

# Creative Enquiry: Arts and Older People

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What do the arts  
offer you/us as  
we age?



**What  
Next?** Arts &  
Ageing  
Resources



# **What Next?**

## **Arts and Ageing Resources**

*Creative Enquiry: Arts and Older People* is a collaboration between the Cork City Council and Cork County Council Arts Offices, the Health Service Executive's Cork Kerry Community Healthcare, Age & Opportunity, Cork Midsummer Festival, Music Alive and SIRIUS, initiated by Cork City Council and funded by the Arts Council's An Invitation to Collaboration Scheme.

*What Next? Arts and Ageing Resources* is a follow-up programme of *Creative Enquiry: Arts and Older People* initiated by Cork City Council and funded by the Arts Council's An Invitation to Collaboration Scheme.



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# Foreword

**Michelle Carew**  
**Cork City Council Arts Officer**

The *Creative Enquiry: Arts and Older People*, from conception to conclusion, represents a journey of learning that lasted from 2018 to 2022. Cork City Council Arts Office, in partnership with Cork County Arts Office, is privileged to have been involved in this project with our partners and participants, including the artists and organisations that have developed the creative means to uncover key insights that will inform policy and practice in the field of arts and older people into the future.

The understanding that this process has facilitated is invaluable, not least in terms of how it created a platform for the voices of older people. The importance of this work was thrown into sharp relief during the period affected by COVID-19 between March 2020 and March 2022. The global pandemic's most adverse social and health impacts were felt profoundly by people over 55 years of age. It is expected that the effects of this experience will take much longer to leave us than the vaccination marquees and health advisory posters that became so ubiquitous.

The outcomes of the *Creative Enquiry* are a testament to the thinking from the residencies of the project's first phase. This thinking informed creative responses to supporting older people through the COVID-19 crisis and informs ongoing and future efforts to develop high-quality arts experiences for this demographic.

This report, a podcast series and a workshop archive forms *What Next? Arts and Ageing Resources*, the project's second phase. Together, they outline practical and innovative resources for inter-generational initiatives through collaboration between communities,

practitioners, organisations and institutions. We anticipate that the reflections and recommendations captured in *What Next?* will provide positive support for future projects and programmes.

This project was supported by the Arts Council's Invitation to Collaboration Scheme, for which we are incredibly grateful. We would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge the tremendous commitment of all involved in the *Creative Enquiry* and *What Next?*, not least the project managers who steered each phase so skilfully and sensitively: Mary Brady and Miguel Amado (SIRIUS).

Our achievements would not have been possible without the collective commitment of the participating organisations – Cork Midsummer Festival, Music Alive and SIRIUS – and the input of lead artists Marie Brett, Colette Lewis, Helga Deasy and Susan McManamon. We are especially appreciative of our strategic partners, Age & Opportunity and the Health Service Executive, for their unwavering support, as well as of our colleagues in Cork City and County Local Authorities and our extended network, for taking on board the outcomes within developing policy.

However, the greatest portion of our gratitude is due to the participants in, and recipients of, the artistic experiences that formed the project. Through their enthusiasm, generosity and creative and critical contributions, they shaped this significant work and influenced the very field of its making. We look forward to the future of inclusion and artistic accomplishment that our mutual learning makes possible.





# Introduction

Joanne Laws with Miguel Amado

*Creative Enquiry: Arts and Older People* was a project that explored new approaches to participation in the arts for and with older people, involving Cork Midsummer Festival, MusicAlive and SIRIUS as well as the artists Marie Brett, Helga Deasy and Susan McManamon, and Colette Lewis. *Creative Enquiry – Phase One* comprised a series of residencies, commencing in summer 2019 and lasting for approximately nine months.<sup>1</sup> *Creative Enquiry – Phase Two*, titled *What Next? Arts and Ageing Resources*, evolved in autumn 2021 and spring 2022, producing a group of resources for the sector based on practice-based learning from the artists, participants and hosts.

Among these resources are three workshops that were hosted virtually over consecutive days in November 2021 and archived online for public access. These sessions were delivered by representatives of the partner organisations in dialogue with the resident artists. These conceptually rich and pragmatic conversations critically reflected on the residencies while also situating them within current discourse relating to arts and health.

In addition, a podcast series further expanded this dialogical approach to amplify the voices of artists and participants, who collectively considered some of the theoretical, ethical and civic responsibilities of participatory practice. Particularly fascinating were reflections on the artists' conceptual inquiries – centring on ideas of cultural

lore, embodied knowledge and place-based knowledge – as well as their methodologies, which variously unfolded around the epistemologies of artist as researcher, co-learner and fellow participant.

Areas of discussion included societal values and the role of creativity as we age, barriers to participation in the arts for older people and how the arts may be embedded in healthcare. Other topics emphasised a visionary shift away from 'final outcomes' in socially engaged practice towards the development of long-term relationships that enable durational or open-ended projects. Also highlighted was the need for more radical ways of measuring qualitative 'final outcomes', such as enhanced well-being or gradual shifts in attitudes over time.

*What Next? Arts and Ageing Resources* is of particular interest to artists, organisations and funders committed to developing projects with older people in community and care settings. Therefore, the scope of this report is to collect practice-based learning from the initiative, broadly reflect on its legacy and present a set of recommendations for those working in the sector.



Do the arts affect something  
different from other types of  
Social activity that  
Contribute to the well-being  
people?

# **Section 1**

## **Creative Enquiry: Arts and Older People**

### **Overview**

# 1.1 Stakeholders

## Funder

Arts Council (An Invitation to Collaboration Scheme)

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## Strategic Partners

Cork City Council Arts Office

Cork County Council Arts Office

Age & Opportunity

Healthcare Service Executive,  
Cork Kerry Community Healthcare

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## Host Organisations

Cork Midsummer Festival

MusicAlive

SIRIUS

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## Artists in Residence

Marie Brett

Helga Deasy

Colette Lewis

Susan McManamon

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## Personnel

Lorraine Maye, Director, Cork Midsummer Festival

Kath Gorman, former Head of Participation and Engagement, Cork Midsummer Festival

Susan Holland, Head of Participation and Engagement, Cork Midsummer Festival

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Kevin O'Shanahan, Creative Director, MusicAlive

Barbara McCarthy, Administrator, MusicAlive

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Miguel Amado, Director, SIRIUS

Miranda Driscoll, former Director, SIRIUS

Claire Ryan, former Learning and Engagement Officer, SIRIUS

Brian Mac Domhnaill, former Programme and Operations Manager, SIRIUS

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Michelle Carew, Arts Officer, Cork City Council Arts Office

Siobhán Clancy, Assistant Arts Officer – Community Arts, Cork City Council Arts Office

Jean Brennan, former Arts Officer, Cork City Council Arts Office

Maeve Dineen, former Community Arts Coordinator, Cork City Council

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Ian McDonagh, Arts Officer, Cork County Council Arts Office

Maeve Mulrennan, Assistant Arts Officer, Cork County Council Arts Office

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Tara Byrne, Arts Programme Manager, Age & Opportunity

Eleanor Moore, Principal Community Worker, Cork South Community Work Department, Cork Kerry Community Healthcare, Health Service Executive

Mary Brady, Project Manager, Phase 1

## Participating Organisations

Celtic Stickmakers, Cork branch  
Cobh Zero Waste  
Cobh Family Resource Centre  
Mayfield Men's Shed  
Molgoggers Cobh  
Nazareth Care, Nazareth House Mallow  
Park Road Day Care Centre  
Rankin Dinghy Revival Group  
The SWELS  
The Lantern Project, Nano Nagle Place  
Traditional Lace Makers of Ireland, Cork branch

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## *What Next? Arts & Ageing Resources: Personnel*

Miguel Amado, Project Manager, Phase 2 and e-publication Editor  
Joanna Deans, Designer  
Emma Dwyer, Communications Consultant  
Joanne Laws, e-publication Researcher, Writer and Associate Editor  
Ellie O'Byrne, Podcast Series Producer and Workshop Series Host

## *What Next? Arts & Ageing Resources: Contributors*

Sheila Sullivan and Margaret Ahearne, Nazareth Care, Nazareth House Mallow  
Mary and Seán Curtin, Nazareth Care, Nazareth House Mallow  
Karina Healy, The Lantern Project, Nano Nagle Place  
Noel Keohane, Mayfield Men's Shed  
Kevin Jones  
Moggy Somers, Cobh Zero Waste  
Eugene Trindles, Celtic Stickmakers, Cork branch



# 1.2 Phase One: Residencies

The focus of *Creative Enquiry: Arts and Older People* – Phase One were three residencies involving engagement with older people, hosted by three organisations and delivered by four artists.

