supporting people’s health and wellbeing in later life. On the basis of an exhaustive review of the published literature, and a series of roundtables with experts across the UK, the APPGAHW recently concluded that the “evidence is there that the arts can help meet major challenges facing health and social care including ageing, long-term conditions, mental health and loneliness.” (APPGAHW 2017: 154-5)

Not long previously, in 2016, the Arts & Humanities Research Council (AHRC) published a comprehensive and critical survey of the range of currently available evidence regarding ‘cultural value’. With respect to health and wellbeing, the authors concluded that there is “clear evidence of an association between arts and cultural participation and self-reported subjective wellbeing, even when demographic and lifestyle factors are taken into account.” (Crossick & Kaszynska 2016: 112) The report states that there is “particular evidence of the benefits of participatory arts for older people. Improvements have been seen in mental health and wellbeing, physical health and engagement with others. There is also evidence of such benefits for people living with dementia, especially when the activities engage with them and draw on their continuing capacity for creativity, story-telling and so on.” (Crossick & Kaszynska 2016: 112)

Nonetheless, each of these reports offers a word of caution. Whilst Crossick and Kaszynska conclude that there is clear evidence of an association between cultural participation and wellbeing, they also note that “greater clarity” on these relationships will come with further research, including longitudinal studies. In addition to this ongoing process of building the evidence base, the APPGAHW report implicitly raises questions of political communication, as whilst there is now a strong body of supporting research, it is nevertheless the case that the “benefits of the arts for health and wellbeing are still not widely recognised.” (APPGAHW 2017: 155)

### **The Benefits of Digital Technologies in Later Life**

There are methodological challenges to disentangling the many social factors influencing health and wellbeing at any age, including in later life. Even though studies might control for multiple factors, “they cannot completely control for the interactive and reciprocal nature of health status, personality factors, activity opportunities, [and] activity preferences” (Adams et al. 2011: 702). Nonetheless, the review of the literature on ageing and wellbeing by Adams et al does provide support for the view that “informal social participation, through activities such as visiting with friends, has a consistently positive relationship with wellbeing in later life”, and that the “social intimacy inherent in certain activities appears to be a very important, if not the most important, aspect of engagement that influences wellbeing.” (Adams et al. 2011: 705) The evidence for the value of social intimacy in later life is strong. However, the current evidence for the enabling value of digital technologies, in this respect, is less conclusive.

An evidence review conducted by Age UK in 2016 indicated that the main functions used by older people were those enabling them to keep in regular touch with friends and family, and to do so inexpensively (Age UK 2016: 3). The review also noted, however, that whilst technologies can play this connecting role very successfully, older people often need training to obtain the skills to make initial use of these technologies, as well as ongoing support. A recent literature review regarding the role of ICT in improving the quality of life [QOL] for older people indicates that the jury is still out. The evidence “demonstrates that the effects of older people’s use of ICT [...] on different domains of QOL can be both positive and negative, challenging common assumptions that ICT is unquestionably beneficial” (Damant et al. 2016: 1). The authors looked at both ‘mainstream’ technologies such as computers, email and smartphones and specialist technologies used in care settings. Future research needs to more clearly differentiate between these kinds of technology. Nonetheless, the findings of the review confirm the need for some caution in hailing the benefits of digital technologies for older people, and the need for further research.





Digital technologies hold out the promise of connecting people as never before, as well as radically democratizing the means of self-expression. But there are reasons to exercise judicious scepticism, especially when it comes to older people. One reason concerns the structures of the technologies themselves, including the ways in which apparently 'neutral' platforms and tools mediate communications and creativity in very specific ways (Taylor 2014). A second reason is the many ways in which the empowering possibilities of digital technologies are unequally distributed. This issue is particularly important with respect to that section of the population who are not 'digital natives', and particularly those who have retired before

*I'd advise people to come because if it's done a positive thing for me, talking about your life, I think it would benefit anyone. I'd encourage people to come.*

Reminiscence Workshop Participant

digital technologies became a standard part of everyday working life within many jobs. The need to address a growing 'digital divide', and the possibility that arts practice could make a contribution to doing so, is highlighted by each of Joe Randall's reports on digital arts and older people for the Baring Foundation (Randall 2012, 2015).

### **Conceptualizing Wellbeing... and Later Life**

There is a groundswell of interest in health, wellbeing and ageing, including 'critical' perspectives raising the political implications of the commercialization of the 'happiness industry' (Davies 2016; Cederstrom & Spicer 2015). Health, wellbeing and ageing cannot be thought of as simply technical challenges to be met by ever advancing medical means. They are questions whose answers are just as much about social relations, political priorities and cultural values. This includes the question of how old age and ageing is conceptualized and represented.

LAT works with people over 50. But some participants are over one hundred years old, and people's capacities vary hugely, even at the same age. Moreover, in many ways, we are not psychologically identical with our biological age, and our experiences of ageing are psycho-social in nature. Drawing on analysis of a wide range of literary, philosophical, psychoanalytic and political texts, Lynne Segal's important work shows how the ageing process is subject to political contestations in which wider issues of class and gender, in particular, are played out. As demonstrated most starkly within psychoanalytic writing, but observable across the range of texts Segal examines, there are many ways in which we continue to operate through younger versions of ourselves, nested within us. This has many implications: not least, with respect to (often erroneous and constraining) social expectations of our interests, desires and commitments in later life. (Segal 2013)

Within gerontology and related academic fields, there is increasing contestation of 'successful' ageing. During the second half of the twentieth century many theories and criteria of successful ageing were developed, but not one "has been widely accepted as a cogent prescription or explanation for success in old age" (Baltes & Carstensen 1996: 402). 'Critical' gerontologists have challenged the 'busy' theory of successful ageing. Adams et al., for example, review the literature on social and leisure activity and wellbeing in later life, and highlight that very few studies consider an

activity's "purpose or meaning". This, they argue, is a significant problem, as whilst meaning is likely to be difficult to measure, nonetheless "it may be crucial in making sense of the activity/wellbeing equation" (Adams et al. 2011: 707). Whilst the 'meaning' of activities may be a challenging phenomenon to research in this context, when it comes to understanding the interrelationships between activity, wellbeing and ageing, they conclude, it is clear that "individual characteristics, such as personality or gender, and intervening variables such as choice, meaning, or perceived quality of the activity, play an important role in fostering wellbeing, above and beyond the type of activity or participation frequency." (Adams et al. 2011: 709)

This raises the question of how the opportunities for creative activity that older people are invited into through an initiative such as Do, Think, Share relate to issues of purpose and meaning. To address this, we need to ask: what are the underlying assumptions this project has made (and the values it has committed to) in seeking to explore the potential of self-led creativity and digital technology to support the "creative agency" of older people, and thereby tackle the challenges of loneliness and social isolation in later life?

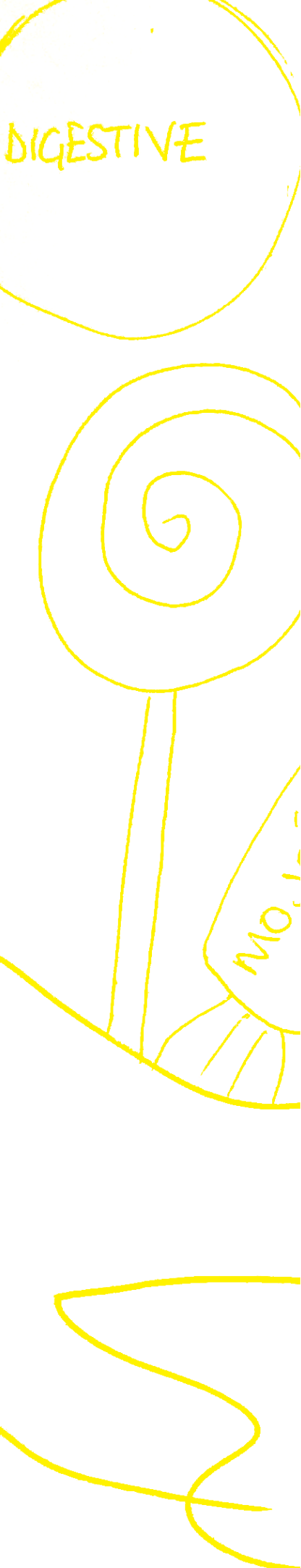


## 1.4 The wider context: cultural opportunity in later life

### **Do, Think, Share in Historical Context**

The Do, Think, Share approach needs to be understood within a broader history of community arts practice. The classic model of community arts, which had its heyday in the UK between the late 1960s and early 1980s, involves an 'artist' working with a 'community', supporting the members of that community to create, thereby redistributing the means of cultural production (Braden 1978; Kelly 1984; Jeffers & Moriaty 2017). The approach





of 64MA is both a continuation of this history, and divergent. Through a variety of methods, the organisation seeks to “unlock” the creativity of everyone within the UK, without necessarily involving a professional artist or facilitator. One of the primary means for doing so is via creative challenges made available digitally. On this model, there is no need for a distinction between the ‘artist’ and the ‘community’. At the same time, amongst the range of its activities, 64MA does offer workshops through which to facilitate creativity, being in the room with participants.

### **Conceptual Variations: Art & Creativity**

Randall’s 2012 and 2015 reports for Baring repeatedly refer to “art” and “the arts”. Since 2010, The Baring Foundation’s Arts Programme has “focused on the creativity of older people, with the objective: to increase the quality and quantity of the arts for older people, especially vulnerable older people. Through this programme, the Foundation has found that there is considerable interest from artists and organisations seeking to use different types of creative technology in their arts projects with older people.” (Randall 2015: 3) The work of 64MA addresses the cultural opportunity of older people from a wider perspective. Rather than thinking in terms of “artists and organisations” developing projects with older people, it treats older people as artists already, and asks the question of the role that digital technology might play in enabling their creativity.

David Gauntlett uses the word creativity and the phrase ‘everyday creativity’ broadly, “in relation to the activities of making which are rewarding to oneself and to others”. (Gauntlett 2011: 13) He suggests that rather than being closely associated with innovative products or great works of art, creativity “might be better understood as a process, and a feeling. In this way of looking at it, creativity is about breaking new ground, but internally: the sense of going somewhere, doing something that you’ve not done before. This might lead to fruits which others can appreciate, but those may be secondary to the process of creativity itself, which is best identified from within.” (Gauntlett 2011: 17) Everyday creativity, he argues, is not only prevalent already, but it is on the rise. The “range of collaborative things that people do online is extraordinary”, whilst offline, in the “non-virtual world, there is a resurgence of interest in craft activities, clubs, and fairs”. (Gauntlett 2011: 13)

Everyday creativity is at the heart of what 64MA does, campaigning for and enabling everyday creativity around the country. Following consultation with practitioners and policy makers across the UK, in 2016 Jo Hunter and David Micklem produced a report for Arts Council England in which they concluded that everyday creativity is “already prevalent across the country”, but there are actions that could be taken to “diversify and extend the range of options available to a broader number of participants” (64 Million Artists 2016: 26). The Do, Think, Share project with LAT is part of 64MA’s overall approach to everyday creativity: people are already doing it, but the specific conditions in which we live enable and constrain the extent to which each person’s creativity can be exercised and expressed.

