

## CREATIVE AGEING IN THE UK; PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE

I feel honoured to be invited to speak to this conference. I would like to begin by acknowledging the organiser Margret Meagher, as one of the international champions of creative ageing and pay tribute to her great work in Australia and farther afield.

A lot of what I will say this morning will be from the perspective of the Baring Foundation but it is important to say at the start that we are a small part of the jigsaw of what is happening in the UK. There were pioneers in this field long before we became involved and our size is such that we can only act as a catalyst, in particular trying to engage policy makers and larger funders.

Most of what I am going to say will be about what we are funding but I want to start out by saying why we are funding it.

(At this point a short video of work funded by the Baring Foundation was shown. It is from the Sage Gateshead and can be found at <http://vimeopro.com/user11823564/silver-lining>. The video tells the story of a visit by Silver Lining older volunteers into care homes using music and singing. One participant asks for her husband to be brought down from a different part of the home. They sing together and hold hands. She says, 'This is my husband. He is still here inside.' Staff have forgotten that he can sing and read and subsequently use this to engage with him).

There are many reasons for funding in this area, including its effects on building communities, tackling negative stereotypes, reducing social isolation and its positive effects on physical and mental health. But this video reminds us that the arts are uniquely powerful in reminding us of each other's humanity and that they can do this with love.

Many of you will not know about the Baring Foundation. We started life in 1969 as a corporate foundation brought into the world by Baring Brothers Bank, itself established in 1763. With the collapse of the bank we lost 83% of our income and had to rethink our approach. Since then we have focused on supporting civil society to tackle discrimination and disadvantage. We do this in the UK through a social justice programme and an arts programme and abroad through an international development programme focussed on Africa.

After seven years funding an arts programme with refugees and new migrants, we looked at a number of options and settled on arts and older people. Before making any grants I wrote a mapping study called *Ageing Artfully* and I would like to tell you a little about what I found.

There has, of course, always been older artists and older audience members, but it is probably possible to trace back arts and older people as a distinctive area to the 1970s and the community arts movement. This sought to consciously engage with all parts of society and remedy deficits in arts provision for instance in disadvantaged communities. It provided a strong foundation for work with older people. The earliest organisations specialising in arts with older people emerged a decade later and by 2009 I was able to quite easily identify 120 arts organisations across the UK with a strong interest in this field – now we are aware of at least treble that figure, and this is certainly an underestimate too.

So why should we concern ourselves with what might seem to be a burgeoning field in the arts by 2009? Firstly, there is the issue of scale and of need. There are approximately 10 million older people in the UK and we all know (and should rejoice) that that figure will grow rapidly. Perhaps up to 800,000 of those people live with dementia, mostly in the community. Very importantly for me, 400,000 people live in care homes, the vast majority of whom are offered almost nothing in terms of the arts and cannot access the arts without support.

Secondly, we will never be able to begin to meet this level of need without more funding, which requires the engagement of the larger funders and a policy framework which drives this. It is important to recognise that arts and older people are at the intersection of two policy fields and that in the UK both arts and ageing are policy areas devolved to the four jurisdictions of England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Despite this complexity, the state of play has been straightforward – arts and older people has been almost entirely ignored in national policy in all four countries. This stands in contrast, for instance, to arts and young people, which has been the subject of large and successful investment, particularly by the Arts Council England.

The Foundation started off by funding 44 exemplary arts organisations working in this field across the UK from the Outer Hebrides to Cornwall. Much of this work is exquisitely described in one of our recent publications

*'After You Are Two'* by our Arts Adviser, Kate Organ. This is one of a series of free publications on our website, including an evidence review of the impact of the arts on the lives of older people by the Mental Health Foundation and a lovely meditation on arts and ageing by cultural commentator François Matarasso called *Winter Fires*. I have already mentioned the blight of loneliness in older people's lives and we have published a joint report with the Campaign to End Loneliness on the role of the arts in this area.

Aware that we could only scratch the surface through our own funding, we wanted to move on to engaging the most important dedicated arts funders in the UK, the four Arts Councils. The history and context of arts funding is naturally different in each country and our approach has sought to recognise this by being bespoke. What has been common though is the enthusiasm in which our approach has been greeted in each country.

We have jointly commissioned and funded with Creative Scotland a new national, month long festival of arts and older people. Sounds familiar? That's because it shamelessly uses the model of Bealtaine in the Republic of Ireland, run for many years by Dominic Campbell, sitting in front of me in the audience today. Bealtaine is the inspiration of a growing number of festivals, including Gwanwyn in Wales and a festival next year in Northern Ireland. There are also festivals being considered in Finland and the Netherlands and I am sure that this would work well elsewhere, for instance here in New South Wales. The Scottish festival is called Luminare and has just completed an exciting second year including over 300 events across all art forms and several special commissions.

The Arts Council of Northern Ireland was unusual in that it has already run a three year grants programme on arts and older people co-funded by Atlantic Philanthropies. We have contributed to a more ambitious second three year phase of this programme which has just begun. Although funding from Atlantic Philanthropies has finished, new funding has allowed the continuation of the grants programme for three years and the addition of an annual national festival. The combination will be unique and should create a lot of synergy. It is significant, I feel, that that the Public Health Agency has contributed a substantial part of the funding.