## **Marie Brett Cork Midsummer Festival**

Marie Brett invited people into a pool of thinking and making. 'Cultural Lore' examined how creativity, folklore, crafts and traditional skills may be slipping from our collective consciousness as technological advances supplant manual methods, and how they might aid people (re)gain a healthier mind and body.

## **Helga Deasy and Susan McManamon MusicAlive**

Helga Deasy and Susan McManamon collaborated on a series of workshops in Nazareth Care, Nazareth House Mallow and with Mayfield Men's Shed choir. They explored how fusing voice, movement, music and the written word can inspire participation and a process of co-creation.

## **Colette Lewis SIRIUS**

Colette Lewis identified a community of interest to collaborate on 'Local Know-how', focused on place-based knowledge, and share sustainable methods of living that are in danger of being lost. In parallel, as part of the 'Oral Heirlooms' at Park Road Day Care Centre, participants were asked to bring in an object, photograph or story that had meaning for them.

## 1.3 Phase Two: What Next? Arts and Ageing Resources

A core ambition of *Creative Enquiry: Arts and Older People* – Phase Two is to create a series of resources that:

- contribute to current critical debate on the role of creativity as we age;
- articulate practice-based learning in projects with older people;
- provide practical resources and advice for those working in the field (including artists, organisations and funders).

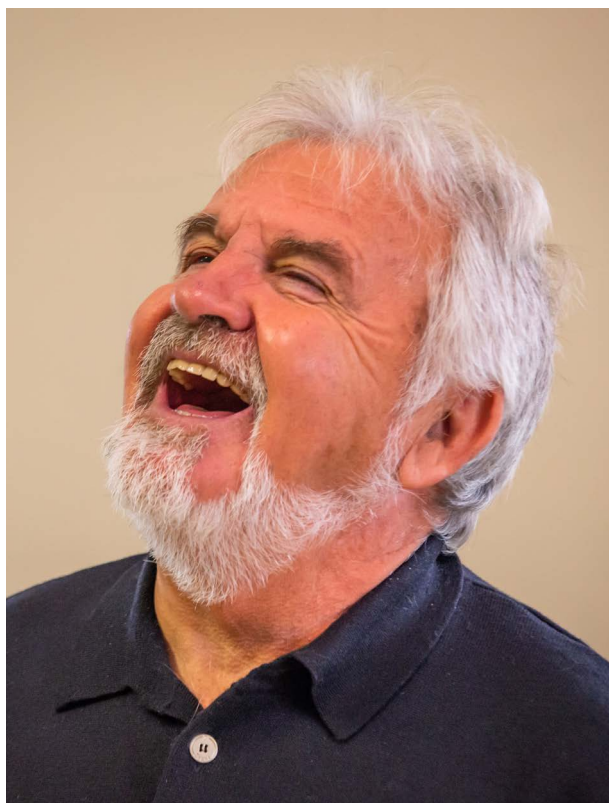
Resource	Number	Date	Featuring	Available
<i>The Arts and Ageing Podcast</i>	9 episodes (including trailer and post-script)	Originally broadcast between September and November 2021	Artists and Community Participants	SIRIUS Podcasts <a href="https://sites.libsyn.com/410657?_ga=2.48681510.1056534402.1653308287-2146836185.1652223933">https://sites.libsyn.com/410657?_ga=2.48681510.1056534402.1653308287-2146836185.1652223933</a> ga=2.48681510.1056534402.1653308287-2146836185.1652223933
<i>The Arts and Ageing Workshop Series</i>	3 sessions	Delivered on 9, 10, 11 November 2021	Artists and Partner Organisations	SIRIUS YouTube channel <a href="https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCjsDRsIOgvMB8mpMc6ONpxA">https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCjsDRsIOgvMB8mpMc6ONpxA</a>
<i>What Next? Arts and Ageing e-publication</i>	1 PDF	Published in October 2023	Artists, Community Participants and Partner Organisations	Age & Opportunity's website Cork City Council's website

# The Arts and Ageing Podcast

*The Arts and Ageing Podcast* was produced by Cork City-based journalist Ellie O'Byrne. It presents interviews with each of the *Creative Enquiry* artists and representatives of the community groups they worked with. This dialogue offers opportunities for reflection, practical advice and examples of projects focusing on arts and older people.

**Target Audience:** Though accessible to a wide audience, *The Arts and Ageing Podcast* is of particular interest to:

- artists and arts workers (including those interested in working with older people in community and care settings)
- programmers
- policymakers
- care professionals and health professionals (including those interested in creativity for older people)



## Episodes:

### 1. Arts & Ageing trailer (28 September 2021)

Podcast series introduction: How can we continue to nurture our creativity as we age?

### 2. Local Know-how: Part 1 (4 October 2021)

Kevin Jones, Moggy Somers and Colette Lewis discuss the 'Local Know-how' project, part of Lewis' *Creative Enquiry* residency with SIRIUS.

### 3. Local Know-how: Part 2 (4 October 2021)

Colette Lewis discusses practical ways to ensure that projects are inclusive of older people.

### 4. Cultural Lore: Part 1 (11 October 2021)

Eugene Trindles, Karina Healy and Marie Brett discuss the 'Cultural Lore' project, part of Brett's *Creative Enquiry* residency with Cork Midsummer Festival.

### 5. Cultural Lore: Part 2 (18 October 2021)

Marie Brett considers some of the barriers that prevent older people from engaging with the arts.

### 6. The Wings to Fly: Part 1 (25 October 2021)

Helga Deasy and Susan McManamon return to Nazareth Care, Nazareth House Mallow for another workshop. Mary Curtin, who is married to Seán, also a resident, and mother and daughter Sheila Sullivan and Margaret Aherne, elaborate on their interaction with the artists and their fellows at Nazareth Care, Nazareth House Mallow.

### 7. The Wings to Fly: Part 2 (1 November 2021)

Noel Keohane recounts the workshops facilitated by Helga Deasy and Susan McManamon during their *Creative Enquiry* residency with MusicAlive.

### 8. The Wings to Fly: Part 3 (8 November 2021)

Helga Deasy and Susan McManamon reflect on their *Creative Enquiry* residency with MusicAlive.

### 9. Postscript (15 November 2021)

Ellie O'Byrne examines common themes across the episodes.



## The Arts and Ageing Workshop Series

Three workshops were undertaken across consecutive days in November 2021. The sessions took place online and were delivered by representatives of the partner organisations in dialogue with the resident artists.

### 1. How Do We Embed the Arts in Health Settings? (9 November 2021)

- **Facilitators:** Kevin O'Shanahan (Creative Director of MusicAlive) and artists Helga Deasy and Susan McManamon.
- **Focus:** The role of the arts in the prevention of ill health, the promotion of good health and the management and treatment of illness, as well as the ways in which one might embed the arts in healthcare.

### 2. How Do We Apply the Creative Enquiry Model? (10 November 2021)

- **Facilitators:** Kath Gorman (former Head of Participation and Engagement at Cork Midsummer Festival) and artist Marie Brett.
- **Focus:** How can programmes be made accessible for and with older audiences, based on building relationships through a flexible developmental approach.

### 3. What Are the Ethics of Engaging with Communities? (11 November)

- **Facilitators:** Miguel Amado (director of SIRIUS) and artist Colette Lewis.
- **Focus:** Which innovative and place-based methods for collaborating with older people are there towards shifting away from 'final outcomes' to build long-term relationships, as well as how the ethical imperatives of organisations and artists might contribute to wider societal discussions.