### **The Deficit Model & Later Life**

64MA is one of a range of UK-wide initiatives - including Get Creative, Fun Palaces and the ongoing work of Voluntary Arts - which, each in their own way, are looking to support people in their own creativity. This is part of a renewed interest in ideas of ‘cultural democracy’ (see Wilson, Gross & Bull 2017 and Jeffers & Moriaty 2017), and related critiques of the longstanding mode of cultural policy that focuses on ‘excellence and access’ (Street 2011).

Critics of the prevailing policy paradigm accuse it of operating according to a 'deficit model' in which those who do not participate in publicly funded culture should do, and are in deficit (Miles & Sullivan 2012). Building on the critique of the deficit model, the AHRC Understanding Everyday Participation project (Miles & Gibson 2016) has highlighted how people are involved in cultural participation in numerous ways that have nothing to do with arts organisations, reaching the conclusion that there is no such thing as a cultural 'non-participant'.

An important question that needs to be debated further - and which is raised sharply by the findings of this report, *Everyday Creativity in Later Life* - is the relationship between projects such as Do, Think, Share and the deficit model. Some of the organisations involved in LAT have a specific focus on learning and skills, including the Workers' Educational Association (WEA) and Learning for the Fourth Age (L4A). These organisations have been some of the most actively engaged with the Do, Think, Share initiative. As Fiona Smith of L4A explains:

*We believe that you're never too old to learn, and that just because you may have specific care needs, that shouldn't prevent you from accessing learning opportunities. So, we try to provide learning opportunities to older people who are in receipt of care. And that might be that they're in a care home or a nursing home, it might be that they're in sheltered housing, it might be that they still live in their own home but that for whatever reason [...] it's difficult to access opportunities to learn, or to continue learning, or [continue with] pre-existing hobbies and interests.*



When does the provision of opportunities constitute an implicit 'lack' on the part of the beneficiary? Does the critique of the deficit model apply to policies and practices directed towards children and people in later life, or only to working-age adults? Whilst there is good reason to challenge an approach to cultural policy and provision founded on partial, paternalistic



views of cultural value, examples such as the Do, Think, Share LAT project raise the question of what approaches need to be taken that neither prescribe what cultural opportunity should consist of nor disavow any social or public responsibility for supporting cultural opportunities.

### **Cultural Opportunity in Later Life: An Ecological Approach?**

In recent research with young people in one London borough, Wilson and Gross showed how cultural opportunity operates ecologically, through the interconnections and interdependencies between organisations and non-organisational resources of different kinds (Wilson & Gross 2017). If cultural opportunity operates ecologically for young people, does the same apply for older people? Further research is needed to understand what cultural opportunity consists of in later life, and how it operates for different populations of older people in different social and geographical



circumstances. But we can hypothesise, at this stage, that to the extent to which cultural opportunities have a role to play in meeting the needs of people in later life - and to the degree to which these needs are not only the responsibility of individual older people themselves - the conditions of flourishing interconnection and interdependency that constitute a healthy ecology (Holden 2015, 2016; Wilson & Gross 2017) need to be deliberately cultivated further, to ensure that the cultural opportunities of people in later life are maintained and expanded.

In some cases, retirement can be an extremely rich and varied period of life, with additional time and resources to engage in cultural and creative activities (Gross 2013), and in which, “Freed from the ties of work, people in older adulthood may enter a creative age.” (APPGAHW 2017: 122) But we also know that, for many people, later life is a time of decreasing opportunity and increasing isolation. In this context, if “research shows that participation in

culture and the arts declines steeply in our seventies” (Cutler 2017a: 5) we need to address what this participation consists of, and how it operates. Moreover, we need to ask what new conditions can be cultivated that better enable cultural opportunity in later life. Taking an ecological approach, this means considering not only the direct provision of arts organisations or professional practitioners, although that may be an important part of the ecology. It also means addressing the interconnections between (often informal) sites of cultural opportunity of different kinds, and the ways in which older people are - or are not - able to access and navigate these pathways. This raises the question of the role that digital technologies can play.

Baring’s 2012 report, *Digital Arts and Older People* (Randall 2012), drew the distinction between the use of technology as a tool and as a medium. It is as a tool, for sharing - rather than as a medium of production - that Do, Think, Share has engaged with the possibilities of digital technologies in helping to address the challenges of loneliness and social isolation in later life. In Baring’s 2015 follow-up report, the issue of scale was highlighted, as “scale is an increasingly important rationale for the use of digital tools and media with older people – both because they can facilitate greater self-directed activity and they provide opportunities for remote viewing of live arts events from non-traditional settings such as day centres and care homes.” (Randall 2015: 1) Part of the potential of digital technologies is their capacity to radically increase the breadth of cultural opportunities. But as will be illustrated in what follows, the Do, Think, Share action research project in Leicester shows that the beneficial potential of digital technologies in later life, for the time being at least, will be highly mediated by people working ‘on the ground’. Moreover, as the Baring Foundation’s own work on local authorities helps to indicate (Cutler 2017b), ultimately an ecological approach is needed: involving multiple agencies, working in specific locations, as well as through the use of digital technologies.



"I've learnt more about myself."

Workshop Participant



# THEMES & FINDINGS

## 2.1 Varities of facilitation: supporting self-led creativity in later life

Through this action research project, the question of how best to facilitate the self-led creative activity of older people arose at multiple scales. This ranged from questions of workshop structure, to the relationship between an organisation acting nationally and the local groups and individuals initiating creative activity under its umbrella.

### **There is a fine balance to be struck between ‘delivering’ and ‘enabling’.**

A fundamental aim of the Do, Think, Share project was to enable people in their self-led creativity. At the same time, this has been initiated through the delivery of workshops. It is an ongoing, iterative process to balance the two: avoiding being pulled too far in the direction of a ‘supply side’ delivery approach (closely determining the nature of the activities that take place), whilst providing participants with sufficient structure and guidance.

### **Varying facilitation according to need.**

The Do, Think, Share project in Leicester shows that the balance between delivering specific ‘content’ and holding open spaces for participants to take the lead should vary from location to location, depending on the needs and interests of the specific group. This is a key skill for facilitators: to adapt nimbly, calibrating a balance appropriate to the given context in which they are working. This project has found that even when committed to a minimally intervening style of facilitation – and with an explicit interest in enabling participant agency – it remains an ongoing challenge to find the right balance between offering participants clear guidance and allowing them “the space for their imaginations and their divergent associative thinking to operate”, as one member of 64MA staff put it.

### **Recognising and supporting people’s pre-existing skills and interests.**

Part of the craft of facilitation is to enable people to exercise the skills they already have. The Confederation of Indian Organisations (CIO), for example, in running its internet café, had an 82-year-old participant who used to be able to type, and through the programme redeveloped that skill. Facilitators can draw on various types of knowledge, capacity and experience in order to effectively recognize and support participants’ pre-existing skills and interests. This can range from effective listening - including asking well-chosen, facilitative questions - to sharing expert knowledge on specific topics in ways that connect creatively with the interests of members of the group. For example, Vinod Kotecha, project manager of the CIO, found





↑ Creativity workshop at *The Confederation of Indian Organisations*

that a lot of CIO participants “are very keen gardeners, but they didn’t have the opportunity”. Having an outside expert visit was very helpful. When a gardener was brought in to work with the CIO’s members, it became clear that many “knew the different plants and what they do, so there is a lot of knowledge there”, but “to bring them out we need someone to come along to the session”.

#### **Offering access to information.**

Older people often value having access to information, and workshops can play an important part in providing opportunities of this kind. For example, providing information is the primary focus of one of the five programme strands within the CIO. “We have speakers on health, from the social services, from doctors, solicitors, to talk about wills – anything to do with elderly people which they normally don’t get the information, we get the speaker. Every week there’s a different speaker.” Clearly there are many types of facilitation that will meet the needs and interests of older people in different ways. In some cases, this will be a ‘broadcast’ model of providing information. In other cases, a co-produced and participatory model of facilitation will be more appropriate and effective. In each case, different kinds of expertise will be most suitable.

#### **Holding open a space.**

When providing access to information about welfare rights or social services, bringing in ‘knowledge experts’ has its place. However, when it comes to creative activities with older people, facilitators’ expertise is often located in their ability to foster inclusive participatory conditions, without necessarily having expert knowledge in any one artistic medium. Facilitators’ key skills are often located in methods of ‘holding open’ a space in which creative exploration and conversation can occur, and in which participants can

*"Creative things are enjoyable.  
They keep your mind alert, your  
body active."*

CIO Workshop Participant

develop their own capacities and interests. As one member of staff at a LAT organisation put it, "I'm not an artist, but what I can do is stand back a little bit and [...] look at the opportunities", being alert to the dynamics in the room, and enabling the relationships to be as positive as possible.

### **Conditions for relationship.**

In some creative workshops with older people, the activity is primarily about relationships, and only secondarily about the artistic activity. This was reported, for example, by some volunteers within LAT who visit people in care homes. "When I first went in I was wanting to get something obvious out of it, and then I learnt that it doesn't matter if there's an outcome - it's the relationship. It's not about what they produce, it's the time they have together, and time to be valued. A lot of the carers are very good, but they don't have the time to have the kind of interaction we have with them." Within a variety of settings, including care homes and sheltered accommodation, facilitated creative activity can have value by *providing a structure through which people come together*.

### **Who does the facilitation?**

In some cases, the most suitable person to facilitate a creative group is also a member of that group. This was the case, for example, with the Derby Creative Challenge Group, within Parkinson's UK (see Case Study 2, below). Here, the facilitator knows the participants very well, and this knowledge enables her to tweak and hone the creative challenges - provided to that group in advance by 64MA - and to take executive decisions during the flow of the workshops. This does not mean, of course, that outside facilitators cannot work well. Their role, for example, may be to model a new approach that can then be picked up and run with by local facilitators who will continue to work with the group on an ongoing basis.

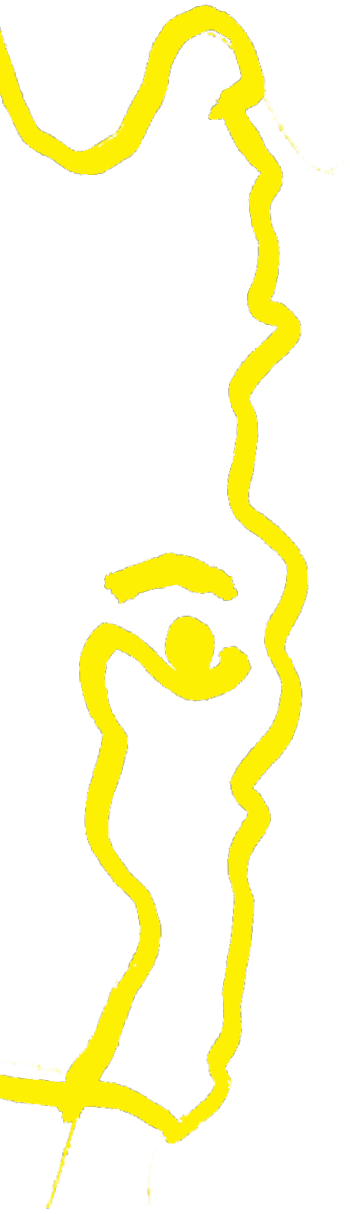
### **Facilitation and partnership.**

Within the Do, Think, Share project, workshops tailored to the needs of particular groups have been much more successful than a number of more general workshops held at the very beginning of the project. At these early sessions, some LAT organisational staff were less sure of the connection between the workshop and their own organisational purposes, including the specific needs of their beneficiaries.

