



Technically Older an update on digital arts and creative ageing

By Joe Randall

The Baring Foundation

About the Baring Foundation

The Baring Foundation was established in 1969 as an independent funder. It tackles discrimination and disadvantage through strengthening civil society in the UK and abroad. The arts are one of the Foundation's three funding strands. Since 2010 this has focused on arts and older people. A brief account of this work up to 2015 can be found on our website – 'Getting On'.

About the author

Joe Randall is an independent public policy researcher. Joe wrote a previous paper – **Digital Arts and Older People** – while working as Research Officer at the Baring Foundation in 2012.

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Executive Summary

This report aims to revisit and update the work done for the 2012 Baring Foundation publication [Digital Arts and Older People](#). It explores developments since 2012 in the field of artists working with older people using creative technology, and showcases ten exciting and inspiring new case studies.

The report begins by briefly summarising the 2012 paper, which sought to answer the question *what is distinctive about working with older people using creative technology?* That report:

- drew a distinction between the use of technology as a tool and as a medium,
- discussed some of the issues that artists seek to challenge and explore through using digital arts with older people,
- looked at the particular forms of participatory arts practice that are often facilitated by creative technology,
- discussed the particular communities to whom different forms of digital arts can be well suited, and
- examined the limitations and disadvantages to the use of creative technology with older people.

Drawing on a new set of interviews and a literature review – both conducted in the spring and summer of 2015, **the report then considers some of the new and additional benefits that artists today ascribe to the use of creative technology with older people.** It notes that scale is an increasingly important rationale for the use of digital tools and media with older people – both because they can facilitate greater self-directed activity and they provide opportunities for remote viewing of live arts events from non-traditional settings such as day centres and care homes. Another feature of creative technologies that artists have become particularly enthusiastic about since 2012 is the ease with which they can facilitate personalised creative opportunities that fit into a ‘person-centred’ approach to care.

Next, the report looks at some of the continuity in the wider landscape in which artists working with older people and creative technology operate. We note that despite digital arts constituting a large proportion of mainstream arts practice, funding and opportunities in this area are still disproportionately focused on the young. The issue of the ‘digital divide’ between generations remains salient, and with more services moving ‘online-only’ this problem may still be growing. And many artists working in this field still experience particular barriers around the use of technology in care home settings.

Then, the report examines a few reasons to be hopeful for positive change in this external landscape. Many artists are anticipating – and some are already experiencing – changes as a younger generation advance who are more comfortable with some forms of technology. There are signs of positive changes to care home environments in which artists operate, as the demographic profile of care staff also changes. And technological developments – both to hardware and software – continue to make many forms of creative technology more accessible and appropriate for older people.

We then present ten detailed case studies of interesting and inspirational practice that highlight and reinforce many of these lessons, **before concluding with three challenges to actors in the field** which, if acted upon, could lead to dramatic advances in the quality and quantity of creative opportunities for older people in the UK.

Photo courtesy of City Arts (Imagine)



Introduction

Since 2010, the Baring Foundation's Arts Programme has focused on the creativity of older people, with the objective:

to increase the quality and quantity of the arts for older people, especially vulnerable older people

Through this programme, the Foundation has found that there is considerable interest from artists and organisations seeking to use different types of creative technology in their arts projects with older people. In 2012 the Foundation published *Digital Art and Older People*, a report that looked at this emerging field and, supported by case studies, explored the questions:

what is distinctive about working with older people using creative technology?

Since 2012 there have been significant changes to this field, as well as to the wider landscape in which artists working with older people and creative technology operate. This report explores these developments, showcasing new case studies and discussing the state of the field in 2015. It concludes by setting out some challenges to funders, providers and artists themselves about growing the use of creative technology with older people.

This is a different publication to [Digital Arts and Older People](#), and it is intended to be read alongside that report. This report does not seek to retest the work done in 2012 that explored the distinctive elements of working with older people and creative technology, instead it documents new developments identified by practitioners working in this field.

The case studies and conclusions in this report draws on interviews with practitioners and experts in the field, as well as an extensive literature review, both conducted in the spring and summer of 2015.

Recapping the 2012 paper: what is distinctive about the use of creative technology with older people?