#### Themes addressed:

- recommendations for strategic planning and programming;
- planning and delivery of programming in relation to older people;
- conceptual and ethical issues in socially engaged practice;
- questions around embedding the arts in healthcare.

#### Target audience:

The workshops are of interest to artists who may be planning future projects in different settings with older cohorts. In attendance were a range of practitioners, programmers, health professionals and community representatives, who were invited to contribute to the conversation during a Q&A session at the end of each workshop.





# Section 2

## Findings

## 2.1 Attitudes to Ageing



<b>Ageing is a continuum</b>	We are all constantly aging; you don't just suddenly become old.
<b>Ageism</b>	Ageism is a social construct, which can often be internalised: "Ageism is a form of prejudice against our own future selves." <sup>2</sup>
<b>Internalisation of Ageism</b>	One participant observed a 'self-imposed' ageism among members of his group: "We are too old to be doing that kind of thing." <sup>3</sup>
<b>Agency</b>	When people are receiving care (for example in a residential context), their voice can get lost. Many of the participants articulated fears about a loss of agency and autonomy as they age.
<b>Assumptions</b>	Do not make assumptions about what people can or cannot do; it is important to meet people where they are at.
<b>Definitions</b>	Participants felt there is some stigma in being named (or self-identifying) as an older person. Everyone wants to be respected for their personhood; nobody wants to be devalued by negative associations of ageing.
<b>Elder Knowledge</b>	We need to revive our collective understanding of elderhood and wisdom, not as a forlorn or nostalgic thing, but as a force of privilege and action: "I worry that all the knowledge and expertise that I harbour won't be seen as valuable when I'm old." <sup>4</sup>
<b>Gender Differential</b>	As noted by one artist, older women tend to become less visible as they age.
<b>Individuality</b>	People in care settings are often expected to do the same activity at the same time. People are automatically involved in a project, simply because they are there by circumstance, which can be more damaging. There can be a tendency to generalise the needs of the individuals; individuality gets lost in this collective identity.
<b>Intergenerationality</b>	Participants felt it was not appropriate for activities to be designated based on age; they want to be part of a vibrant, cross-generational group, rather than with many people of the same age.
<b>Intersectionality</b>	Intersectionality between age and other marginalising factors – for example, income bracket, ethnicity, sexual orientation, health and mobility status – is an area worthy of further scrutiny.
<b>Productivity</b>	Notions of productivity are often linked to one's capacity to be economically active. This model only values individuals for their labour and ability to produce, thereby devaluing the accumulated wisdom of those who are retired and no longer 'productive'.
<b>Terminology</b>	'Older people' is a generic, homogenous term; no two older people are the same.

## 2.2 What Can the Arts Offer Us As We Age?

Benefit	Detail
Challenge preconceptions about art	Expanding definitions of art beyond painting, drawing and other media, to embrace socially engaged practice as a more horizontal, democratic, inclusive and participatory process. This also reframes expectations of the artist as the 'expert' who gives you something of value.
Challenge attitudes to ageing	As stated by one of the artists: "Art can challenge, influence, and transform attitudes we might have towards ageing, and the value that older peoples' knowledge and experience can bring to a community." <sup>5</sup>
Communal experience	When collectively engaged in creativity, many other things can be transmitted. Activities can be a vehicle towards conversation and the sharing of more nuanced or expanded knowledge. The transformative power of art in society comes from being present in the moment; in essence, it opens a space for the collective imagination.
Learn new things	To be active through creativity enables the reactivation of neural pathways.
Neuroplasticity	Older age can be a 'misery' or a 'dance'; our attitude affects our age. The arts offer tremendous opportunities to express and process emotions, as well as connect with one's own mood. Research shows that being present in the moment activates one's endorphins. The activities coordinator at Nazareth Care, Nazareth House Mallow observed how patients with dementia may remember the words of a song, which suddenly unlocks a door to memory.
Physical health	As stated by the Creative Director of MusicAlive, the arts are becoming more strategically placed within the health service. Forms of health interventions are taking place in the community, thus structurally reimagining where healthcare can operate from. There is a growing acknowledgement that medicine cannot solve all problems. As observed by one of the artists: "In the beginning, people were cautious and had aches and pains and limited movement; but as the sessions progressed and we introduced imagery, people became present in the moment and forgot about their aches and pains; their movements became freer and more liberated, due to a shift in mind-set." <sup>6</sup>
Play	The foundation of creativity is playfulness and spontaneity, which helps to keep us young. Some view older age as a 'second childhood', offering the creative freedom of play and discovery after one's working life.

Benefit	Detail
Social interaction	Creativity can connect people in different ways, while strengthening relationships and fostering community.
Tacit knowledge	When working and making together, forms of embodied knowledge are unleashed, including tacit knowledge, which refers to the skills and abilities an individual gains through experiences, which are often difficult to verbalise.
Wellbeing	Whether using poetry to bring people into an internal space or using voice and movement to create a more outward connection between people, it is clear that the arts have an ongoing and vital role to play in terms of mental health benefits.



## 2.3 How Can the Arts Offer Meaningful Engagement?

Art can take the form of an object, but more important, in socially engaged practice, is the encounter itself – being with people, and the wider conversations that unfold when engaged in a process. While a 'final outcome' (like a performance, an exhibition or an event) can be a great achievement for participants, an emphasis on the process may leave them with something more long-lasting.

### Process vs 'End Product'

Emphasising the 'end product' from the outset may put the participants under pressure.

When the process is good, then an 'end product' naturally emerges, and may even be of a higher quality; this requires time and a subtlety of approach.

An emphasis on process can help build new relationships or deepen existing bonds between participants.

In home settings, working towards an 'end product' is not always appropriate.

For people with dementia, being in the moment is the most important thing.

Focusing on process is where the 'magic' happens, but capturing it can be difficult.

If you are not working towards a 'final outcome', then documenting the process becomes very important; small moments, stories and comments can be captured in reflective journals or recorded through photography or film (where permissible).

A focus on 'final outcomes' through tangibility and metrics is problematic. How do we trace the impact of a project over time beyond spectacles, optics or attendance figures? How can we measure the transformative power of conversation or gradual shifts in attitudes?



## 2.4 What Constitutes Quality Engagement in the Arts?

Throughout the *Creative Enquiry* residencies, notions of what defines quality engagement in the arts ranged considerably. Some of the artists and participants commented on the meaningful relationships forged during the process, while others appreciated how their skills and contributions were valued within the group dynamic. Many noted that a more meaningful engagement in the arts happens when participants are invited to become 'co-creators' rather than simply consumers, which suggests a passive attitude.

### **In general, it was felt that quality engagement in the arts must involve:**

- a sense of inclusion and welcome;
- professional artists and adequate materials;
- accessible, ambitious and diverse forms of art;
- experimentation and risk taking;
- an opportunity to learn something new;
- plenty of time to develop relationships;
- connections with the experience of participants;
- reciprocal knowledge exchange and opportunities to pass on a craft;
- an intergenerational approach;
- tangible, 'final outcomes' (which may include documentation of process).

### **It was also indicated that the following supports are necessary:**

- robust relationships with organisations;
- skilled, experienced, willing and curious practitioners;
- artists who utilise a person-centred approach;
- time to identify existing communities and accessible locations;
- local ambassadors to help reach, communicate with, and invite participants;
- support from staff and family members (when working with vulnerable people).

## 2.5 What Are the Barriers to Participation in the Arts for Older People?

Theme	Barrier	Details
Practicalities	Time	Many participants cited time and the period of the year as a key decision factor, since older people may be fearful of going out in the dark, particularly if the weather is bad.
	Affordability	Many participants cited ticket cost a key decision factor.
Accessibility	Venue	The accessibility of the building (steps, handrails, lifts, etc.) and whether the venue is already known to them, were stated as important considerations for older people.
	Mobility	The mobility and energy levels of older people, coupled with considerations around transport, were highlighted by participants. In addition, being alone is viewed as a significant obstacle, since older people are less willing to go to venues unaccompanied.
Attitudes	Preconceptions	The terminology surrounding performances, exhibitions and events can be a significant obstacle since it rarely helps to change pre-existing ideas around what art is or is not.
	Ageism	Sometimes ageism can be internalised, with older people simply believing that certain performances, exhibitions and events are 'not for them'.
Programming	Lack of Flexibility	A focus on particular types of performances, exhibitions and events can limit opportunities for more discursive or group activities; older people sometimes want to be creators of art, not simply consumers.
	Lack of Intergenerationality	Performances, exhibitions and events for 'older people only' are neither appealing nor appropriate. The preference is for performances, exhibitions and events with an intergenerational focus.