## 2.2 Language matters

### **Finding suitable vocabularies.**

Finding a suitable terminology and way of communicating is a key part of effective facilitation. It can also be an important part of bonding processes within self-organising creative groups. Language can shape what people feel they are (or are not) able to do. As the leader of one group explains, participants support each other through speaking in ways that seek to minimize embarrassment, inhibition or self-criticism. If someone says, "“Oh, I can't draw cats”, the whole group turns to them and says, ‘we can't either’.



They just support each other with their phraseology, *'what do you mean you can't draw cats, none of us can!'*”

### **Keywords.**

With several of the central terms within the Do, Think, Share project – including creativity, digital, and ageing – there are degrees of uncertainty in their usage, and this uncertainty has consequences. For example, the language of ‘digital’ isn’t always helpful. Older people sometimes indicated that they do not make use of digital technology, but it would then emerge that they use Skype to keep in touch with family members living overseas. Similarly, the language of ‘art’ was rejected by some older people. The leader of the Derby Creative Challenge Group explained that there was an extended discussion amongst its members regarding their name. *“Nobody liked the word ‘artist’ when we started, nobody wanted to call us that. [...] I thought it would be ‘64 Million Something, Something’, so people knew who we were. But they were quite adamant [not to use] the word ‘artist’: that people wouldn’t join us cos they’d think they’d have to be able to draw.”*



### **Language & literacy.**

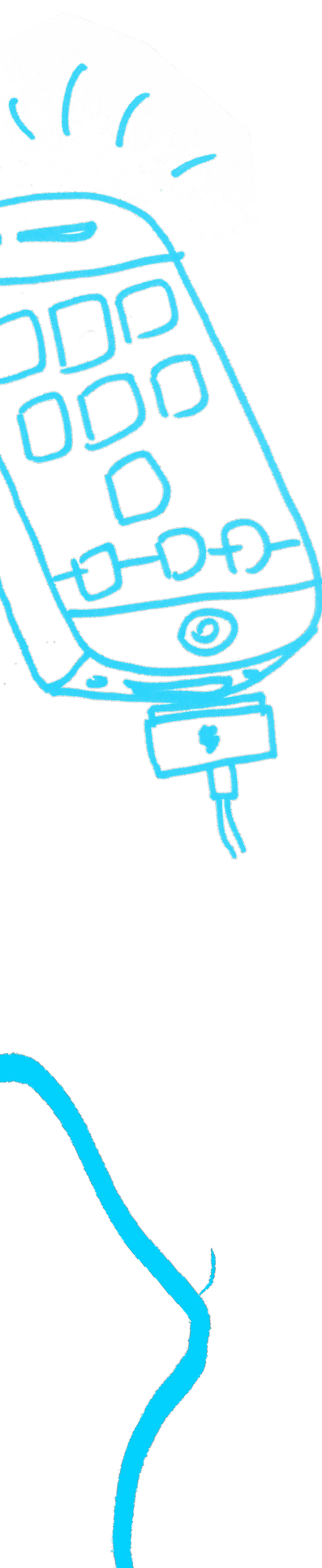
Levels of English language proficiency vary amongst the groups of people that the CIO works with. Consideration needs to be given to how to make creative challenges and other resources available in Gujarati and other languages, as well as in English.

## **2.3 Partnership working**

### **Making a partnership offer that is both open and focused.**

Closely connected to key issues of facilitation are those relating to partnership working. The Do, Think, Share project illustrates the specific challenges of developing an approach to partnership working in which a specialist organisation such as 64MA – with expertise in enabling people in their own creativity – seeks to respond to pre-existing needs, interests and capacities and to provide potential partners with an offer that is sufficiently





clear that busy organisations know whether (and how) to devote time to developing that partnership. This replicates - at the scale of organisational partnership - the challenge of balancing delivery and enabling, discussed above.

### **Iterative partnerships are challenging.**

The value of iterative partnership working is that it enables specific needs, interests and capacities to be articulated, for collaborative aims to be refined, and for this process to feel genuinely collaborative. However, it can be demanding to undertake an iterative approach whilst ensuring an overall clarity of purpose, offer and expectations. Within the successful bilateral partnerships between 64MA and LAT organisations, this was largely achieved. But it requires purposeful leadership, and the time and energy to make it work are substantial. As was demonstrated in the successful partnerships within the project, it also requires trust and openness, allowing the overall direction of the partnership to be shaped through ongoing conversation. As one interviewee put it, finding mutual relationships and “really listening” is key, and “those take a lot of time to develop”.

### **Pressures on the Third Sector.**

Some LAT organisations discussed the pressures affecting them and the voluntary sector more broadly. In some cases, this affected their capacity to engage with the Do, Think, Share initiative.

### **Alignment of organisational missions.**

Those organisations who most fully engaged with the Do, Think, Share project were those that identified a close alignment between the aims of Do, Think, Share and their own organisational mission.

## 2.4 Affecting change: a nested / cascading model

### **Enabling the enablers.**

A notable feature of this action-research project was the shift in focus from working in depth with the older people themselves, to focusing on organisational staff and volunteers. As one member of 64MA staff reflected, “we realized that the best way for an organisation like us to work with a group that feels socially isolated or marginalized is to work with the people who work with them, and enable them to use their creativity: because they’ve already got the relationships, local knowledge and expertise”. Within the context of LAT, if digital technology is going to be helpful, it is, in the first instance, largely through the mediation of staff and volunteers. This has wider implications for understanding the processes and structures through which older people’s cultural and creative opportunities can be supported on a sustainable basis, and the roles that digital may play.

### **Responding to need.**

Through their collaborations in Leicester, the project team developed insight into the particular conditions within which LAT organisations are working with older people, and the specific ways in which the Do, Think, Share approach and ‘digital tool’ (what became the Do, Think, Share website) could support them. Where LAT staff and volunteers visit people in care homes, they would welcome new sources of creative activities. In workshop situations, having new creative formats and challenges to hand would be valuable.

# ★ VOTE HERE ★

TOOL	HAVE?	USE?	DIGITAL
MOBILE PHONE			h
SMART PHONE			
TABLET			
LAPTOP			
DESKTOP COMPUTER			
KINDLE			
ALEXA ECHO			
LANDLINE			



### **Supporting staff and volunteer wellbeing.**

The project's emerging 'nested' model also builds on the insight that if organisational staff and volunteers are themselves stressed, unhappy, or isolated, they will be less able to support their participants. Interviewees indicate that the legacy of the Do, Think, Share project will be achieved, in the first instance, by supporting staff and volunteers: providing them with access to a wide range of creative resources, some of which may support their own wellbeing.

### **Working with connectors / ambassadors.**

A member of staff at one LAT organisation suggested that expanding the Do, Think, Share approach could take place through "local leads". 64MA is already thinking about "ambassadors" around the country. Ensuring ambassadors are diverse, representative of the heterogeneity of populations across the UK, is the way in which 64MA will ensure that it is working inclusively. As one member of 64MA staff puts it, "in order to reach everyone you have to be specific about who you want to reach." The ambassadors, or connectors, could be a retiree, a teacher in a school, a volunteer in a care home, a member of staff at an arts organisation, or any enthusiastic participant in the 64MA January Challenge.

## **2.5 Participant pathways**

### **Making pathways visible.**

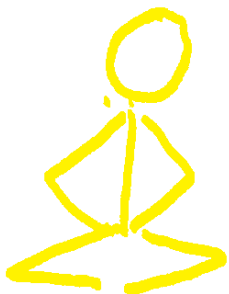
Older people having clear pathways beyond particular sessions, to other appropriate opportunities nearby, is important. Within LAT there is some evidence of pathways being established from one group to another, creating an environment in which participants have "started going to each other's projects", as one interviewee put it. Some organisations, such as the WEA, are interested in linking IT sessions with other parts of their own programme, such as connecting an IT group with a walking group. However, for some organisations working with older people, providing a range of suitable pathways to new opportunities further afield can be a challenge, especially when resources are constrained.

### **Beneficiaries taking over the organisation or facilitation of a group can be an important next step.**

In the CIO, participants have assumed organizational responsibilities for one of the project groups. These organisational activities are creative undertakings in themselves. As Vinod Kotecha explains, "the beneficiaries become the managers of the lunch club, so it's not an art thing, but their creativity and confidence has come up. Cos people who are very ill have come, and come out of isolation, and they've taken responsibility, and their self-esteem is very high". In other parts of LAT, beneficiaries are now taking the lead in running activities on a self-organizing basis.

### **Ongoing support is necessary.**

Even whilst some beneficiaries take on organisational roles, staff in LAT organisations are aware that supporting people to take steps beyond specific workshops is a considerable undertaking. As one organisational lead put it, "hand-holding is a huge part of what we do." This includes supporting people within particular sessions, and enabling them to attend new activities: "you can't just put a poster on a wall and expect people to come". High levels of ongoing support will be very important for many older people.





## 2.6 Memory & Creativity

### **Creative responses to the past:**

As discussed in more detail in the two case studies presented in Chapter 3, whilst older people may value the opportunity to explore the past through the creative processes of Do, Think, Share and similar frameworks, being invited into processes of introspection and reminiscence can be painful. Different groups and individuals will each respond in their own ways. It may be part of the role of group leaders to calibrate activities such that the older people involved have the opportunity to explore and express their experiences, if they wish to. But a key challenge for facilitation of this kind is to enable participants to feel in control of the process, including its emotional tone.

## 2.7 Digital technology: challenges & opportunities

### **Older people were active in the 2018 January Challenge.**

During 64MA's fourth annual January Challenge, over 20% of online participants were 60 years of age or older, engaging from many parts of the UK (64 Million Artists 2018: 6). This finding offers a provisional indication of the potential for some older people to make independent use of digitally provided frameworks for self-led creativity, such as online versions of the Do, Think, Share approach.

### **Varied levels of IT skills and experience.**

Across the population of older people involved in the Do, Think, Share project in Leicester, there was a wide range of levels of IT skill and experience. As

one member of 64MA staff put it, the spectrum was “from people who don’t have an email address to people who are really at home administrating Facebook groups.”

