



## ***The Facts about...***

### **Art as Treatment for Dementia**

**“Art can make a difference for people with dementia - like a call to the brain, a connection, helping people come alive again.”**

This is the conclusion reached by Baroness Sally Greengross, Chair, **All Party Parliamentary Group on Dementia**, as she commissioned additional research into how art can be used in the treatment and, to some extent, prevention of the development of dementia.

#### **Dementia and Imagination Project**

The resulting project, is called Dementia and Imagination.

<http://dementiaandimagination.org.uk/>

Its aim is to understand the impact of visual arts for well-being and also its impact for connectivity.

#### **Organisations involved in Arts and Dementia**

Other organisations already use the Arts as a means of supporting both those living with dementia, their families and those involved in caring for them.

**Arts 4 Dementia** ([www.arts4dementia.org.uk](http://www.arts4dementia.org.uk)) points out that “Creative skills can remain vibrant for years after the onset of dementia - engaging in artistic activity is the best non-pharmacological way to reawaken and stimulate cognitive ability”.

People living with dementia can be directed to arts opportunities as cognitive rehabilitation and to restore a fulfilling social life together in the community.

The charity works with arts organisations to facilitate high-quality, re-energising arts workshops that bypass the stresses of dementia, inspire the interests of families of those suffering from dementia, and restore self-esteem and sense of purpose.

**The Baring Foundation** ([www.baringfoundation.org.uk](http://www.baringfoundation.org.uk)) is another organisation that has recognised the benefits that Art provides. It has focused its programme **on participatory arts with people over 60** and usually those facing disadvantage or discrimination.

The Foundation believes that everyone has a right to take part in cultural activities, but that these also bring benefits in terms of personal health and well-being, as well as community development.

The Alzheimer's Society ([www.alzheimers.org.uk](http://www.alzheimers.org.uk)) also recognises the impact that art can have, and runs Arts and Crafts workshops throughout the UK.



## Ideas to Inspire

Some ideas for projects that have brought benefits to people living with dementia include:

- Reminiscence projects - where museums produce loan boxes full of objects and images to stimulate memories of the past, conversation and fun.
- Creation of memory boxes - which may reinforce the older person's sense of themselves; placed outside the bedroom of someone with dementia, for instance, this helps them to remember who they are and where they come from.
- Outreach art - taking a picture (usually selected on the basis that they are easy to understand with a range of colours in high contrast) to a group or individual for conversation and discussion.

## Quantifying the Benefits of Art for People Living with Dementia

Pioneering work in the USA suggests that those who participate in arts, crafts, computer use and social activities can even reduce the risk of developing Mild Cognitive Impairment (MCI), which sometimes leads to Dementia.

In one study, published in the American Academy of Neurology, research focused on 256 people with an average age of 87 who were free of memory and thinking problems at the start of the study; after an average of four years, 121 of these people developed MCI.

Key findings included:

- Participants who engaged in arts in both middle and old age were 73% less likely to develop MCI than those who did not report engaging in artistic activities
- Those who crafted in middle and old age were 45% less likely to develop MCI
- People who socialised in middle and old age were 55% less likely to develop MCI compared to those who did not engage in similar activities

Reflecting on the study, Dr Clare Walton, Research Manager at Alzheimer's Society, said:

'Although this study looks at mild cognitive impairment rather than dementia, it does add to previous evidence that keeping your brain active during life with arts, crafts and social activities might reduce the risk of developing memory problems.

'Alzheimer's Society has long-promoted the benefits of arts, crafts and social interaction as a way to help people with dementia live well and reduce loneliness. However, it is too early to say whether these activities done regularly throughout life can help keep dementia at bay.'

## **Stimulation Through Art**

For anyone interested in learning more about the use of art as support for older people, Dr Gene Cohen's work "**The Creative Age: Awakening Human Potential in the Second Half of Life**" is a good start point.

One thing that all agree on is **that stimulation through arts leads to an improved sense of self-esteem and self-confidence**. This may have a number of sources:

- It is common to feel happier when being given attention from someone else
- New or improved personal relations will certainly improve morale
- Skills can be learnt or refreshed

Perhaps less obvious is that artistic activities validate the identity of the older person - which echoes Oscar Wilde's sentiment that "*Art is the most intense mode of individualism.*"

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