Theme	Barrier	Details
Promotion	Printed Material	There is often too much writing on promotional materials, and fonts can be very small and images or colours can have poor contrast.
	Booking Systems	Online booking can be difficult for older people to navigate.
Care setting	Ethos	The existing vision regarding the role of the arts within care settings can be an obstacle.
	Space	The lack of suitable space in which to work within care settings can be problematic.





MEN'S SHED

Good news for Mayfield Men's Shed

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# **Section 3**

## **Recommendations**

## 3.1 Artists

Recommendation	Detail
<b>Access</b>	In order to make contact with different groups, it is beneficial to attend local meetings and events, and meet community development officers, who are able to advise on networks and provide other recommendations. As noted by one of the artists: "Just be brave and ask people to give you their opinions. You will often receive a phenomenal welcome." <sup>7</sup>
<b>Activities</b>	Focus on simple and accessible activities to accommodate various body restrictions.
<b>Co-learning</b>	Some artists worked with the participants as active collaborators through dialogue and listening to what is meaningful for them. Others became fellow participants or learners in the process, thus reframing the model of 'artist as expert' and instilling a more inclusive and dialogical approach based on reciprocal exchange, in which everyone brings something of value.
<b>Community of interest</b>	Building a 'community of interest' is an antidote to devising projects exclusively for older people. Inviting people to come together based on their shared interests or goals is a different premise to groupings based on age. It supersedes the idea of an 'older person's project'. It also sidelines existing groups and articulates the intent to establish a new group without existing alliances. People turn up because they are actively interested, demonstrating a different kind of engagement and agency.
<b>Existing ethos</b>	The care setting's existing ethos regarding perceptions and value of the arts greatly impacts projects. Contexts that may be difficult or limiting, or have fixed expectations about projects, were described by one artist as the "gentle creative challenge." <sup>8</sup> The artist noted that developing relationships and building trust with the care setting's staff and management takes time and commitment.
<b>Initiating projects</b>	Whether artists are at an early career stage or diversifying an established practice, it is recommended that they connect with their local authority arts officer for advice on funding strands, guidance on proposals and introductions to potential groups.
<b>Intergenerationality</b>	Artists should try to develop projects with intergenerational aspirations and outlooks.
<b>Local ambassadors</b>	Artists should find the 'magic' people in every community who enable connectivity, open doors and make things happen; invest in them and their networks.

Recommendation	Detail
<b>Participation</b>	If working in a care setting, artists should accept that people may be weak or unwilling to participate on any given day.
<b>Place-based knowledge</b>	Artists should identify the kinds of deep knowledge embodied in the social, personal and work experiences of the people who live in a place. Solutions to problems often already exist within the community.
<b>Process</b>	If artists are not working towards an 'end product', then documenting the process becomes very important. They should keep reflective journals and record moments through video and photography (if permissible), thus capturing the voices of the participants and how the work is received.
<b>Promotion</b>	When inviting participation within a community, artists should consider using posters or flyers and advertising through post offices, community newsletters, local radio and newspapers, and word of mouth.
<b>Sustainability</b>	Artists must consider how to sustain themselves financially in projects over a long duration. This may include securing sufficient funding or having a diversity of income, where possible.
<b>Time</b>	Projects should have plenty of lead-in time, enabling for slow research and genuine reflection, which should be factored in from the outset. There should also be a suitable provision for the continuation of projects, including new phases or follow-up projects.
<b>Trust</b>	When focusing on the process, artists need to be mindful of people's limitations, and participants need to trust that artists respect these parameters. That kind of safe space only comes through spending time with a group.

## 3.2 Organisations

### General

Recommendation	Detail
<b>Access</b>	As citizens, we all have a right to engage with culture in general – whether making or consuming it – and that right is legally enshrined through the United Nations and also nationally through the Equal Status Acts. Organisations should emphasise equity and equality of access.
<b>Accessibility</b>	The physical infrastructure and accessibility of a venue are incredibly important. Research in the disability sector shows that the built environment (rather than an actual health condition) is seen as the disabling aspect of a person's life, in terms of attending performances, exhibitions and events or accessing services.
<b>Diversity</b>	"A diverse organisation is a more dynamic and effective organisation." <sup>9</sup>
<b>Governance</b>	Having older people among the staff and boards of organisations is valuable. It is also important to co-design programmes, from conception to delivery, with older people, whether through advisory committees or more hands-on activities.
<b>Policy</b>	Organisations should develop policies that directly relate to arts and older people around key areas such as access, participation and partnership development.
<b>Promotional strategy</b>	Organisations should develop cross-organisational strategies that actively promote public awareness of the documented benefits of engagement in the arts for health and well-being.
<b>The white cube</b>	Organisations need to consider how socially engaged practice can be brought to their core, rather than being side-lined as an adjunct or auxiliary tool, within education and/or audience development departments.
<b>Training</b>	Organisations should explore options and allocate resources for staff training in equality, diversity, inclusion and access, where relevant.
<b>Welcome</b>	Organisations need to consider what it means to feel welcome. What are the intangible elements in any venue that make visitors feel either excluded or included?



## Working with Communities

Recommendation	Detail
Relationships	Organisations should seek to build long-term, meaningful relationships with the community, which includes older people.
Representation	Organisations should include older people within the organisational structure, for example on boards and advisory panels.
Social change	Many organisations use the language of social justice but often fail to challenge the principles of the system it critiques, and in some cases actively reproduce them. Art as social change has the inbuilt capacity to perform a critique that enables 'real' engagement.

## Working with Artists

Recommendation	Detail
Research	Artists see the world in a different way. They tend to have a gentle approach in terms of meeting people, building relationships and trust, and creating reciprocal knowledge exchange. Artists acting as researchers tend to have more nuanced and subtle approaches than other outreach strands, such as marketing surveys, which can feel cold and transactional. Artistic research can be richer in qualitative data, which in turn can be used to inform organisational and advocacy approaches.
Experience	An experienced artist with a track record helps articulate collaboration in careful and attentive ways.
Flexibility	Organisations and partners need to be flexible and genuinely open to changes as projects unfold, thus allowing artists and participants to have genuine agency and input.
Support	Funding to artists needs to be reimagined to extend beyond projects. For example, an organisation might employ an artist for multiple years to develop this kind of work.
Time	Projects should have plenty of lead-in time, enabling for slow pace and genuine reflection, which should be factored in from the outset. There should also be a suitable provision for the continuation of projects, including new phases or follow-up projects where possible.

## Working with Other Organisations

Recommendation	Detail
Partnerships model	It is important to maintain ongoing conversations with local authority arts offices or other organisations about their plans and policies. Regional partnerships between organisations can prove extremely beneficial. Collaboration is richer and more interesting, and has the potential for longevity. As noted by Tara Byrne in her interview: "You can't do things like this alone."
Strategic partnerships	Organisations should maximise opportunities to connect with Age Friendly Ireland and work with Age & Opportunity, which facilitates various activities, including Cultural Companions, and coordinates the Bealtaine Festival, an annual celebration of creativity in older age. As noted by Eleanor Moore in her interview: "It would be good to create a forum of artists and healthcare workers with no agenda so that people could just get to know each other and how we all work."