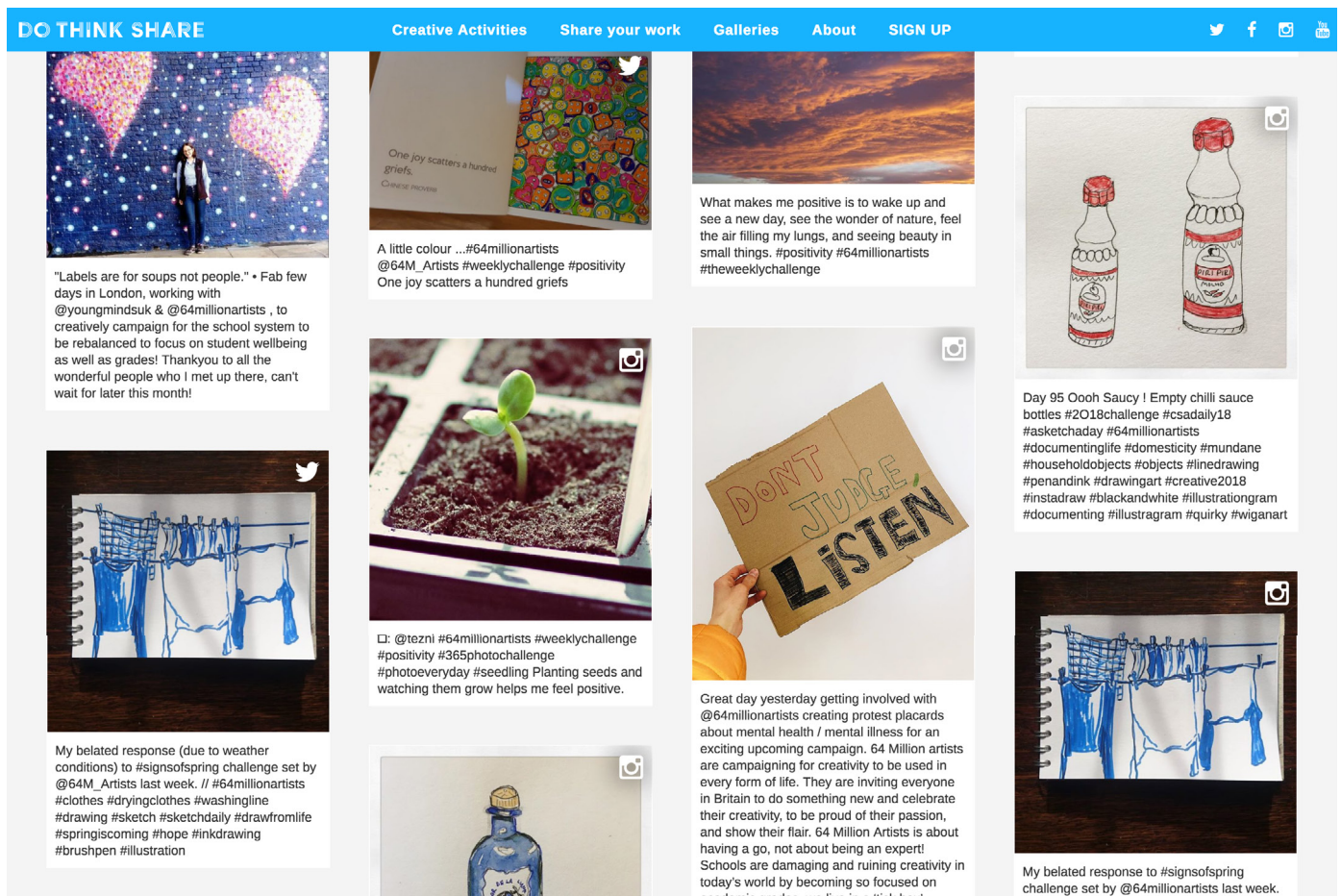
### **Motivations: better relationships and access to information.**

Do older people care about digital technology? If so, what role can digital technology play in supporting them in these respects? The research conducted in Leicester indicates that many older people are not interested in digital technology in and of itself. There needs to be a “hook”. They are most likely to be interested in digital technology if it clearly presents itself as useful to them in meeting a pre-existing need or interest: in particular, communicating with family, or accessing specific information. Reflecting on the insights generated through this project, the view of one member of 64MA staff is that “older people aren’t interested in spending more time online or being online, they are interested in [...] having meaningful and better quality real life relationships with people”.

### **Some LAT organisations report very high levels of interest and demand for activities in support of digital skills.**

The CIO, for example, offers a weekly ‘internet café’, which has a waiting list. Here there are clear purposes to which participants are seeking to put digital skills: communicating with family, accessing practical information (to make travel plans, for example), or accessing news, films and music. Some LAT organisations find that older people have often been given digital devices by children or grandchildren as gifts. However, they then need further support to use that device, even if they have had an informal lesson with a family member.

↓ Screenshots of  
dothinkshare.com





**Digital technology can be very valuable in later life, but it cannot just be bolted on.**

As one LAT organisation staff member explained, digital technology “can be so positive and so valuable, but it can’t just be bolted on and quickly added into anything, because that can only happen where there’s an existing level of familiarity and skills. So, it does need to be thought about as part of a longer term and comprehensive approach”. Separate and additional technology training is needed. It cannot come solely through creative activities themselves, it needs to be run in parallel to them. Moreover, the digital training for older people offered within LAT, such as the classes within the WEA, often involves plenty of support and repetition.

**Ensuring privacy: sharing in person and sharing online.**

In some circumstances, employing digital technologies is not suitable. If approaches like Do, Think, Share are used in situations in which quite private or personal experiences are shared, there is a potential tension with sharing creative outputs and reflections ‘publicly’ online. This needs to be handled carefully. Some organisational leads also discuss their hesitancy in bringing digital technologies into spaces of interaction with older people, especially when working with people living in care homes, or with dementia. Introducing technologies in ways that are intrusive must be avoided, and in some circumstances consent will be a particularly important consideration.

**Digital technology will not, by itself, solve social isolation and loneliness in later life: it may have a part to play in this.**

Interviewees indicate the need to carefully calibrate expectations of how digital technologies can help address issues of social isolation. As one interviewee put it, occasionally “I think there is this idea of digital as the saviour of everything, that, you know, if only we got older people online then everything would be okay and that social isolation would be solved. And, you know, digital is just a tool, and no it won’t. I think the key is to give people access to resources that make their real lives, offline, more rich and meaningful, and enjoyable.”

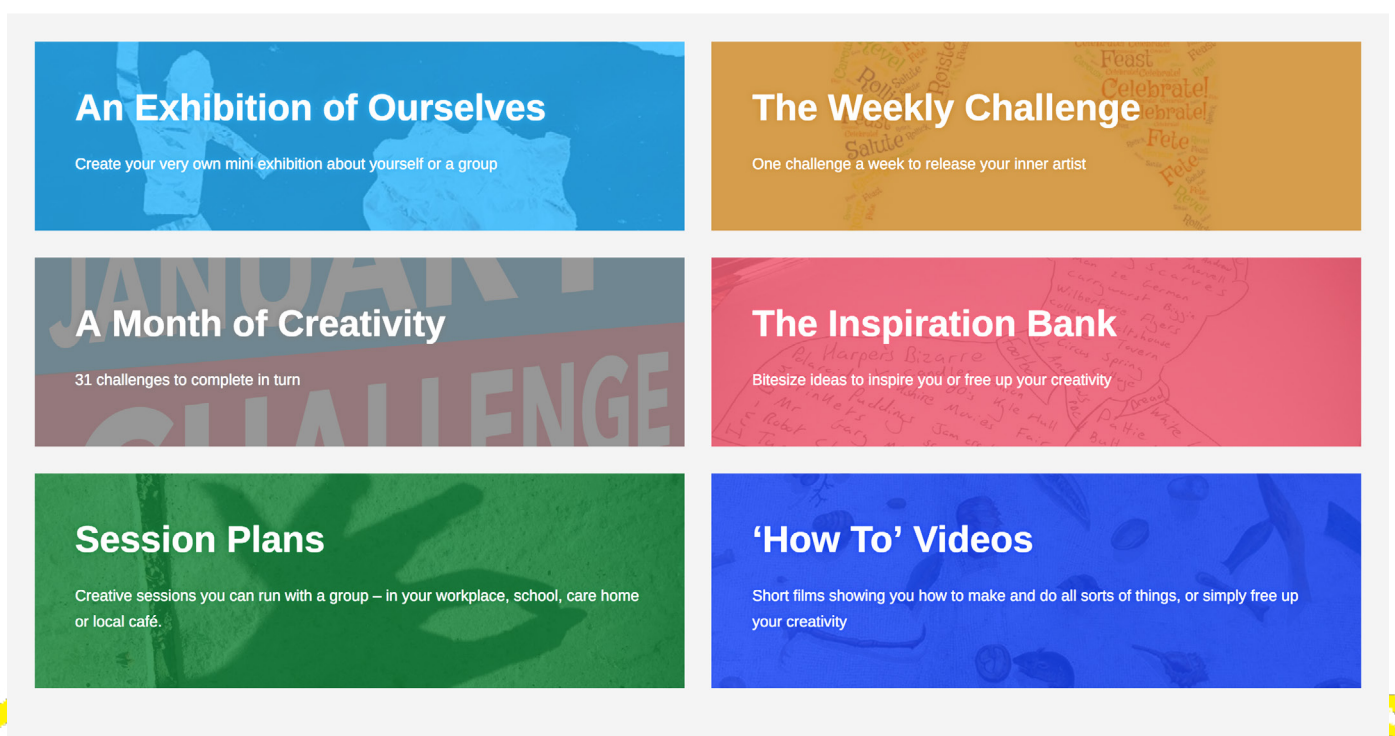
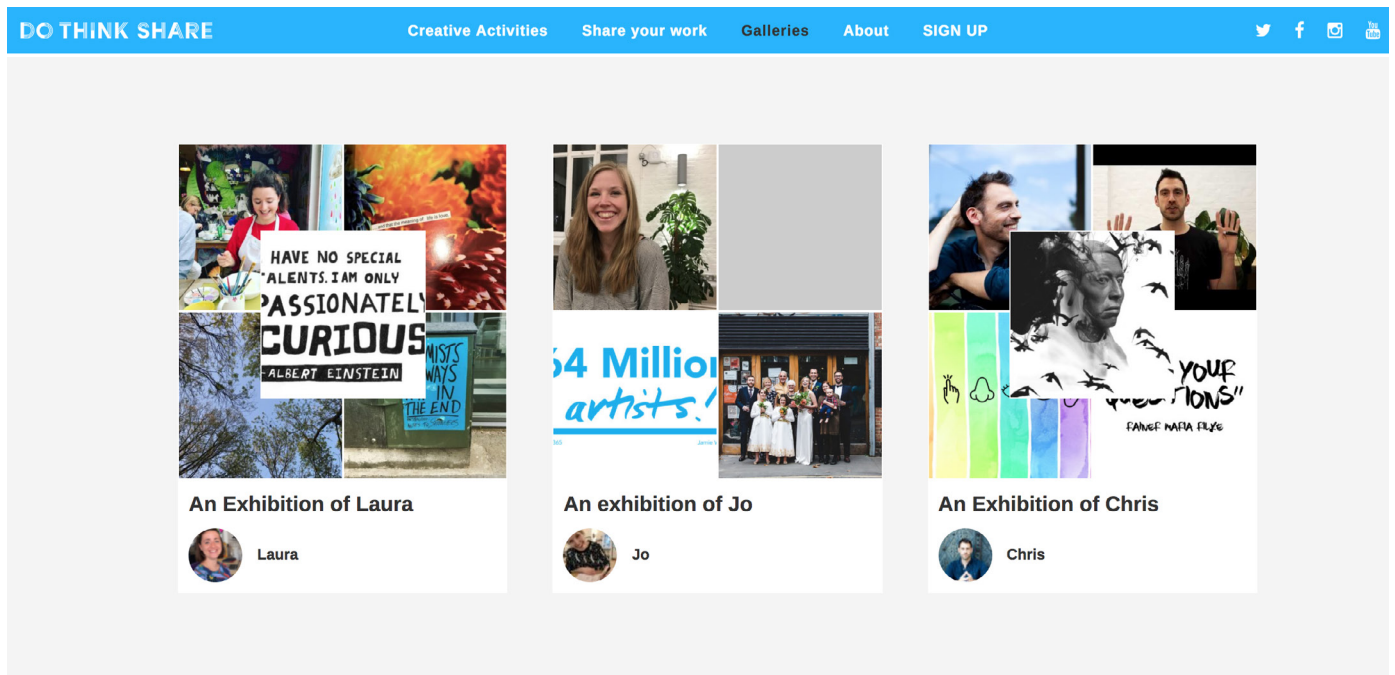
## 2.8 The Do, Think, Share website

**The Do, Think, Share website is intended to be accessible at the level of user experience.**

As one member of 64MA staff explains, this relates to the website’s “tone of voice, feeling inclusive, open, engaging for everyone at different ability levels”, offering “simple navigation, accessible contrasting colours, text size and font size being accessible”. The design of the website has been informed, in part, by working with LAT groups in Leicester. It is too early, at this stage, to say what level of uptake there will be for the website, and by whom.