We have collaborated with the Arts Council England in creating its first fund dedicated to work in care homes. The fund is for £1 million. This attracted

over 50 applications, though we will only be able to make around four grants. The fund is ambitious and taken together we hope that the grants will offer models for transforming arts provision in care homes. The grants will be announced before the end of this year.

Discussions are at an early stage with the Arts Council of Wales which has for a number of years supported the Gwanwyn festival.

I would like to mention one other important partnership that we have established in this field. The Winston Churchill Memorial Trust funds travelling fellowships in a wide variety of fields. For the first time they have extended one of their annual themes over four years and have chosen to do this for arts and older people. You will find on their website many reports from fellows travelling all over the world seeking good practice on this topic. We will draw all these together in a report and conference at the close of the programme in 2015.

We have tried in a modest way too to support a community of practice among artists in this field. To this end we have funded two major, free national conferences with our partner Manchester City Council. We chose Manchester in part because we support their Valuing Older People Cultural Offer which is an excellent model for other local authorities. We are highlighting the importance of local authorities in this area through funding a number of 'enquiry visits' among a peer group of councils and through a new publication, *Local Authorities + Older People + Arts = A Creative Combination*. Secondly we have commissioned and funded a dedicated website [www.ageofcreativity.co.uk](http://www.ageofcreativity.co.uk) which has a wealth of resources and which I urge you to look at.

Lastly, regarding our current activity, you will notice that I have exclusively talked about the involvement of professional artists in work with older people, with a special emphasis on participatory arts, that being where older people themselves create art. Of course most artistic activity is by amateurs, many of them older people. So we have asked Voluntary Arts to write a think piece on the potential for greater use of amateur or voluntary arts in care homes which we will publish next year.

Looking to the immediate future I want to mention some important initiatives in which we can claim little or no credit. I am delighted about that

because as a small foundation what we can support ourselves will always be a mere fragment of the whole.

Firstly, as you will hear in much more depth at this conference, there has been a major investment in research. This has largely been through the New Dynamics of Ageing programme which has uniquely involved all the UK's major research councils. Five of the studies focused on the arts and the results will be combined in a single publication next year. There is, however, a large amount of other research activity happening, for instance the £1.5 million study starting soon on the effect of visual arts on people living with dementia.

There is a lot of interest among artists in the impact of the arts on dementia. This needs to be embraced by organisations supporting people living with dementia. The Alzheimer's Society has for some time run its 'Singing for the Brain' sessions drawing on the evidence of neuro-science of the benefits of singing for people living with dementia. I am pleased to say that the Alzheimer's Society has started a review of its activity in this field and even more importantly begun a parallel review for the Dementia Friendly Communities programme (a key element of our Prime Minister's Dementia Challenge) on involving the arts.

Next week on my return to London I will be attending a major conference at the British Museum. It will be the culmination of a nation-wide consultation, led by the British Museum, of museums and galleries called Age Collective. This has asked how they can improve their offer to older people. The conference will unveil a new manifesto for age-friendly museums and galleries modelled on the very influential one on making them family friendly.

There are many other developments I could mention, but lastly I would like to highlight a very important initiative by the two English Sector Skills Councils charged with developing training for artists and the creative industries and for care staff. They have jointly funded a study of arts in residential care with a special focus on training. This has come up with a large number of recommendations on how to better integrate arts into care homes which are currently being examined.

After the short term future my crystal ball gets very foggy pretty quickly. On the one hand a generation of baby boomers as they age will do what they

have done throughout their lives – demand more and better. This will apply to the arts which will need to respond. On the other hand in the UK and across much of the world we see a severe retrenchment in public funding and growing income inequality leaving the poor behind and unheeded. Anyone involved in the residential care system will be able to attest to the immense pressures on funding which feel unsustainable, grinding down provision to the minimum. So the arts will have to shout ever louder. The proportion of older people living in residential care is certain to diminish, though it will remain a group with important needs, including culturally.

I would like to end on a more positive note. I am a baby boomer myself, so I know where I want to live if I need to live in a care home. I visited it in Helsinki in August and it is called a Comprehensive Service Centre. There are several in the city. It is large and bright and modern, and in a buzzy part of the city. The most important thing about it is that it offers lots of facilities for the local community. The public lending library with mother and toddlers groups. A swimming pool. A lecture hall/theatre/cinema. A busy restaurant where residents and local people eat the same meals. A series of workshops with tutors, including for metal and wood working and textiles and fabrics. And the arts are seen as integral to this. Artists help train care staff who hence have more interesting jobs (albeit not well paid even in Finland). A professional musician will come in for a relaxed concert talking to residents throughout, not playing the equivalent of World War Two hits but classical pieces and folk songs. His regular visits are just part of a year round, broad arts programme.

But I am not sure that I would enjoy the Finnish Winter, so it needs to be in London. I cannot see any reason why that shouldn't happen, hopefully a long time before I need to move in. It might be even nicer to live in one in Sydney.

Thank you.

This is a version of a speech given to the Fifth Annual International Conference on Arts and Health in Sydney, Australia on 12<sup>th</sup> November 2013 by David Cutler, Director of the Baring Foundation.