## Programming

Recommendation	Detail
Anti-ageism	Organisations need to make anti-ageism, health and well-being integral and strategic aspects of programmes.
Audiences	Organisations should be ambitious about reaching wide audiences while making accessible and diverse forms of art available to a range of different groups across the life course, especially activities for children and older people.
Barriers	Organisations should consider the barriers to participation in the arts when programming for older people. This includes consideration of cost, booking, transportation and access issues as well as the nature, location and timing of performances, exhibitions and events. For example, it is good practice for programmes to offer discounts, or use subtitling and larger fonts, as part of an inclusive methodology that doesn't single out the older cohort specifically.
Booking systems	Several different booking systems should be offered, given that online booking can be difficult for older people.

Recommendation	Detail
<b>Diversity</b>	It is important for programmes to be as diverse as possible so that a broad range of people can connect with them. If the arts are dominated by one particular demographic, that group's experiences are likely going to be foregrounded.
<b>Inclusivity</b>	Organisations need to facilitate access to performances, exhibitions and events for people dependent on care.
<b>Companionship</b>	Older people often do not attend performances, exhibitions and events because they have nobody to go with. Organisations must consider partnering with a buddy scheme such as Cultural Companions.
<b>Intergenerationality</b>	Older people consistently and persistently expressed the wish <i>not</i> to be defined and grouped according to age. Older people generally do not want to be programmed for separately from other age groups or attend performances, exhibitions and events marketed exclusively for them. Intergenerational projects should be favoured.
<b>Intersectionality</b>	Older people from different communities have different needs in terms of physical and mental health. So, as well as diversity, there is also the issue of intersectionality and reaching certain older people who find it difficult to have a voice.
<b>Invitation</b>	Invitations to attend, participate or contribute are welcomed by groups. Organisations may consider gifting tickets or inviting audiences to volunteer or contribute in other ways. Organisations might consider devising a gifts initiative, which involves gifting free tickets to specific groups.
<b>Participation</b>	Meaningful participation of older people in the arts – as both producers and consumers – is part of a broader conversation and policy focus on equality, diversity and inclusion.
<b>Promotional material</b>	Organisations should limit the amount of writing, increase font size and include more imagery in promotional material. They should also consider audio description (on websites) or captioning (for film).

## 3.3 Funders

Recommendation	Detail
<b>Access</b>	Participation in the arts enhances one's life and helps one think about the world. Access is not just about health, education or the economy; it is across everything and that is where the inherent value lies.
<b>Assets and resources</b>	The sector is currently lacking a robust visualisation of what communities already have to offer. There is a perceived need to identify existing assets and resources that can be used to build active networks and partnerships. This may include infrastructure, people, groups and support services.
<b>Collaboration</b>	It is important to develop structures and mechanisms for collaboration between the arts and other sectors, such as introducing programmes that are co-financed by different budgets.
<b>Health and wellbeing</b>	The arts should be included in all health and wellbeing local and national strategies. As custodians of a lot of older people (in terms of residential care), the Health Service Executive has a role to play in arts and wellbeing as we age. This role should be clarified and enhanced, and the Health Service Executive should be part of the policy package. There is a memorandum of understanding between Health & Wellbeing at the Health Service Executive, the Arts Council, Creative Ireland and Healthy Ireland, which delivers creative initiatives supporting specific health and wellbeing goals for staff, patients and communities.
<b>Infrastructural support</b>	Organisations should be funded to improve infrastructure (including venue accessibility) to meet the needs of communities.
<b>Intersectionality</b>	It is important to consider the intersectionality between age and other marginalising factors such as income bracket, ethnicity, sexual orientation, health and mobility status.
<b>Measurement</b>	It is important to identify ways to measure the societal value of the arts, beyond statistics and data alone, that consider the individual or communal experience, such as the enhanced wellbeing of participants in a given moment and over time.
<b>Outcomes</b>	Project outputs should not be prescriptive or formulaic but free to emerge organically through inquiry and collaboration.
<b>Programming support</b>	Organisations should be funded to develop programmes that meet the needs of communities and enable the commissioning of work by artists.

Recommendation	Detail
Referrals	The introduction of lines of referral from healthcare to organisations should be considered, for example through the use of social prescribing schemes.
Representation	Government departments focused on the arts, heritage and language should be represented in the National Positive Ageing Strategy.
Time	Projects should be funded in a sustainable way, with a commitment to development and delivery over long periods of time.
Training (arts)	It is important to develop opportunities for arts training for healthcare professionals to improve their knowledge of creativity and well-being.
Training (health)	It is important to develop opportunities for awareness training for artists to improve their knowledge of different kinds of dementia, hearing loss, visual impairment, stroke recovery or the impact of different medications, and how one might work in collaboration with medical personnel at day care or residential centres around older people's specific needs.





# Section 4

## Reflections

# Notes on *The Arts and Ageing Podcast*

## Ellie O'Byrne

*The Arts and Ageing Podcast* is a series that revisits the *Creative Enquiry – Arts and Older People* residencies that took place in 2019. It features interviews with artists and participants conducted 18 months after the initial initiative. Questions focused on older people's agency, dignity and quality of life. Producing *The Arts and Ageing Podcast* raised as many questions about art as it did about concepts of ageing.

### Terminology

For the title of the podcast, I expressed a preference for 'arts and ageing' over 'arts and older people' because ageing is a continuum – an active process that is impacting us all, rather than a defined state. At the centre of the *Creative Enquiry* and the podcast series – and indeed for those involved in programming, curating and funding projects and activities aimed at older people – lies a real catch-22: older people consistently and persistently express the wish *not* to be defined and grouped according to age, but rather to keep their individuality and be included in multi-generational audiences.

In *The Arts and Ageing Podcast*, all participants were asked for their definition of 'old' or 'older', and everyone expressed the view that being 'old' is relative; inside all of us is the person who has been all of the different ages in their past. "When I was much younger, I thought people in their forties were ancient," Eugene Trindles told me while we were doing our interview for the *Cultural Lore* episode. "That's just human nature. Every generation sees the older generation as being past it, but we don't feel that way."

The ageing process is something we are all experiencing all of the time, and there are as many different ways to age as there are humans. Indeed, one of the men who had been invited to participate in the podcast series was not aware that he was doing so on the basis of being an older person. This highlighted to me the fluidity of defining an 'older person'.

In an attempt to avoid ageism, terms like 'elderly person' and 'old person' have fallen out of use, often to be replaced with the term 'older person', which we used during the podcast, in the absence of a clearer definition. Is this someone aged over 55? A retiree? A pensioner? Someone approaching the end of their individual allotted lifespan? Is it someone over 70, 80, 90? How can one create programmes and funding streams for a cohort that is not clearly defined?

All of the artists circumvented this problem by establishing what Colette Lewis described as 'communities of interest', where the focus was defining groups not by age, but by common interests or goals, which can involve skill and knowledge sharing. In the case of Colette Lewis and Marie Brett, there were opportunities for older people to pass along valuable knowledge to others; in the case of Helga Deasy and Susan McManamon, the transfer was in the other direction, in the form of choir practice or breathing and movement exercises that constituted lessons.



## Intersectionality

A glimpse at the gender breakdown of the podcast series is revealing: all participating artists were female, while all the older people who participated, with the exception of the voices featured in *The Wings to Fly: Part One*, were male. This episode was recorded with Helga Deasy and Susan McManamon in Nazareth Care, Nazareth House Mallow, where they conducted a music and movement workshop with residents. It was the only episode recorded in a care setting.

For the purposes of streamlined production, most interviews were conducted over the course of two days at SIRIUS in Cobh. However, this created a self-selecting group in terms of mobility and independence among interviewees. The three men, Kevin, Eugene and Noel, were strikingly similar in outlook, attitude and overall health and mobility. All three exhibited a high degree of agency and the expectation that they would be listened to.

The only older female voices in the podcast series came from the care home setting of Nazareth Care, Nazareth House Mallow. Similarly, the podcast series failed to address the intersectionality between age and other marginalising factors, such as economic status, ethnicity, health and mobility.

It is clear that inviting older people to participate in projects and activities in venues excludes the most marginalised older people. Marie Brett's work identified specific barriers to access that emerge from these intersections, such as ticket prices for those on a state pension.

## What Is the Place of Arts?

The myriad benefits of engaging older people in the arts and creativity are well studied and evident. However, the benefits of artists – as opposed to specialists with pre-existing expertise, such as therapists – leading engagement are less clear. Whether this type of engagement is more beneficial for the artist and their practice than for older people is a salient question.