**The website needs further testing.**

The website is a work in progress. As 64MA staff members readily acknowledge, it requires further and ongoing testing, including to see how it will operate under “stress” once a large volume of material is uploaded. Broadly, there is more to be understood about how and by whom the website is used, and whose needs it is able to meet. User testing needs to take place on an ongoing basis. As 64MA staff explain, the approach of this project has not been to build “big and expensive” technological infrastructure, but instead to engage in an iterative process, in conversation with participants in the LAT consortium, developing the site collaboratively and responding to user need.



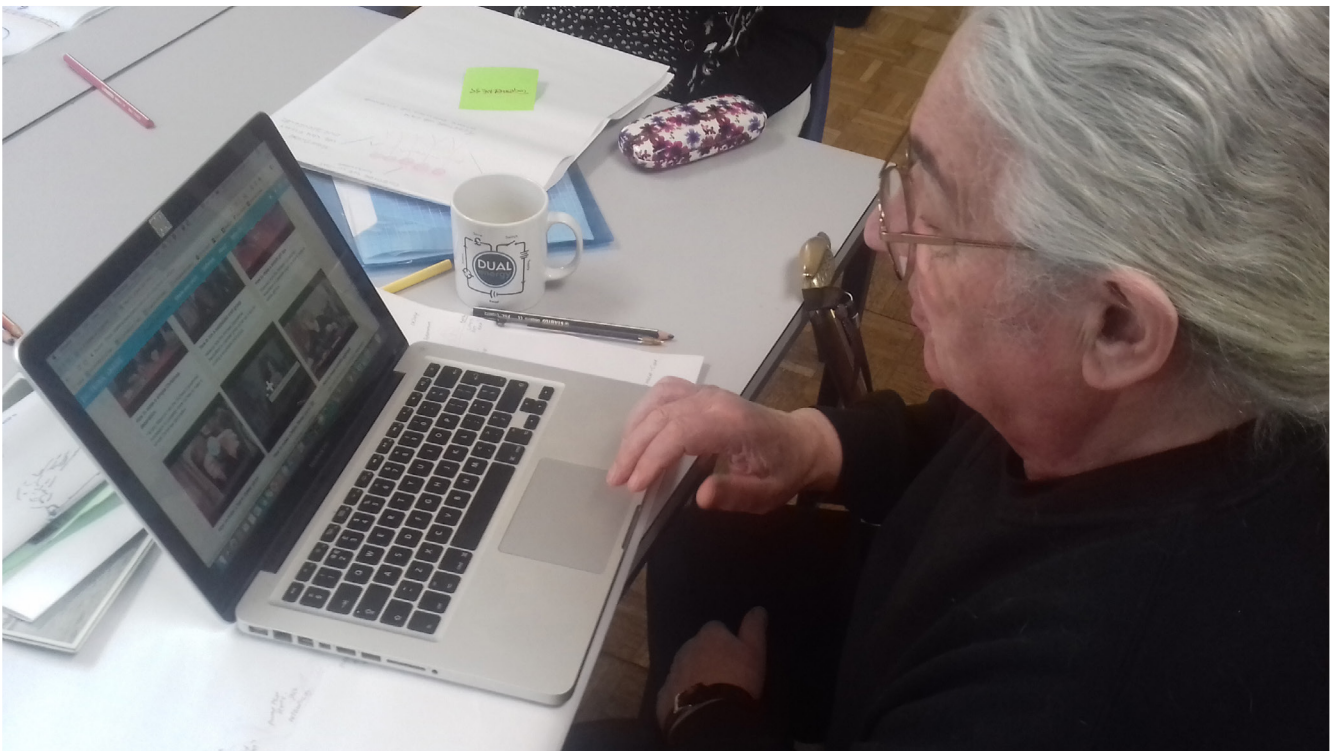
↑ Screenshots of  
dothinkshare.com

**The Do, Think, Share website has tested some principles.**

The website is intended to provide a range of creative resources – such as Do, Think, Share workshop plans - serving a range of constituencies and purposes. It also provides spaces through which to share the outputs of creative activities. As a member of 64MA staff puts it, the development of the website has “tested free and shareable tools that anyone can use. It’s tested that idea of being a platform for creativity.” The testing of these principles has been a success, but if it is to operate on a larger scale, further development and testing will be necessary.

**This is not a finished product, but an ongoing development.**

The process of developing the Do, Think, Share website has been very open and flexible. The 64MA team and the website developer have been in close contact, building the site to make it as inclusive and user friendly as possible. Both 64MA and members of LAT highlight the fact that the Do, Think, Share website is something that will continue to grow and evolve. As one member



↑ Participant at  
a WEA Workshop

of LAT staff said, “my biggest fear with products and projects is that they’re finished and then they’re put in a filing cabinet and never seen again, and I can’t see that happening with this. I think it’s a really great piece of work that they’ll be able to keep referring back to, keep adding on to.”

**Serving the nested model: a resource for facilitators... and for sharing.**

The Do Think Share website, has two parallel functions. Firstly, sharing workshop plans, creative ideas and challenges. Secondly, sharing the outcomes of those activities. In terms of who the website is for, it potentially serves the ‘nested’ model of affecting change, supporting facilitators of groups as much as individuals. As one LAT interviewee put it, “I think there are going to be lots of activity co-ordinators who are going to find this very useful.” LAT staff members and volunteers indicate that if the website fulfils its potential of providing resources to enable facilitators to facilitate, operating as a platform of platforms, this will be very valuable.



## CASE STUDIES

*The following case studies offer accounts of project activity with two groups; providing detailed illustration of a number of the key findings outlined in the previous chapter.*

### 3.1 Workers' Educational Association (WEA) Leicester

#### **Older and Wiser.**

The WEA is a charity and the UK's largest voluntary sector provider of adult education. As one of its staff members puts it, the WEA supports "community learning, for everybody", including reaching people who have missed out on education. Older and Wiser is a three-year programme within WEA Leicester, funded as part of LAT. It involves a wide range of groups and classes, including craft, poetry, flower arranging, a pop-in café, and a range of ICT groups. Within Older and Wiser there is more flexibility than in the regular WEA programme, including less pressure on class sizes. All activities take place in community buildings or partner organisations. Location is important, and WEA staff look out for venues which might work well for attracting new participants.

↓ A participant at  
a WEA workshop



At the start of the Older and Wiser project there wasn't a particular focus on ICT skills, but "it just grew". The WEA now offers five different groups focusing on desktops and laptops, and another six supporting the use of tablets and smartphones. Participants are mostly over 60, and the large majority are retired.

Sally Hall, project manager of Older and Wiser, suggests that there is a combination of reasons people have for attending the tablet groups. Some own a tablet and are frustrated that they cannot use it as effectively as they would like. So, they bring their device with them and want “a supportive environment in which they can learn without feeling stupid.” A second motivation is wanting to know how to do a specific thing with a tablet or smartphone - in some cases having previously been shown how to do it by a family member, and now being unable to. A third motivation is wanting to spend time with other people, and to chat.

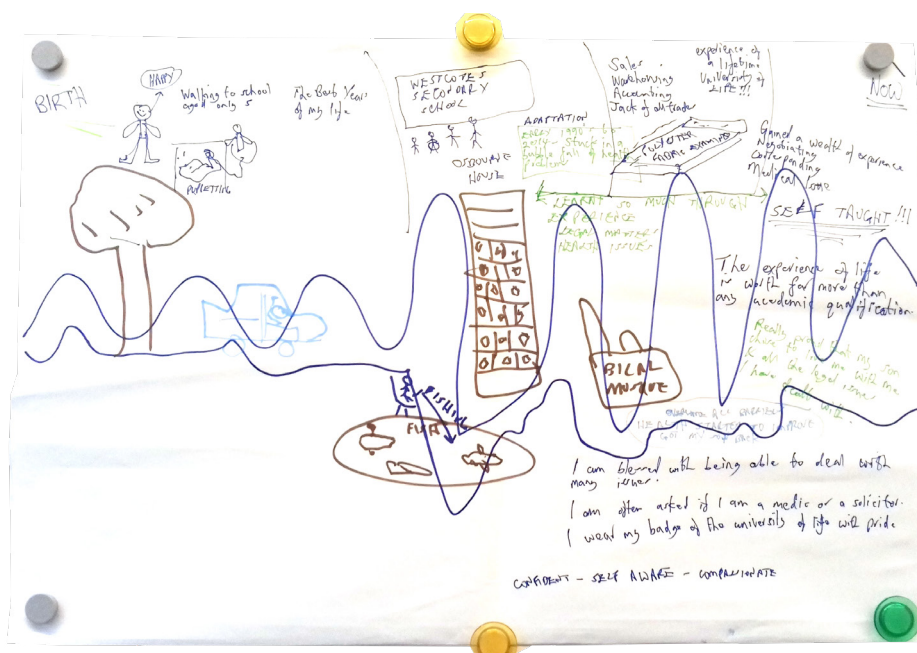
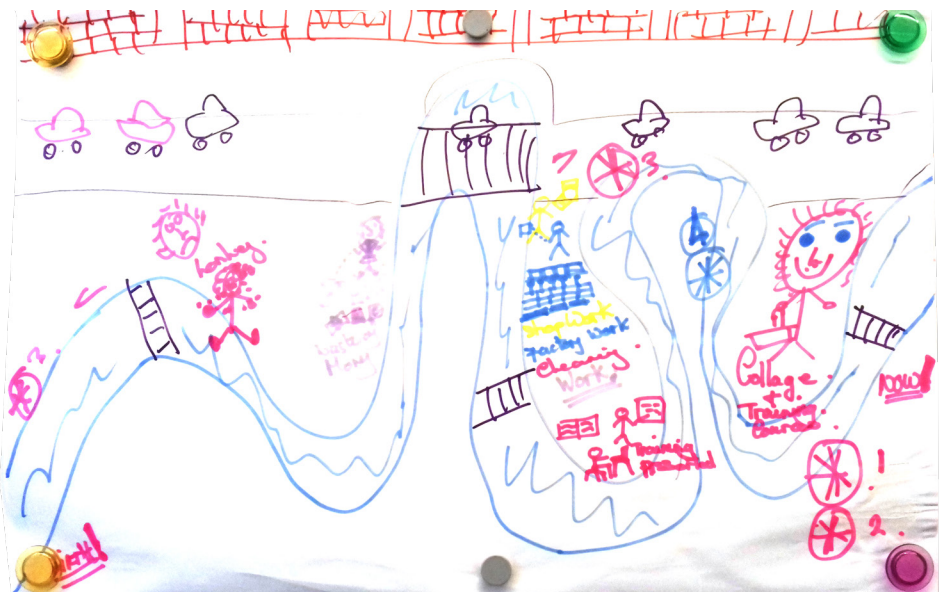


↑ The outcome of a group brainstorm exercise at a WEA workshop

Sally Hall's view is that when it comes to supporting older people in ICT skills, "there is massive untapped potential there". Older people can be really empowered through developing ICT skills, especially through the process of acquiring these skills within relaxed, informal groups, that have a strong social aspect. It's:

*just the simple things of people being in touch with each other more easily, through simple social media, to being able to find information*







*for themselves, to finding an NHS dentist online. It means you have the opportunity to take that into your own hands. Those are the sorts of simple things that are often taken for granted, but are so disempowering [if you can't do them].*

To support WEA participants to acquire ICT skills, however, particular conditions need to be in place. In addition to a relaxed, informal, safe learning environment, the possibility to repeat the learning process is very important. It may take several sessions to embed a skill. The need for small group sizes and iterative learning requires appropriate resourcing. Working in this way within LAT has been made possible by its Big Lottery funding.