Our 2012 publication [Digital Arts and Older People](#) sought to answer the question *what is distinctive about working with older people using creative technology?* This paper does not seek to extensively re-test or re-state the work exploring this question, summarised here:

First, there is a distinction between creative technology being used as a tool and as a medium

- technology acts as a tool when it enhances the practice of more traditional media, often used as part of the process for creating an artwork (e.g. skype-facilitated collaboration between older people to write a play), or for dissemination of otherwise inaccessible cultural experiences (e.g. simultaneous online curation or technological aids that enable or enhance older people's access to physical exhibitions).
- technology acts as a medium when it is essential to the production of an artwork (e.g. the use of an iPad to record or manipulate images or sound and to display these).

Second, there are a number of issues that artists seek to challenge and explore through using digital arts with older people, including:

- tackling the 'digital divide' and enhancing digital inclusion;
- increasing connectedness and acting upon isolation and loneliness;
- engaging older people with current developments in artistic practice, and challenging stereotypes about digital art as an exclusively 'young' form.



Photo courtesy of iPad engAGE

Third, there are particular forms of participatory arts practice that are often facilitated by creative technology, including:

- intergenerational projects, reflecting differences between generations of 'digital natives' and older people, as well as challenging stereotypes around older people's supposedly 'analogue' preferences;
- the use of digital technology to record and create memory and reminiscence works that are more immediate, replicable, and multi-sensory than traditional media;

Drake Music Scotland. Photo © Anne Binckebanck



Fourth, there are particular communities to whom different forms of digital arts can be well suited, including:

- people living with dementia, for whom technology can facilitate multisensory experiences, intuitive touchscreen participation, and simple reminiscence tools.
- people with limited mobility or physical function, for whom some forms of creative technology, such as tablet computers are increasingly accessible;
- older people uninspired or uninterested in traditional media, who can be particularly interested in new technologies.

Finally, there are limitations and some disadvantages to the use of creative technologies with older people, including:

- a concern that many forms of digital art lack immediacy and require further production effort;
- older people's fears and uncertainties around digital technology, and lack of willingness to get involved;
- the care home environment. Care home staff often lack 'digital awareness' themselves, and are not confident or enabled to assist older people with their own self-directed use of technology. Care homes also often lack the basic requisite IT infrastructure for anything other than professional artists' work.
- resources, and the relatively high capital costs associated with the technologies involved for artists, care homes and older people themselves.

The state of the field in 2015: continuity and change in digital arts practice with older people

Artists working with older people using creative technology in 2015 cite new and different advantages to this work

In 2015, participatory digital arts practice with older people remains a relatively new, uncommon and fast-changing area of practice. In the interviews and literature review conducted for this paper, many of the issues and themes we discussed in 2012 arose once again. Instead of delving back into these in detail, in this section we focus on some additional themes and concerns that artists working in this way with older people have identified:

- the potential to use creative technology to work at scale, reaching greater number of older people at lower cost, and
- the potential for these technologies to enable much more personalised opportunities for creativity.

Achieving greater scale through creative technology

The objective of the Baring Foundation's arts and older people programme is:

To improve the quality and quantity of arts involving older people in the UK, especially vulnerable older people

Ageing Artfully (2009)

In 2015 participatory arts activity with older people remains something of a cottage industry in which small arts organisations work with relatively limited numbers of older people. Despite significant improvements since 2009, progress on the 'quantity' element of the Foundation's objectives nevertheless still lags behind the evident quality of much of the work that can be seen within the field.

The Foundation's 2009 Ageing Artfully report identified thirteen areas in which action was required for a step-change to be achieved in arts and older people in the UK. 'Scaling up' was one of these. Many artists interviewed for this report felt that there is great potential for the use of creative technology to greatly increase the scale of artistic and creative opportunities on offer to older people in the UK.

The two opportunities most commonly identified by artists are:

- scaling up through the use of technology to enable more self-directed creative activity by older people, and
- achieving greater scale through greater remote or on-demand access to live arts performances.

Achieving scale through greater self-directed activity

One advantage that artists working with older people using creative technology cite is the potential for such technology to enable greater self-directed activity, supporting older people's ability to be creative in an unstructured way, in their own time and in settings that they choose.

Many older people with acute needs, such as those living with dementia, may be less able to use forms of creative technology like tablet computers without continual support and assistance from specialist and professional artists.

Armchair Gallery Tours. Photo courtesy of City Arts



However some projects – both in care homes, and with older people living in their own homes – have reported great results from providing older people with access to simple touchscreen or audio devices alongside an open-ended offer of support for artistic activities. These activities can range from listening to playlists of personally meaningful music; watching painting videos on YouTube; accessing eBooks where local library services are limited; or using virtual painting, clay-modelling and sound recording apps.