At times, when interviewing artists for the podcast series, it became difficult to differentiate, in practical terms, between practice in the arts and well-being initiatives – for example, when engagement consisted of having cups of tea and discussions. In some of these instances, the participants did not frame what they were participating in as art. Helga Deasy and Susan McManamon's residencies at Nazareth Care, Nazareth House Mallow and with Mayfield Men's Shed most clearly defined participant expectation.

Is the function of this engagement artist focused, or focused on the benefits that engagement brings older people? If the latter, why would such work be funded by the Arts Council instead of through the Health Service Executive? Arts Council means artist focused, and here we stumble on a disturbing division: Why isn't the artist the older person? Why are older people participants, audiences, but never artists themselves? Furthermore, are older people participants in the sense of being beneficiaries, learners or audience members? Or are they the subject matter for an artist in creating work?

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Some of these concerns and questions are embedded in my wider concerns for the evolving nature of publicly funded art, away from artefact and towards the conceptual; away from the experiences and values of broader society and towards the values of a niche intellectual elite. But hard as it may be to assess and measure success or otherwise, the point raised by Colette Lewis in *Local Know-how: Part Two*, about the transformative power of art in society, is salient: "Art has the potential to be transformative and to bring about social change," she said. "It can challenge, influence and transform attitudes we might have towards ageing, and the value that older peoples' knowledge and experience can bring to a community."

### **Ageism, Productivity, Skill**

Unlike other forms of prejudice, ageism is the one form of discrimination that we will all face, if we are fortunate to live long enough. There were a great number of instances of internalised ageism expressed by interviewees in the podcast series, and most especially amongst male interviewees Kevin, Noel and Eugene. This took the form of worries about a lack of productivity. All three men had worked hard all their adult lives – Kevin as a fisherman, Noel in retail and Eugene in training and education – and expressed a strong desire to remain 'useful'. Colette Lewis strongly commented on this in the episode *Local Know-how: Part Two*, connecting it to a form of capitalism that only values individuals for their labour and ability to produce, and devaluing the accumulated wisdom of those who are retired and no longer 'productive'.

The position of Mayfield Men's Shed and other communities of interest like Celtic Stickmakers, rooted in skill, crafts and a semblance of productivity, was of note. This model is relevant since interactions are ostensibly about the craft or skill being practiced, such as woodwork and construction, and the resulting 'end product'. However, embedded informally and often nonverbally within that framework is a support network extending to checking on recently bereaved members or members who are known to be struggling with isolation or poor physical or mental health. This approach centres on craft but encompasses wellbeing. It also brings the benefit of transcending socio-economic divides and valuing the skills of people who may have worked in physically demanding trades before retirement.

### **The Experience**

Producing *The Arts and Ageing Podcast* was an immensely rich and varied experience. Every interviewee provided a depth of insight into their participation in *Creative Enquiry – Arts and Older People* that retains value. Due to their hard work, humour and consideration, the podcast series can stand as a permanent digital artefact of this project.

**Ellie O'Byrne is a journalist.**

# Interview with Tara Byrne Miguel Amado and Joanne Laws

**Miguel Amado and Joanne Laws: What are your thoughts on the connections between organisations, engagement and older people as a specific demographic?**

Tara Byrne: As citizens, we all have a right to engage with culture in general – whether making or consuming it. That right is legally enshrined through the United Nations and also nationally through the Equal Status Acts. Notwithstanding the problems inherent in demarcating groups of people, organisations choosing to work with particular groups should emphasise equity and equality of access.

We are diverse people with different priorities, and no one likes to feel like they are part of one particular category. The wellbeing movement, which in general is prevalent in the West, especially in the UK, is now making its way through Irish policy in relation to culture, with a focus on 'creative ageing'.

**MA & JL: Do you feel there are specific needs, in terms of access, for older people that differ from other demographics?**

TB: It is a tricky area to talk about because it requires one to differentiate people in a way that some may find ageist or discriminatory, which can lead to the othering of older people. However, I do think that most older people would acknowledge that there are various barriers to access – whether physical, cultural, historical or economic – which prevent them from engaging in the arts in the same way as other demographics.

Our bodies become less agile as we age, so venues need to consider how people are physically accessing their buildings. Physical access is a huge concern, but access goes way beyond that for older people – in fact, for all groups. What does it mean to feel welcome? What are the intangible elements in any venue that make you feel either excluded or included?

At Age & Opportunity, we use a detailed breakdown of age in five-year brackets – 50 to 55, 56 to 60, and so on. Without wishing to generalise too much, someone who is 65 today has a different experience from someone aged 85 in terms of how culture was available to them when they were younger: the more the arts are available to you from a young age, the more likely you are to have a facility and an understanding of the communication around it.

My mother, for example, who is 86, is a highly educated woman for her generation, but would have had almost no access to culture as a young person. She would feel, to a certain extent, that venues are not for her. On the other hand, there is a lack of identification with the term 'arts'. Older people may be members of an amateur dramatic society or book club, yet they still perceive the arts as something elitist.

One of the things that makes a person interested in the arts is the ability to filter one's own thought processes through it to make sense of the world. Therefore, if the arts are dominated by one particular demographic, it is likely that their experiences are going

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to be foregrounded. It is important to consider the range of experiences that we are making available through theatre, visual art and so on, in terms of the lives that we represent. A big part of what we do is around representation.

**MA & JL: It sounds like there is work to be done to diversify programmes so that they cater more for underrepresented demographics, including older people.**

TB: If you are an older person, you are unlikely to feel fully represented within many programmes. But it is not necessarily just about seeing older people in the arts; it is about recognising concerns and ideas you can identify with. And ideas are not universal or timeless; they come and go and change over time.

**MA & JL: Do you have any advice for organisations who want to engage with older people more meaningfully?**

TB: There is no one way of doing anything. It is just about being mindful and understanding the lives of older people. Older people don't want to be treated differently from anyone else. And yet they do have specific needs, which may be similar to other demographics that feel unheard or invisible. Therefore, it is good practice for organisations to offer discounts or to use subtitling and larger fonts as parts of an inclusive methodology that doesn't single out the older cohort specifically. It is about striking a balance between treating everyone like they are all the same while taking account of some differences and not making assumptions about older people.

Programmes need to be as diverse as possible so that a broad range of older people can connect with them. That might mean sometimes commissioning an older artist, even though they aren't necessarily going to produce work about being older. Having older people among the staff and boards of organisations also valuable. We are not doing this nearly enough, but I think it is important to co-design programmes, from conception to delivery, with older people, whether through advisory committees or more hands-on activities.

**MA & JL: When Age & Opportunity was established in 1988, what was it trying to address?**

TB: In the beginning, Age & Opportunity was more focused on addressing ageism and quality of life in Ireland through a positive lens. It existed without considering the arts until the Bealtaine Festival was founded in 1995, and we have expanded that over the last five years or so. The Bealtaine Festival was and still is very much about properly recognising and marking the creative contributions of older people in Ireland. Professionals and organisations from the arts come together to showcase and celebrate the brilliant work by older people happening in communities.

**MA & JL: What do you feel is needed from a policy perspective to develop further awareness and practice that enables meaningful engagement with the arts among older people?**

TB: Quite often, funders have schemes that cater specifically to younger people. Similarly, organisations have policies in place for working with children and young people in inclusive ways, and staff undergo particular training for working with this cohort. There is even a national day for children's creativity. I understand that policy in relation to young people is fundamentally about educating them so that they can

become more self-sufficient in relation to the arts as they age. But I think it is worth thinking about how this same model could be applied to working with older people. If it is valuable for one, should it not be valuable for another? I must also mention the Health Service Executive, as they are custodians of many older people in terms of residential care, so they have a role to play in arts and wellbeing as we age, and should be part of the policy package.

**MA & JL: What was your experience with the *Creative Enquiry – Arts and Older People* project? And what were some of the key ideas that have emerged from it?**

TB: It was an opportunity for us to get off the treadmill and think with other people about what we do. This was beneficial because it confirmed some of the things we already knew about access to the arts, while changing our minds about other things. It was valuable to work in a longer-term way as part of a wider network of organisations.