### **Integrating ICT.**

In the future, Older and Wiser would like to see ICT integrated within other WEA courses. For example, integrating ICT skills within the craft group, so that participants can access websites, including Do, Think, Share, that provide information and resources through which to develop interests and skills.

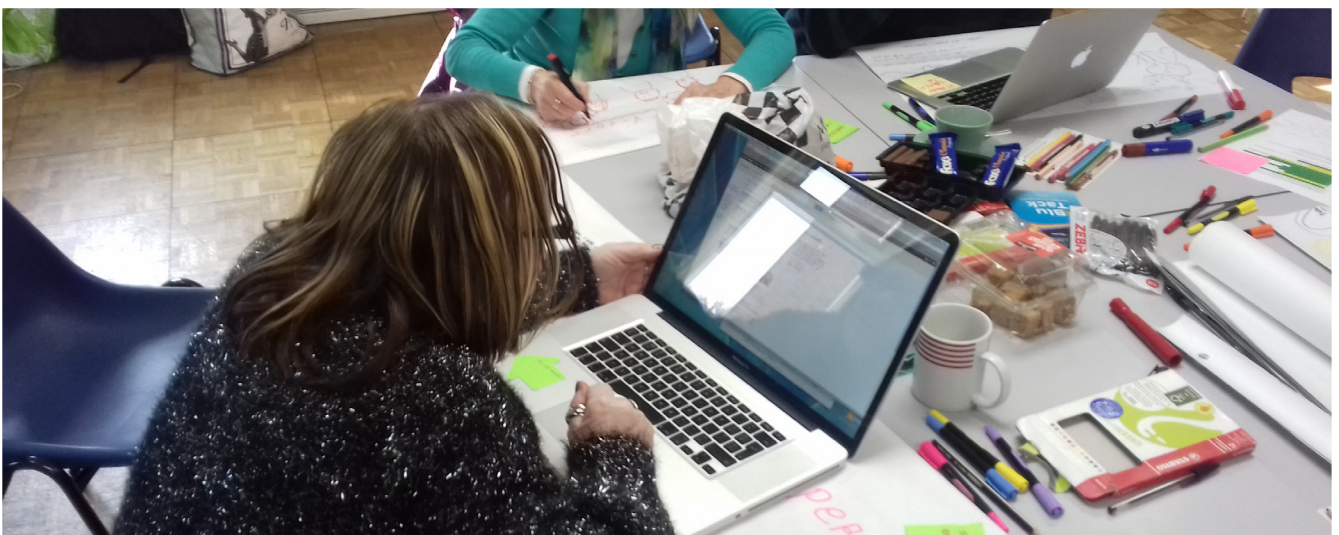
### **Listening to people.**

The pop-in café isn't a typical WEA offer. It is less focused on a specific skill, or area of knowledge, and is more a "community engagement" activity. The pop-in café takes place once a week for two and a half hours, and people come along for as long as they want. This may involve simply reading the newspaper, or it may be to do some craft activities. One of the aims for the café is to enable WEA staff "to be able to pay attention to individuals [...]. To really listen." Part of the value of this is to enable WEA staff to provide tailored, personalized information about other opportunities and available support. This attentiveness requires appropriate levels of human resourcing. Part of the approach has been to enable active listening amongst the participants themselves, with some attending listening skills courses. A "younger older person" who is a member of the group is keen to take on a leadership role within the café, and the hope is that she will be able to mentor another person to take it on in the future. This is further iteration of a 'nested' or 'cascading' model of facilitation in action.

↓ A WEA workshop  
participant working  
on a laptop

### **Creating pathways.**

Some participants take part in more than one group within Older and Wiser.





As Sally Hall puts it, “some of them appear to be all over the place.” Some tutors are very conscious of signposting participants to other opportunities WEA offers, such as the family history tutor signposting the ICT classes. “Having pathways beyond is really important. And we’ve developed some”, but there are challenges to achieving this, not least in respect of resources, and the possible contraction of the range of groups it is possible to offer when the period of LAT funding comes to an end.

### **Collaboration with Do, Think, Share.**

Sally Hall was interested in the idea of Do, Think, Share in part because she was aware of how craft had taken off in the café, and participants had even gone on to lead craft sessions elsewhere. Do, Think, Share connected to what Sally was already thinking about at the time, in terms of getting people together to share their craft knowledge, and she was particularly interested in linking this to digital skills.

### **Facilitating reflective practice.**

Part of 64MA’s role with WEA has been to visit the poetry and craft groups and to facilitate reflective practice, via variations on the Do, Think, Share approach. 64MA staff also visited both the poetry group and the pop-in café to help set up a WhatsApp group in each, so that participants could keep in touch between sessions. There has been only limited uptake and activity within these groups.

*"Without these workshops I wouldn't know the people I know now. I've made friends who'll be there for me. And I'll be there for them."*

→ WEA Workshop Participant

### **‘How To’ Videos.**

In the second half of the project 64MA began to populate the Do, Think, Share website with resources for individuals and facilitators to employ in enabling creative activities. 64MA staff visited WEA groups to make ‘How To’ videos, to be uploaded to the website. Participants enjoyed the opportunity to make these videos, and for their skills and knowledge to be shared.

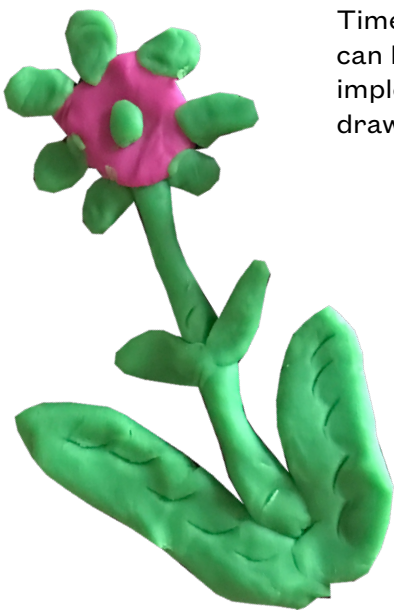
### **Making an Exhibition of Ourselves.**

In March 2018 WEA and 64MA jointly ran a series of three workshops, Making an Exhibition of Ourselves, the design and delivery of which was undertaken jointly by the two organisations. The first of the three workshops involved participants making a creative response to four stages of life: childhood, teenage, midlife and now. In the second session, participants brought and discussed three objects that represent them. In the final session, members of the group were invited to come up with five words which they felt connected them all. They chose: empathy, togetherness, shared experience, optimism and survivors. This led into a concluding creative exercise, producing a ‘mind map’ presenting these five words. Finally, participants were invited to take photos of those maps, with the option of creating a mini gallery to represent the core values of the group, to be uploaded to the new ‘An Exhibition of Me’ part of the Do, Think, Share website.

Sally Hall felt that the key design elements of the workshop worked well, and the fundamental aims of the sessions were achieved. This meant “people getting benefit from sharing their stories with others, and from being able to explore and have some new insights by being facilitated at looking through different lenses, different perspectives, different vehicles – which often sparks off new ways of looking at things.”

In the last session, participants reflected on their experiences of the workshops, and articulated a range of ways in which the process had been valuable. As Sally Hall summarizes, the participants not only developed new insights and perspectives, the value of the sessions also lay in “being listened to, being able to share. Because as [one participant] said, ‘where else can you do this sort of thing’.” There was also value in “recognizing commonalities” in life experiences, and in the way in which difficult times have been responded to. By the end of the three weeks there was “a sense of common ground and unity between the people who were there, because of the sharing that had gone on together”. Through these workshops there was a process of bonding at different levels, including two members of the group who didn’t know each other previously meeting up for a coffee, and contact details being exchanged during the final session.

↓ Workshop outcomes  
from the Derby Creative  
Challenge group



For Rob Hunter, the chairman of LAT, the Making an Exhibition of Ourselves workshop series “brings together certain threads” of Do, Think, Share’s involvement in LAT. A key aspect of what 64MA brings is a simple structure through which to reflect and share, as well as to do. In this case, the active presence of 64 MA staff has been a key part of how this has happened. Time will tell how effectively and widely the Do, Think, Share approach can be employed without the presence of the 64MA staff - and instead be implemented by individuals and groups in Leicester and around the country, drawing on the resources of the Do, Think, Share website.

*"I've made a lot of friends from here. I've been out with them for a cup of tea. We've bonded and formed a magical friendship with each other."*

→ WEA Reminiscence Workshop Participant

*"As someone with dementia I find that craftwork helps me a lot."*

→ WEA Craft Group Participant





## 3.2 Parkinson's UK, Derby

### **The Derby Creative Challenge Group.**

Derby has a very large branch of Parkinson's UK. The Creative Challenge Group began in June 2017 and involves participants ranging in age from late 40s to mid-80s. Not everyone in the group has Parkinson's - some are friends of people in the group with the condition. There is no charge to attend the sessions. The group leader, Ann, provides most of the materials, and the Derby branch of Parkinson's UK provides a small budget for additional resources. The hotel where the group meets on Monday mornings allows the use of a room for free, if hot drinks are purchased. Some of the people involved in this group are unable to take part in most of the other activities offered by Parkinson's UK Derby, because they are not physically able. For some members this group is the main activity they do each week, outside of the home.

### **The nested model in action.**

This is an example of a self-run group receiving session plans and then adapting them to their particular needs and circumstances. The Derby group has undertaken a wide range of creative activities, including poetry, writing, model making, drawing and "lots of conversation". These activities have been undertaken in response to session plans sent directly by 64MA staff, to which the leader of the Derby group has made alterations. Making these adaptations has been an important part of how the group has worked. This includes accommodating quite practical circumstances, such as which activities are possible within the size of the room, and considerations specific to the physical capacities of the members of this group.

