

Creative Ageing Conference – Perth 29th March 2011

I am delighted to have been asked to speak about arts and older people today and especially pleased to be here in this beautiful new concert hall in my favourite country in the world! The Foundation hopes to be much more active in Scotland in the future, but more on that later.

Firstly can I congratulate Creative Scotland and the National Forum on Ageing for putting on this conference, which as far as I know is the first of its kind in Britain – so we are making a little bit of history at this very moment!

I have been asked to give a picture of the state of arts for and by older people in the UK but I would like to say a little first about the Baring Foundation and what we are doing on this topic.

The Baring Foundation was created in 1969 as a corporate foundation by Baring Bros. bank and has continued as an independent grant giver since the collapse of the bank in 1995. The Foundation seeks to support people suffering disadvantage and discrimination and does this mainly through strengthening the voluntary organisations that serve them. Our funding is now derived from an endowment.

Since the Foundation's inception it has supported the arts. In 2009 we decided to turn the focus of our arts programme to arts for older people and took this decision based on the findings of a mapping report I wrote called *Ageing Artfully* which is in your delegates' packs and can also be found on our website. As has already been said, older people are not at all a homogenous group, but the Foundation has been especially interested in supporting opportunities for people over 60 years of age who are facing disadvantage or discrimination.

Ageing Artfully is mainly based on case studies of 120 professional arts organisations working in a participative way with older people. We concentrated on participative arts for two reasons. First, most of our funding has been spent in this area. Second, participation, as I will describe later on, may have greater benefits for older people than the general population.

I am aware that by having this focus, *Ageing Artfully* has missed out a lot that is of value to older people in the arts. Being an audience member for instance. The research called *Taking Part* conducted for the Arts Councils, has shown that attending a performance as an audience member

drops off dramatically (!) at retirement age. Amateur or volunteer-led arts have an important place in the lives of older people. It is our belief though that professionally led arts can create a special sort of magic that is desperately in need of financial support as has been shown today the decisions of the Arts Council across the border.

So back to what we did look at in *Ageing Artfully*.

The history of arts organisations working in this way seems intertwined with the community arts movement and can be traced back at least to the 1970s.

We analysed the 120 arts organisations that we discovered by specialism and found that a surprisingly large number, 17, were entirely specialist in working with older people. Most of the rest had engagement with older people as an important and regular strand of their work. It is certain that a larger group again will occasionally do a specific project with older people when project funding or an artist's enthusiasm allows. Since writing that report at least another 120 arts organisations have come to our attention to applying to us for funding for this work.

The arts activity that we uncovered happens in a variety of venues, for instance a community venue or an arts venue, but we concluded that work was rarely shown by the major arts venues and that this unwittingly devalued the activity.

We then looked at the different art forms used and it was clear that work was happening across the entire spectrum and in a highly inventive way. It is worth noting that particular benefits are more likely to accrue from particular art forms, such as balance and flexibility from dance and movement.

When we looked at funding, the contrast with the dedicated funding that has been available for work with children and young people is striking. The pot created by the Arts Council Northern Ireland and our own quite modest fund are rare exceptions to this rule.

Turning to geography it is important to immediately note that both arts policy and older people's policy are devolved matters in the four nations of the UK so each has to be addressed separately, but generally speaking there had been very little attention to this issue. Arts policy almost always neglects older people and older people's policy has almost nothing to say

about the arts. So the wealth of activity that we discovered at the local level occurred in the absence of national support.

I hesitate before talking about Scotland in front of an audience of people who know a lot more about this than me, but here goes

In 2002, the then Scottish Arts Council commissioned a report entitled *Research into Lifelong Learning, the Arts and Older People* from Richard Gerald Associates. This looked at the size of what it called the 'older market' and noted a series of barriers to older people's participation.

So far the Baring Foundation has identified around 30 arts organisations in Scotland with a specific interest in working with older people and I am sure that there are others that we have yet to find. We have funded three of these to date:

- Arts in Hospital based in Glasgow who are holding a workshop today;
- Plantation Productions in Govan in Glasgow and who work in film, and;
- An Lanntair, the arts centre in Stornaway which will look at the importance of the ceildh house to the older community.

I will now turn back to our report, *Ageing Artfully* and what it has to say about the benefits of participation in the arts. I would first like to say that we accept that the arts are important in their own right and that they are about joy, beauty, personal expression and creative adventure. However they have other benefits too and it is only to be expected that non-arts funders like health commissioners have to be concerned with these.

Ageing Artfully looked at two inter-related principal dimensions to these benefits, health and relationships.

The first can be divided into physical health and mental health. There are many examples of work that improves physical health, not only as has already been said dance, but for instance singing in a choir can improve breathing and cardio-vascular health.

In terms of mental health, there has been an understandable concentration on working with people with dementia given that there are around 750,000 people with Alzheimers in the UK and almost everyone would be over 50 years old.. Examples of this include Lost Chord and Singing for the Brain and the Equal Arts organisation based in Gateshead has set up a network of organisations concerned with arts and dementia.

The most important study yet conducted regarding the impact of participative arts on the health of older people was undertaken by Dr Gene Cohen in the USA. It was a double blind study which looked at two similar groups of 300 older people, one of whom participated in a variety of professionally run participative arts programmes and one of whom did not. The group that did participate in the arts enjoyed at the end of the study generally improved health, resulting in lower use of medication and fewer visits to the doctor. If this intervention was reproduced across the USA, Cohen concluded that there would be a saving to federal healthcare budgets of \$6.3 billion per year.

The second dimension (which has a strong effect on mental health) is relationships which we have divided between personal or immediate relationships and community relationships. In the first category work such as that of Ladder to the Moon which goes into care homes, transforms them into imaginary Hollywood film sets and shoots a musical can result in carers looking on residents differently with new insights into their backgrounds and dreams and can strengthen bonds. An obvious example of work at the community level is Magic Me's intergenerational programmes bringing together primary school children and residents in care homes to share the stories of an area. Loneliness comes in different forms and is not confined to older people, but it is more common amongst them and the arts can provide a powerful antidote.

Ageing Artfully concludes with 13 recommendations as to how arts for older people could develop further.

So what has the Baring Foundation being doing as a small foundation operating across the UK and aware of the many dimensions to the issue of the arts and older people?

We are directly funding arts organisations themselves as we have been doing for over 40 years. We were almost overwhelmed with 130 applications for just ten core costs grants last year and since then have taken a twin track approach. We have given another 17 grants to arts organisations undertaking exemplary projects to involve older people, but we have also used our money to create a broader Strategic Development Fund. There are a number of ways we have already decided to use this money and we are considering several more.

Firstly I am delighted to say that the Foundation is entering into an important new funding partnership today with Creative Scotland to

support the participation of older people in the arts and Andrew Dixon, the Chief Executive of Creative Scotland will tell you more about this after lunch.

Next we have commissioned an evidence review of what is known about the impact of the arts on the lives older people and this will be undertaken by the Mental Health Foundation based in Edinburgh.

This will be launched at a national day long event held in partnership with Manchester City Council on 19th October and I can only hope that it is as lively a programme as today's in Perth.

Finally we have entered into a partnership with the National Care Forum and the National Association of Providers of Activity for Older People to look at good practice in the provision of arts opportunities in residential care homes and this will be launched at the National Care Forum's conference on 8th November.

In conclusion, it seems to me bizarre, almost beyond words, that the greatest achievement of the last century, where on average people in the UK will live two years longer each decade, is treated as a problem to be managed rather than the greatest possible cause for celebration. Today is most certainly a day for celebration.

Thank you.

David Cutler