**MA & JL: Do you think there needs to be more awareness in the sector relating to collaboration and how organisations can work together?**

TB: A key role of Age & Opportunity is to put people together and facilitate the formation of networks and partnerships. Everything starts with an idea; it was useful to see what's working elsewhere and try and adapt certain projects to other settings across Ireland. For example, we initiated the National Arts in Nursing Homes Day (taking place across Ireland annually in May), which has been highly successful. Our way of working is always through collaboration, because it is richer and more interesting, and has the potential for more longevity. You can't do things like this alone.

**MA & JL: In terms of engagement with older people, what are the current positive aspects?**

TB: I think that there is a burgeoning movement, however small, in relation to the arts and older people, and we all have a role to play in that. There certainly seems to be more and more activity coming from the local authorities, some of whom are innovative and proactive in terms of engaging older people. There is definitely a sense that something is developing or that there is much more awareness, particularly in light of the focus on identity politics over the last decade, and the more recent policy focus on equality, diversity and inclusion. Certainly, the meaningful participation of older people in the arts is part of that broader conversation.

**MA & JL: What are the current challenges or urgencies?**

TB: What is lacking is a robust visualisation of what the sector actually is. We need to know what communities already have to offer by identifying assets and resources that can be used to build active networks and partnerships. This may include infrastructure (buildings or civic amenities); people within the community who have extensive knowledge or access to a wide network of interrelated groups and agencies; groups (associations and institutions); and support services (particularly those that enhance the lives of community members).

Another big task is clarifying and enhancing the role of the Health Service Executive, again acknowledging that many older people are in residential or day care settings. There have been positive inroads regarding the memorandum of understanding

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between Health & Wellbeing at the Health Service Executive, the Arts Council, Creative Ireland and Healthy Ireland. This partnership aims to deliver programming initiatives in support of specific health and wellbeing goals for staff, patients and wider communities.

Another issue is the fact that many opportunities, from residencies to awards, are geared towards younger people. A more general problem is the lack of visibility in relation to older people, while their voices are also significantly lacking at policy level.

**MA & JL: If the arts were to be assigned some sort of value in terms of health and well-being, would that be problematic?**

TB: I don't think there is anything wrong with this, as long as it is acknowledged by organisations that they are serving a particular agenda. If that is how you are valuing projects, then that is how they are assessed and judged. On balance, it is a positive thing that Creative Ireland, however instrumental, has come into the space to foreground the value of participation in terms of wellbeing. I think it is a tightrope between government agendas, which seek to produce an understanding of what the arts deliver, such as health, mental health and wellbeing, and the Arts Council, which is clearly placing more emphasis on access and participation, while acknowledging other benefits.

No art form is completely pure or autonomous; they are all wrapped up in many tangible and intangible things. Access is important because participation in the arts enhances your life and helps you think about the world. Access differentiates because it is not just about health, education or the economy – it is across everything, and that is where the inherent value lies.

**Tara Byrne is Arts Programme Manager, Age & Opportunity.**

## Interview with Eleanor Moore Miguel Amado and Siobhán Clancy

**Miguel Amado and Siobhán Clancy: What is your experience of programmes that engage with older people as a specific demographic?**

Eleanor Moore: In terms of working with older people from an arts and health perspective, we have two programmes. First is *Arts for Health*, a very clearly defined project that works with older people in residential, hospital and day care settings, and also out in the community. This project has a defined budget that hasn't changed; it works very well, so we are trying to learn from that. The second is *Creative Enquiry: Arts and Older People*, which has been one of the more significant ones that we have been directly involved with. Having the opportunity to work with different types of artists and organisations has been really good; it has enhanced my learning around what artists can do and what's available.

In terms of older people and the Health Service Executive, a lot of our recent work tends to focus on physical considerations. We always look at a winter-ready programme for older people within communities, in relation to, for example, *Meals on Wheels*. If something happens in the winter, what do people need? Food, water, heat. Our other activities focus on keeping people well within communities and keeping them out of hospital through physical activities like walking or physiotherapy. Another ongoing project is *Singing for the Brain*, which trains a musician to work with people with dementia. We have participants around the city and county, but since COVID-19, the project has also expanded online. We continue to support the *Cultural Companions* programme at Muintir na Tíre, which allows older people to engage with things that are happening in the theatre, cinema, music and so on. Within our Cork Kerry Community Healthcare Operational Plan, we are currently developing an arts and health agenda.

**MA & SB: From an Health Service Executive perspective, what priority areas do you think the arts could contribute to? For instance, you referred to services for older people that often focus on the physical. Could artists and organisations play an active role there?**

EM: Yes, I think so. There are several pathways. We have Age Friendly in the City Council, with a remit around older people. Our departments are meeting up with those coordinators to see where those linkages might be, and I certainly think there's a role for arts and health there, and also in relation to the Bealtaine Festival, taking place every May.

We also have what we call our Section 39 – the funding element for organisations active in the community. This includes active retirement groups and older person groups, which are linked into a national programme and tend to be very traditional in their activities. They might do bingo or have someone coming in to do music or arts and crafts. If there is a bit of funding offered, they're the kinds of small groups that could avail and be supported in many suburban or even very rural areas.

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### **MA & SB: What do you feel is needed, at policy level, to increase awareness and participation of older people in the arts?**

EM: The Arts and Creative Charter for Older People by Age & Opportunity needs to be approved and shared with everybody with a related remit, including Health Service Executive senior management and the Heads of Services in Health and Wellbeing or in Primary Care. A very clear set of aims and objectives would clarify why the connection between arts and health is important for older people, why we need it on our agenda and why funding is needed at local and national level. We also need health review data to show how engagement keeps older people out of hospital beds or in their homes longer, and keeps them more alert and active in their communities, residential or day care centres. There's clearly a real opportunity to get older people's brains working by exploring and enabling their own creativity.

### **MA & SB: From an arts and health perspective, is there anything specific to the older cohort that you feel needs to be considered when developing any kind of programme?**

EM: I think it would be good for artists to undertake awareness training. This would help to develop knowledge around different kinds of dementia, hearing loss, blindness, stroke recovery or the impact of different medications to learn how one might work in collaboration with medical personnel at day care or residential centres around an older person's specific needs.

### **MA & SB: What else do you feel needs to be done – whether by policymakers, local authorities or organisations – to diversify their work so that it caters to demographics, including older people, that experience barriers to participation in the arts?**

EM: That's a really good question, and it's something we've talked about in community work from time to time. Awareness training around diversity, cultural awareness and LGBTQI+ issues is important. We're looking at inclusive nursing homes for the LGBTQI+ communities because a number of years ago, it was said that many people 'go back into the closet' if they move to a nursing home. I've been involved with Cork City Council and the Cork LGBTQI+ Inter-Agency Group, who hosted the Global Rainbow Cities Network Policy Conference 2023. I also think that religion in this country is changing. I attended an event before Christmas which started with a Catholic prayer, yet I knew there were other faiths in the room. Breaking down those kinds of barriers is slowly beginning to happen, but I think more awareness training around diversity is needed. Within the Health Service Executive, that's something we have to think about constantly.

### **MA & SB: What advice would you give to organisations focusing on health promotion wishing to engage with older people through creativity?**

EM: Firstly, I'd refer them to our current strategies for arts and health. Secondly, I'd recommend that they find ways to clearly articulate the ways in which a person's health and well-being are enhanced by creativity, which also ties into Enhanced Community Care and the networks of health services out in the community. I'd also suggest that they keep an open mind, since artists bring different thought processes and methodologies, so they should have faith in them. I would also advise healthcare centres to visit and talk to other organisations that have hosted or participated in successful projects with artists. Once healthcare workers have been involved in



projects, they can be good advocates because they see the benefits within their own setting.