### **An important feature of how the group runs is the role of the organiser, Ann.**

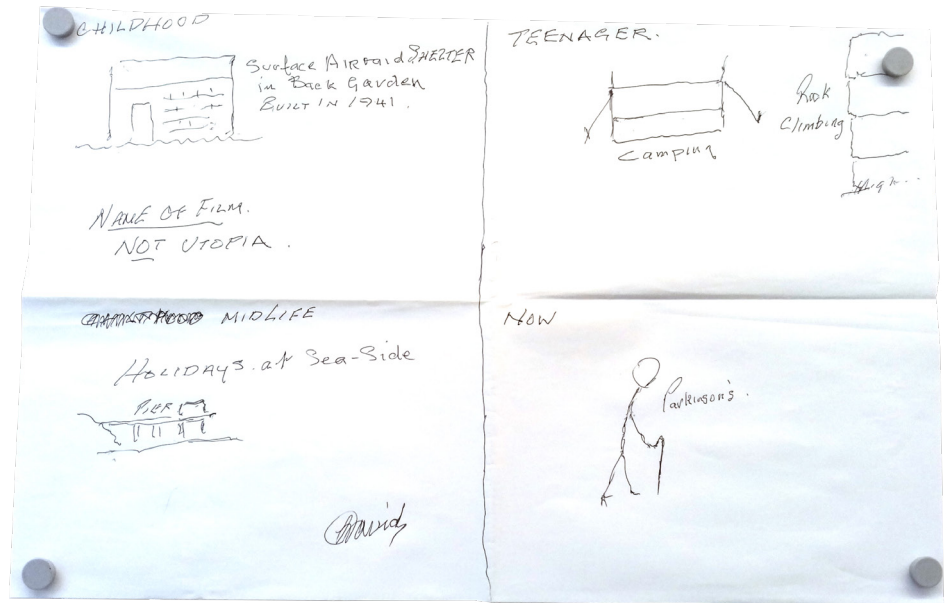
She is herself a member of Parkinson's UK, Derby, having been diagnosed with the condition a few years ago. She plays an active role in the group, undertaking the creative challenges herself, whilst also having a clear identity as group leader. Ann reflects on how best to perform her role, including avoiding coming across as a teacher. During each session she actively considers how the activities and the dynamics within the group are going, and makes small but significant changes when necessary. The sustainability of the group, as it currently operates, is dependent upon having someone to take on this leadership role.

*"The group has developed over time.  
It's found its own identity."*

Derby Parkinson's  
Support Group Member

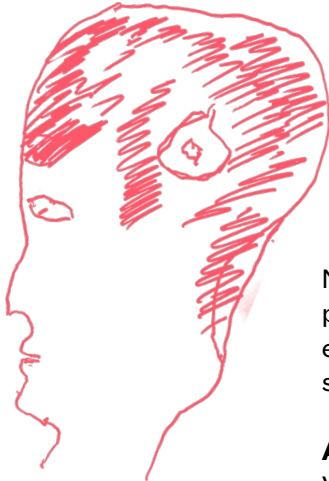


↓ 'Four Seasons'  
Exercises from the  
Derby Group



### Learning new rules.

At first there was some uncertainty and discomfort amongst participants regarding the nature and purpose of the sessions. Some attendees thought it was going to be a craft group, asking, 'when are we going to learn to knit?'. In the early weeks some participants complained that 'this is just like school'. Ann indicates that over time the group came to grasp what was specific about the Do, Think, Share approach and the creative tasks being undertaken. It is not about the learning of particular craft skills. It's an invitation to respond creatively to challenges, and those responses can take many forms. Ann describes this as a process of learning new rules:



*they needed to understand that it didn't mean drawing all the time. It's about thinking – thinking creatively. [...] Once that started to happen, they sort of recognised it in each other: it's almost like they learnt new rules, maybe, or perhaps 'rules' is too strong a word, but supports or guidelines for how to be. And then they feel very comfortable with that. It's almost like a safe-to-fail environment, where there'll be able to have a go.*

Now that the rules have been learnt and the format is well established, the participants are "ready to roll". Members of the group now say that they enjoy not knowing what the challenge is going to be each week. There is a surprise in store, and they find that exciting.

### A visit to the Derby Museum and Art Gallery was very popular.

Visiting the museum, members of the group were invited to choose an object and write about it. They loved this session. They enjoyed the opportunity to explore the museum and choose things that particularly interested them. They also appreciated the expertise of museum staff. Ann explains that one member of the group saw Viking tools, went home to his workshop "got out his tools and started creating again". This illustrates the need to explore an ecological approach: identifying and supporting pathways and interconnections between different sites of cultural opportunity in later life.

↓ Members of the  
Derby Creative  
Challenge Group





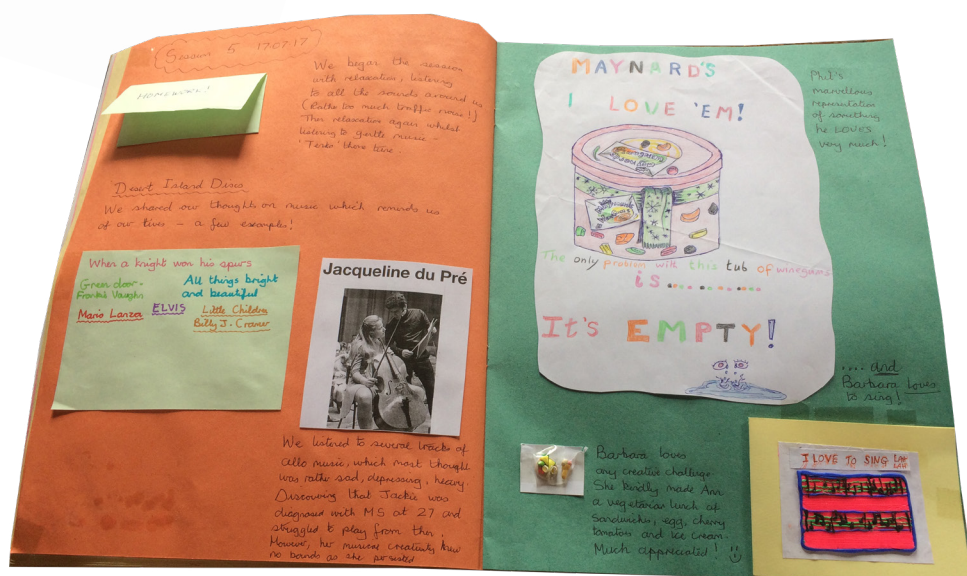


## The sessions involve a lot of conversation.

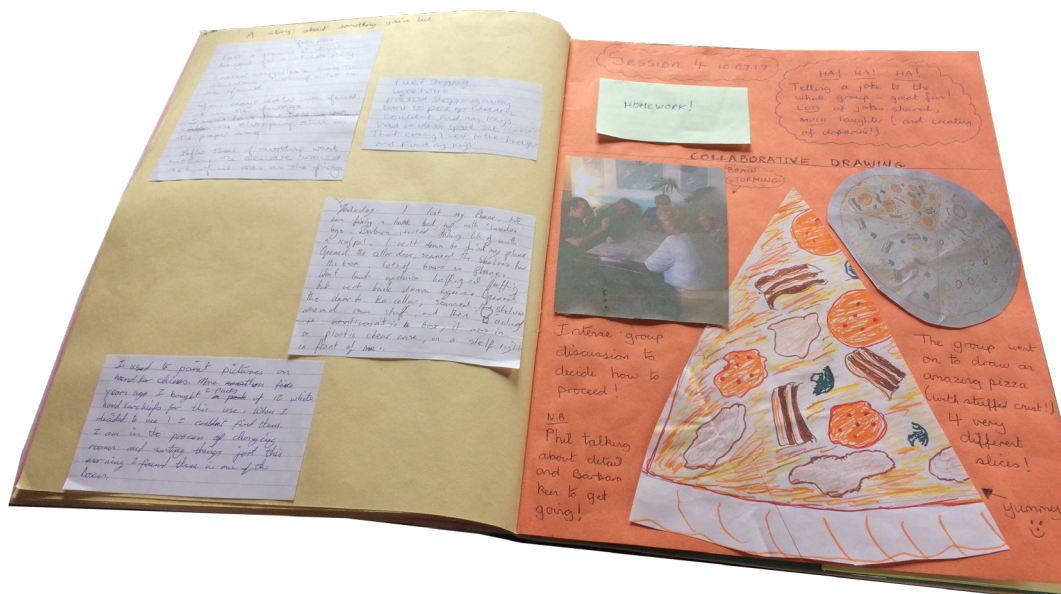
Sometimes this develops quite organically out of the session's creative activities, and sometimes it precedes those activities, including discussions about the previous week's homework. The group's creative activities provide the opportunity to segue between doing, thinking and sharing, whilst not always explicitly invoking these stages. For example, in making calendars, this led to a discussion of birthdays, and the meaning of birthdays in later life, including some of the difficult experiences significant dates can give rise to, as well as positive experiences.

## The group has a 'scrapbook' in which they keep an archive of the group's activities.

This includes examples of what has been produced. Members of the group are very keen for Ann to put their completed homework in the scrapbook. "Everything they do they hand over, [...] they want it to go into the scrapbook. And I take it in every month and they have a look through and remember what they've done."

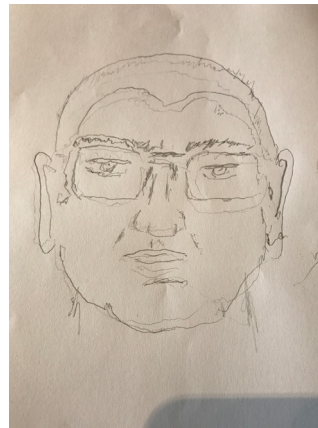
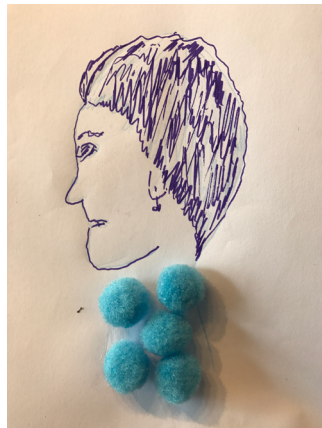


↓ The Derby Parkinson's Support Group Scrapbook



### A creative approach to the organization of time.

The Derby Creative Challenge Group made a group calendar, marking when they began as a group, when their 50th session will take place, and weeks they won't meet due to Bank Holidays. The significance the group has for participants is reflected in the role it now plays in the marking and structuring of their time, as they record past events together, and anticipate future activities. I've written elsewhere about how audiences at the BBC Proms (including retirees) use their concert going as an important way to actively organise their time and their sense of themselves in time (Gross 2013). We can observe comparable practices of time management and self-development in the Derby group. Activities of this kind, which afford the opportunity for giving new structure to time and to projects of (collective) self-development, may be particularly important in later life, when the structures of work and family routine often weaken. The marking and managing of shared time, through this calendar, is also an important part of the Derby participants developing their sense of themselves as a group, making concrete their shared experiences and collective future plans.



↑ Self-portraits drawn during a Workshop with the Derby Creative Challenge Group

### This group constitutes a community of care.

They are actively looking out for one another. They are attentive and responsive to each other's needs, and they steer the activities of the group to meet these needs. There is plenty of mutuality within the group – people helping each other, providing materials others may require, for example. Caring practices, here, also include giving each other lifts, and the hugs and good wishes that mark the end of each session. The connection between the members of the group is strong, with Ann going so far as to say that “it's become almost like a family to them. When you ask them what they feel, they wouldn't miss it – they only miss it if they have to, because they feel it's a new family they've got, where you can laugh and cry, and it stays within the walls and everybody's loyal.” Ann suggests that other groups offered within Parkinson's UK, Derby, don't have “the same intimacy” as this group.

