

Creative Spaces

Evaluation Report - Executive Summary

The three-year Creative Spaces project started in September 2009 with the aim to create dementia-friendly communities and environments. The project was underpinned by creating methods to improve the physical, social and psychological wellbeing of older people with dementia living in residential care, health care settings and their own homes in Cornwall through the use of **outdoor environments and outdoor-related activities** with, for example, sensory-rich visits to places of interest around Cornwall, growing plants for their garden areas and lively conversations across age groups. Fetes, workshops and events brought people together, sparking new friendships between young and old, and raising awareness of dementia. At Trevarna Nursing Home in St Austell **new garden areas were created with residents, staff, families and local communities, inspired by their wishes and desires**. People with dementia in the community were given a voice by expressing themselves through creative activities, interviews.

On average, the home carers (non-professional) such as husbands and wives of older people with dementia interviewed here had been caring for their loved-ones for 2 years 9 months. **94% responded positively to the outdoors being accessible and important to them** (the remainder were physically not fit enough to go outdoors). The Creative Spaces activities were endorsed by all (100%) and they were found to increase communication between participants and home carers. Moreover, the activities were found to reduce levels of agitation and increase levels of brightness. Generally, the positive effects on wellbeing were found to last for varying lengths of time, depending on activity and the individual, and could range from “for the rest of the afternoon” to



“The proof of the pudding? People are still talking about the sessions 6 months and a year on – and they would like the team to come back.”

“for weeks – watching the bulbs growing”. A central theme to the responses regarding the outdoors was the importance of their garden, possibly due to greater familiarity and ease of access as an extension of the home environment.

Similarly, all interviewees at Trevarna Nursing Home endorsed the Creative Spaces concept. Both groups, **the ‘relatives and friends’ as well as the ‘care workers’ saw benefits in including outdoor spaces and creative activity as part of dementia care**. In particular, the relatives and friends were very approving of the changes made to the garden areas turning them into safe and relaxing spaces to share with their loved-ones. A point made by relatives and staff alike was that the outdoor spaces allow for more private conversations than the communal indoor rooms. Of the care staff, **85% found positive effects on wellbeing since the establishment of the new garden spaces and activities**.

The following response was representative: **“Yes, especially agitation. It calms them right down.”** Generally, the Creative Space activities have been found to enhance the understanding and the involvement of the local community with Trevarna Nursing Home, and community members and care staff have demonstrated a sense of ownership of the new garden.

Interviews across groups of people in the community gave insight into age-related preconceptions. Young people from Penrice Community College, the local secondary school, and The House youth group actively took part in re-establishing the garden at Trevarna Nursing Home and supported outings and Creative Spaces activities. They shared experiences of feeling scared or nervous prior to interacting with people with dementia, but their views changed and they gained in confidence as part of the process. They enjoyed the Creative Spaces activities. They learnt new ways of communicating with others and developed strong bonds with the residents. **The young people commented that they would be happy to stay in touch with future activities at Trevarna Nursing Home and would like to get involved**. For Trevarna Nursing Home to be pro-active in such interactions is a key factor for the future sustainability of the inter-generational relationship that has been achieved by the Creative Spaces project. Further, the Penrice Community College teacher leading this interaction gave valuable insight into possible ways forward to sustain future interactions and ideas that would be transferrable to other school and nursing home settings. Moreover, The



House youth group used the Creative Spaces work to discuss marginalization and how there are a lot of similarities between the two groups (young and old) for that reason. The House youth worker, found that **the young people showed a lot of empathy and as a result became less self-centred in their outlook on life.** One outcome of the Creative Spaces project that exceeded their expectations was the film project which 20 young people took part in. This taught them new skills and enabled them to talk about their experiences. The screening of the film raised the levels of awareness in the community members attending.

The St Austell Library Manager explained that activities and interaction between St Austell library and Trevarna Nursing Home existed already before the start of the Creative Spaces project, but they were spurred on by the Sensory Trust. The library has a lot to offer for future interactions with groups of elderly people with dementia and St Austell Library is access friendly for all and the new re-designed garden will be. Moreover, they have offered 'Reading Allowed' sessions to the Trevarna Nursing Home. They recently hosted their second Community Awareness Day at which dementia specialists were attending.

A concluding evaluation of the Creative Spaces project was sought in the form of interviews with key people involved in the project management: Wendy Leach, the Creative Spaces Project Lead for Cornwall Care (Practice Tutor, Education and Practice Development Department, Cornwall Care) and Nicola Redfearn (Operations Manager, Cornwall Care). They commented that the project was far more extensive than Cornwall Care had first realised, but that in general, Cornwall Care had always had a vision that this way of involving clients, staff and families is the way forward to ensuring good engagement when planning their care and environments for the future. Wendy Leach said that she was pleasantly surprised at how the activities that Creative Spaces had brought into the homes really reactivated peoples' memories of pleasant conversations, activities and personal stories. She explained, **"The way to make sure that what we have learnt from the Creative Spaces project is sustainable is to develop an awareness and training in Cornwall Care. We have included it as part of our Central Induction for new employees."**

Ultimately, the provision of creative outdoor activities increases opportunities for people with dementia to interact and connect with people in their community, become more active and regain interest in the world around them. We have established a model of care that integrates outdoor spaces and creative activity to provide a cost-effective, non-



pharmacological approach to alleviate symptoms and enhance quality of life for people with dementia. The Creative Spaces Project Manager, Wendy Brewin, Sensory Trust, commented that the three-year project may not have completed a ‘sea-change’ in the perception of dementia care; however, that this project has achieved a strong base upon which to expand this new approach. The materials produced during this three-year project (evaluation report, community exhibition, poetry and films) are integral to the future of Creative Spaces, particularly carving links with those focusing on care of people with dementia in community settings. This includes Memory Cafés, Age UK, Arts4Health Cornwall, Alzheimers Disease International and Cornwall Council. For example, on a local level we have already established links with Memory Cafés and are planning a series of community events with Age UK Cornwall & Isles of Scilly, Alzheimer Society and Arts for Health Cornwall; whilst nationally we have presented at the UK Dementia Congress (2012) and have been invited to publish an article in the forthcoming Journal of Dementia Care. All of this work has been invaluable in ensuring the sustainability of Creative Spaces.

Our website contains further information and project related films, photos etc.: www.sensorytrust.org.uk/projects/creative_spaces

A project endorsement came from Sue McDermott, Peer Support Network Lead, Cornwall Rural Community Council (CRCC).

“The lovely thing about Wendy and her team is that they make the activities do-able and fun – and that means they are failure free (and this is so important). Also the way each has of drawing guests in and supporting those who need the extra help and encouragement has been a great learning tool for volunteers too. It is important for volunteers to see respectful and inclusive activities being role-modelled.”



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Project Outcomes

Target **Achieved**

older people with dementia have improved quality of life and reduced isolation through receiving improved supportive services, access to activities and outdoor environments, and greater connection with the local community

180 **239**

carers and family members have acquired new skills, built confidence and capability in designing supportive services and environments for people with dementia through training and workshops

150 **606**

young people have acquired new skills and ability in the planning, design and maintenance of outdoor space and improved understanding of dementia and diversity within their community by participation in work-related training and activities

60 **64**

community members have greater understanding of dementia and the ways in which people with dementia, their families and carers can be more connected to their local community, through participation in events, activities and visits

300 **347**

carers and service providers are better informed about how to provide supportive services and environments for people with dementia through training, guidance and participatory events

950 **1885**