**MA & SB: From a health policy perspective, what kinds of strategies could be implemented to develop long-running projects rather than periodic activities?**

EM: I think this goes back to my earlier point that if we, in the Health Service Executive or the Department of Health, together with the Arts Council and Creative Ireland, had a clear strategy and map with annual funding budgets, we could support projects with certain criteria. It's perfectly fine to have a six-month project or a year-long project with an endpoint built in from the start; this helps to manage the expectations of both the artist and the setting. However, there are also more open-ended projects that trace an idea across different locations over time. We might decide to revisit that project at a later date and source additional funding so that it can be extended. I like to find a balance of funding that allows projects of different duration, because this allows opportunities for other things to be explored and expanded upon.

**MA & SB: How can we assess societal value, in terms of arts and health, or arts and wellbeing?**

EM: You talk to the participants and healthcare workers to get their viewpoints and input. In the case of much older people in a residential setting or nursing home, you could also speak with their families. If their older relative has been part of a project, they might be more likely to participate in arts themselves. You can actually quantify this impact if you build in time for feedback and talk to people – their insights are invaluable. Similarly, it's worth asking the artists and art tutors what they get out of projects – what they're learning and their sense of value. These kinds of insights should be embedded in our creative strategies and local policies.

**MA & SB: Perhaps you could reflect on what you have learned during the *Creative Enquiry: Arts and Older People* project and how this may inform future projects.**

EM: I learned to trust that I was working with people who had more knowledge than me and that they knew what they were doing. My learning from community work and community development was also relevant, because I've worked with a lot of disadvantaged groups, and I'm aware of the need for projects to be accessible.

The collaboration with Mayfield Men's Shed choir was a really good lesson for me in learning more about artists and observing how the men trusted and participated in the process. This goes back to the issue of clarity, where everyone knows what they're ultimately trying to do, even if things change in the middle.

I also think we need much more clarity at a national and local level around arts and health; this clarity can only come if Creative Ireland, the Arts Council or the Health Service Executive issue instructions in the form of strategic priorities, with space for consultation and feedback on the social value of the arts for health and wellbeing.

**MA & SB: We need to advocate for forms of engagement that are not just based on statistics and data but measured on experience – at the micro level of one person with another person.**

## Section 4

EM: Yes. This also leaves me with questions in terms of how I might communicate this internally in the Health Service Executive. I still don't have an answer, which disappoints me, but it's one of our priorities internally and at the local level – we may make some inroads there. I also think it would be good to create a forum of artists and healthcare workers with no agenda so that people can just get to know each other and how we all work.

**Eleanor Moore is Principal Community Worker, Cork South Community Work Department, Cork Kerry Community Healthcare, Health Service Executive.**





# **Section 5**

## **Resources & References**

## 5.1 Glossary

<b>Ageism</b>	Discrimination, prejudice and/or unfavourable treatment of people based on their actual or perceived age. <sup>10</sup>
<b>Agency</b>	The capacity of an individual to actively make their own choices and to affect change; free will or self-determination.
<b>Community of interest</b>	A group of people who come together through a common set of concerns or passions.
<b>Elder knowledge</b>	Elders are respected individuals who play key roles in Indigenous communities. As important knowledge keepers with living connections to the past, they help to ensure cultural continuity while serving as teachers, healers, advisors and counsellors.
<b>Embodied knowledge</b>	Activities/actions that are possible because the body has learned how to support them, defined not only as knowledge that resides in the body but also as knowledge that is gained through the body.
<b>Intergenerational</b>	Affecting or involving interaction between people of different generations.
<b>Intersectionality</b>	A framework for conceptualising a person or group as affected by more than one identification aspect that may typically be associated with discriminations and disadvantages. Intersectionality takes into account people's overlapping identities and experiences in order to fully understand the complexity of the prejudices they face.
<b>Local ambassadors</b>	The 'magic' people in every community who can open doors and make things happen.
<b>Lore</b>	A body of knowledge or tradition passed down among members of a culture.
<b>Neuroplasticity</b>	The ability of the brain to form and reorganise synaptic connections, especially in response to learning or following injury.
<b>Older person</b>	Anyone over 55, but the use of the term must acknowledge the vast timeframe and variety of lived experiences it refers to as well as the fact that ageing is a continuum, an active process continually impacting us all.
<b>Place-based knowledge</b>	A deep local knowledge embodied in the experiences, social lives, personal lives and work lives of people who live in a place.
<b>Tacit knowledge</b>	Knowledge, skills and abilities an individual gains through experience that may be difficult to express or verbalise – sometimes known as 'experiential knowledge' or 'know-how'.

## 5.2 Organisations & Programmes

Resource	Description	Website
Arts Council	The government agency for developing the arts.	artscouncil.ie
Age & Opportunity	A national organisation working to enable the best possible quality of life for us all as we age.	ageandopportunity.ie
Age Friendly Ireland	An organisation responsible for the national Age Friendly programme, affiliated to the World Health Organization's Global Network of Age Friendly Cities and Communities.	agefriendlyireland.ie
Create	A national organisation for the development of collaborative arts in community contexts.	create-ireland.ie
Artsandhealth.ie	A website developed by the Waterford Healing Arts Trust and Create focused on arts and health.	artsandhealth.ie
Healing Arts Trust	An organisation focused on arts and health based in Waterford.	waterfordhealingarts.com
Cultural Companions	A scheme by Age & Opportunity to create local and voluntary networks of older people interested in the arts so that they may accompany each other to venues and festivals.	ageandopportunity.ie/arts/cultural-companions
Arts for Health	A programme for older people in health care settings across West Cork managed by Uillinn: West Cork Arts Centre and involving various partners.	artsforhealthwestcork.com
Healthy Ireland	A government-led initiative that brings about good health, access to services, healthy environments and the promotion of resilience to ensure that everyone can enjoy physical and mental health and wellbeing to their full potential.	gov.ie/en/campaigns/healthy-ireland/

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# Footnotes

1. For a detailed summary, see *Creative Enquiry: Artist Residency and Older People Engagement Project*, Cork City Council, 2020.
2. Collette Lewis, 'Local Know-how: Part One', *The Arts and Ageing Podcast*.
3. Noel Keohane, 'The Wings to Fly: Part Two', *The Arts and Ageing Podcast*.
4. Collette Lewis, 'Local Know-how: Part One', *The Arts and Ageing Podcast*.
5. Collette Lewis, 'Local Know-how: Part One', *The Arts and Ageing Podcast*.
6. Helga Deasy and Susan McManamon, 'The Wings to Fly: Part Three', *The Arts and Ageing Podcast*.
7. Marie Brett, 'Cultural Lore: Part Two', *The Arts and Ageing Podcast*.
8. Helga Deasy and Susan McManamon, 'The Wings to Fly: Part Three', *The Arts and Ageing Podcast*.
9. Arts Council, *Equality, Human Rights & Diversity Policy & Strategy*, 2019.
10. Arts Council, *Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Toolkit*, 2022.

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**Page 2** SIRIUS residency by Colette Lewis: repair café meeting co-organised with Cobh Zero Waste, SIRIUS, Cobh, 2019. Photograph: the artist; courtesy of the artist.

**Page 4** MusicAlive residency by Helga Deasy and Susan McManamon: workshop, Nazareth Care, Nazareth House Mallow, 2019. Photograph: Richie Tyndall; courtesy of the artists.

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**Page 35** SIRIUS residency by Colette Lewis: demonstration by Kevin Jones, Kevin Jones' workshop, 2019. Photograph: the artist; courtesy of the artist.

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**Page 50** Cork Midsummer Festival residency by Marie Brett: gathering, Civic Trust House, Cork City, 2019. Photograph: Jed Niezgoda; courtesy of the artist.

**Page 55** SIRIUS residency by Colette Lewis: demonstration by George Stockley, George Stockley's home, 2019. Photograph: the artist; courtesy of the artist.

**Page 58** SIRIUS residency by Colette Lewis: demonstration by Kevin Jones, Kevin Jones' workshop, 2019. Photograph: the artist; courtesy of the artist.

**Back cover** MusicAlive residency by Helga Deasy and Susan McManamon: workshop, Nazareth Care, Nazareth House Mallow, 2019. Photograph: Richie Tyndall; courtesy of the artists.



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