When one member of the group missed a session to have a small operation on her feet, the group wanted to make her a card, so that week's planned creative challenge was set aside. “Everything had to be abandoned” to make a get well soon card. But in making a card “they started thinking outside of the box [...] and they all drew pictures and witty comments about feet and walking and wheelchairs.” The session illustrated the community of care the group has become, as well as the conditions for creativity the group has cultivated.

### Limited online engagement.

Whilst there is a strong feeling of connection between the group, they have not yet established a channel of communication through which to keep in touch between sessions. Ann introduced the idea of a WhatsApp group, but most of the participants do not have Smartphones. Some do keep in touch - for example, to ask someone else what the homework is, if they have forgotten, or to organise lifts - but this is done via a phone call, and Ann says levels of technological capacity within the group are “quite low level”.

Painting - anything  
Discussing Artists  
Music - singing  
Card making  
Cakes - Recipes  
using different med  
Sharing knowledge,  
presenting hobbies.

### Homework.

The participants love the ‘homework’ that is set by the group leader each week. The showing of homework “starts off a huge discussion, even before we start with that week’s activity.”

*They very much enjoy doing something at home, bringing it in the next [week], and sharing it. Everybody showing everyone what they’ve done, like a show and tell sort of thing. And some of the works of a particularly high standard that they do at home, cos they’ve more time. [...] quite a few of them live on their own, and it gives them something positive to do that they will need to show to somebody else, so that sort of sets up a standard for them as well. But I think they very much like to link their home and their life to the group. I think it’s a link between the two, that they like to do.*

The group has also enjoyed opportunities to bring in photographs to share with the group, and to discuss the images and their significance. In the first instance, the photographs came in quite spontaneously, as a follow-up to conversations that had arisen within the group.

### Music.

Listening to music together has been the only activity that has been broadly disliked. Participants found it too sad. They tried a session of playing pieces of music and drawing in response. At first a piece of Beethoven was played, with the expectation that it would be energizing. But several of the group heard the music as military, and linked it to thoughts of war and loss. Upbeat pop and rock music from the 1970s was then tried, but members of the group also found this sad, as it reminded them of being much younger. In a small evaluation that the organiser undertook, when asked if there was anything they would like less of within the group, listening to music was the main response.

### The reminiscence workshop.

Approximately half of attendees (six out of twelve) completed the evaluation form for a workshop held in March 2018, modelled on the WEA Making an Exhibition of Ourselves series described above. This one-off workshop had two parts. In the first half, each participant shared an object that was important to them. In the second part, they were invited to respond creatively to four stages of their lives: childhood, teenage, midlife and now.

Participants enjoyed the opportunity to hear more about each other’s backgrounds and life experiences, and appreciated that everyone was actively involved. One member of the group explained that getting to know each other in this new way was also an opportunity to enjoy “seeing how different our answers are to the same task”. Offering the chance to observe the diversity of ways people respond to the same brief is, in itself, an important part of how sessions of this kind cultivate an environment in which people can have a go, and recognize and explore their own creative potential.



Whilst some participants commented positively that through the session “Everyone shared happiness & sadness in their past”, three of the six evaluation respondents commented that the activity of looking back into the past was upsetting. As one participant put it, “Delving into the past brought too many sad times. [...] In some of us the task brought up very sad times & made us feel vulnerable and exposed. The first class I’ve not enjoyed & came away sad. My own circumstances were too deep to cope with.”

Even though participants expressed these reservations about the activity, four out of the six completing the evaluation form agreed that they would like to do a similar session again in the future. Four out of six respondents agreed that the session made them feel more connected to people; and five out of six agreed that the session made them think. Only two of the participants agreed that they would like to share what they made in the session via the internet, such as on a website, social media, or a WhatsApp group.

### **The place of sadness.**

The music session and the reminiscence workshop raise important questions about how to create safe spaces for all kinds of experiences to be shared and discussed – including difficult feelings – whilst not imposing situations in which participants feel sad in ways they are uncomfortable with, or do not choose for themselves. The place of sadness within later life needs to be acknowledged, and within the Derby group, participants frequently share sad experiences, doing so organically in response to creative activities. As Ann indicates, it may be an important part of running creative activities with people in later life that facilitators find ways of striking a suitable balance. As she puts it, “some of the brightest topics, depending how they feel, can just turn a little bit. But it’s nothing I can’t direct back”, after a time. Ann is aware of some of her own capacities that make her confident to undertake this kind of skilled facilitating role. Ann is aware of some of her own capacities that make her confident to undertake this kind of skilled facilitating role, having worked as a teacher for over thirty years.”.

### **Enabling structures.**

In the Derby Creative Challenge Group, we see how a relatively contained creative activity has the potential to provide a structure through which a whole series of interpersonal interactions take place, and through which participants can reflect on and share aspects of their experiences, both happy and sad. Notably, whilst the weekly Do, Think, Share activities often lead to discussions of the past, these relatively ‘contained’ creative tasks appear to be more attractive to the Derby group than activities directly aimed towards eliciting reflection on the past, which some found overwhelming.

### **Being part of something bigger.**

The group is aware that they receive creative challenges and session plans provided by 64MA, but they appreciate having direct contact with the 64MA team every now and again. Ann explains that this is helpful, as it reminds members of the group where the workshop plans come from. It’s good for the group not to feel that “we’re just floating about”, but rather, “that we’re part of a wider thing.”

RELAXATION



# CONCLUSION

The Do, Think, Share project potentially leaves a legacy in multiple locations. In the first instance, it has helped establish new relationships and new creative practices within Derby and Leicester, particularly within those LAT organisations who have been most fully involved in the project. Within 64MA, the project has enabled extensive learning with regards to how to realize the value of the Do, Think, Share approach at scale, and particularly in the context of working with older people. Beyond this, the Do, Think, Share project – and the website that is its primary output – has successfully tested the principle of providing a ‘platform of platforms’: a digital tool offering freely accessible creative resources to be employed (and adapted) by individuals and groups around the country. The website – and the principle of nested facilitation it embodies – requires further testing. But the indications are that a resource of this kind may be particularly valuable to facilitators, such as third sector staff and volunteers working with older people.

The wider insights generated by the Do, Think, Share action research project, outlined in the preceding chapters, also provide lessons for other individuals, groups, organisations, networks, local authorities, funding agencies and policy makers seeking to support self-led creativity in later life, and particularly those with an interest in the role that digital technologies may play. As this report has indicated, future initiatives should consider taking ecological approaches: promoting existing and potential *interconnections* between organisations and resources of different kinds that support the creative agency of older people within a locality. These deliberately cultivated interconnections – *nurtured eco-systems* – may include charities working with older people, museums, local businesses, community centres, local and national websites, and many other kinds of organisation and resource. Moreover, it may be that as the Do, Think, Share website develops – with its content largely crowdsourced – it becomes an increasingly valuable repository of information and creative materials with which ecological approaches of this kind can be supported in many locations, contributing to communities of many types.

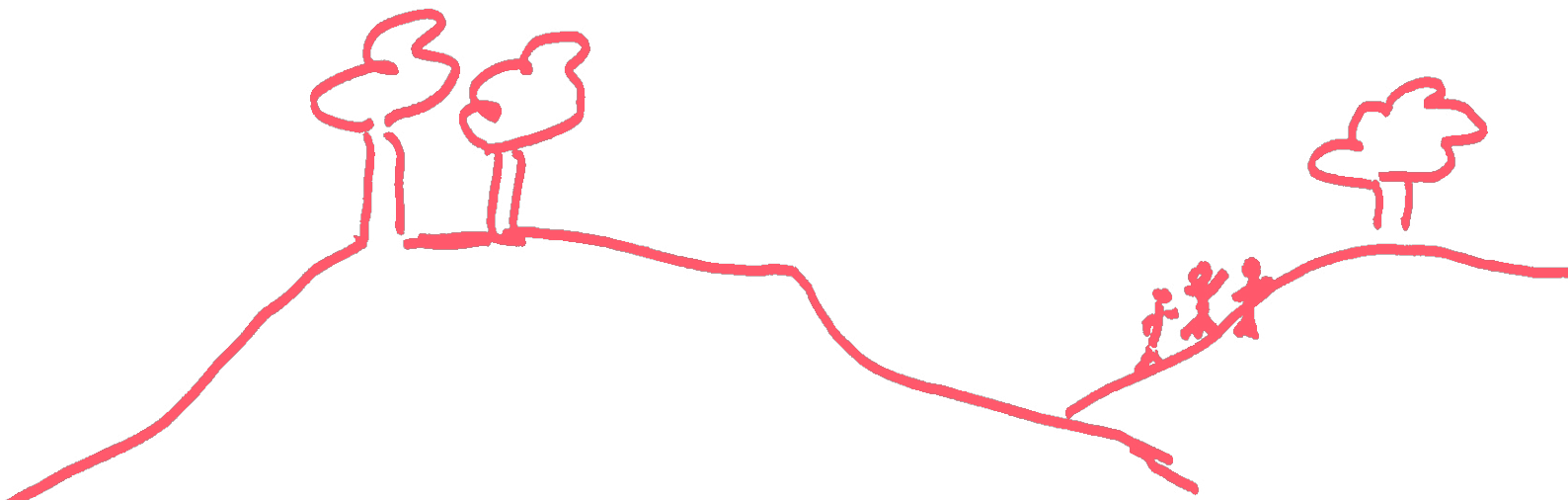
How to enable community to strengthen and flourish is one of the major challenges of our time (Monbiot 2017). This action research project indicates that when it comes to addressing issues of loneliness and social isolation in later life, digital technologies are likely to have an important role to play: but will always need to be employed and understood in careful relation to face-to-face activities and relationships. Finally, then, in taking the Do, Think, Share approach and website forward – and when drawing on the lessons of this research to inform other related initiatives – actively enabling versions of the ‘nested model’, via local leads embedded within their communities, is likely to be a key part of how digitally-supported everyday creativity has the potential to contribute to substantial and sustainable change.

## Research methods

The findings contained in this report derive primarily from semi-structured interviews conducted between June 2017 and March 2018. Interviewees included staff at a range of LAT organisations, as well as staff at 64 Million Artists and members of the wider project team - including Dr Ceri Gorton and Alyson Fielding, who acted as critical friends, and web developer Caroline Haggerty. Further data was collected through evaluation forms completed by participants in the Derby Creative Challenge Group. A thematic analysis was then undertaken, across each of these data.

## Acknowledgements

Huge thanks to all the people who generously contributed to this research, including staff members at 64 Million Artists, the wider project team, and staff and volunteers across the Leicester Ageing Together consortium. In many cases interviewees were interviewed on more than one occasion - for which, particular thanks! Thank you to those who provided project documents and other resources during the course of the research, all of which offered essential insight into the development of the Do, Think, Share activities and website. Finally - last, but by no means least - very many thanks to the participants in creative workshops in Derby and Leicester, who contributed to this research in a number of ways, including being happy for me to join in with some of their sessions... and make the tea.





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