Projects have worked in different ways, but a common reflection from artists and care home activity coordinators has been that the versatility of these forms of creativity and cultural engagement has given the older people participating much greater discretion and choice. Though ongoing professional support is sometimes required, older people using technology to support creativity in their own time often instead utilise support from others who are not professional artists – such as care workers, families and other older people.

To date the Baring Foundation has focused its attention – and its grantmaking – on supporting professional artists working in participatory ways with older people. These approaches are likely to continue to be appropriate and

My house of Memories. Photo courtesy of National Museums Liverpool



needed for more vulnerable groups, however there are opportunities for the Foundation and others to support platforms and programmes that support older people's creativity at greater scale – through more 'light touch' creative technology support and with a reduced reliance upon the time and efforts of professional artists.

Achieving scale through remote or 'on-demand' access to the arts

Much of our media and culture today is consumed remotely and on-demand, however many older people lack the platforms and information necessary to access these. Very few artists working with older people and creative technology can discuss the potential of this field without reference to the astonishing success in recent years of simulcasts of live performances to cinemas – such as National Theatre Live and Royal Opera House Live.

Audience analysis of these (and also web-based live streams) has shown that older people make up a large proportion of their audiences. However for older people with limited mobility, in care homes or who have significant caring responsibilities, even these events are often out of reach. Live streaming of productions to care homes has been done in the past¹, but many in the field feel that in light of the success of NT Live etc, there are opportunities to take this kind of work further and reach greater audiences.

The evident caveat to these opportunities for scaling up is that 'older people' are not a homogenous group, and many of these ways of deploying technology to increase access to the arts are unlikely to be appropriate for older people with more acute needs. However as the fantastic case studies below demonstrate, there are a multitude of ways in which artists can use technology in their work with older people with different degrees of need. Many of these do not aim directly at achieving great scale at low cost, but nevertheless do provide valuable, replicable models that can increase the quantity and quality of arts involving older people where properly supported.

Creating more personalised opportunities for creativity

In 2012, many artists cited the novelty of the approach and the desire to challenge perceptions as some of their primary reasons for working with older people using creative technology. Many viewed the use of technology as inherently interesting and stimulating, but nevertheless also as a hindrance due to the additional costs and difficulty associated with it.

It is hard to generalise across such a broad field, but in 2015 there seems to have

¹ Case Study 2; see also the SHP Live pantomime streaming project: www.thestage.co.uk

been something of a shift. Most artists interviewed for this report emphasised primarily the practical benefits of the technology they deploy, seeing it as a vital and adaptable tool for enabling older people's creativity, and the idea of digital art as a means for exploring challenging or transgressive ideas seems far less prominent.

This more practical tone is reflected what many artists see as the advantage of creative technologies over more traditional media: that they can enable much more personalised opportunities for individuals participating in a professionally-led project. Creative tools such as iPads allow experienced artists to quickly improvise, responding to the needs and different demands of individuals with a suite of apps and activities that allow various senses to be stimulated, and older people themselves to choose the kind of activities they want to engage in.

The shift towards describing creative technology as a tool to enable person-centred approaches to working with and caring for older people is extremely marked. Every single artist interviewed for this work described this as the primary benefit of their digital arts work. Two of these artists contrasted this kind of approach to traditional media projects – where they would either need to come prepared with a huge amount of material, or the older people would have to adapt to suit the preferred style, approach and medium of the professional artist.

But many artists working in this field still discuss many of the same issues and concerns within the wider landscape

Younger people are still the main focus for digital arts opportunities

Technology and digital innovation in the cultural sector is seen as a priority by many funders. In particular, new technologies are seen as tools to find and build new audiences, and also exciting new media with which to inspire and engage new participants².

Despite this interest from funders and being a high-profile area within mainstream artistic practice, digital arts funding and opportunities are still focused almost exclusively on the young.

Both funders and practitioners agree that these kinds of work (i.e. using technology as a tool or as a medium for artistic engagement) remain relatively

² See, for example the £7m Digital R&D Fund for the Arts – a jointly-funded project of Nesta, Arts Council England and the Arts and Humanities Research Council that supported projects using digital technology to create novel business models and to expand arts organisations' audiences. The Fund began in 2012 and closed in 2014/15.

underdeveloped, underexplored and underfunded when it comes to older audiences.

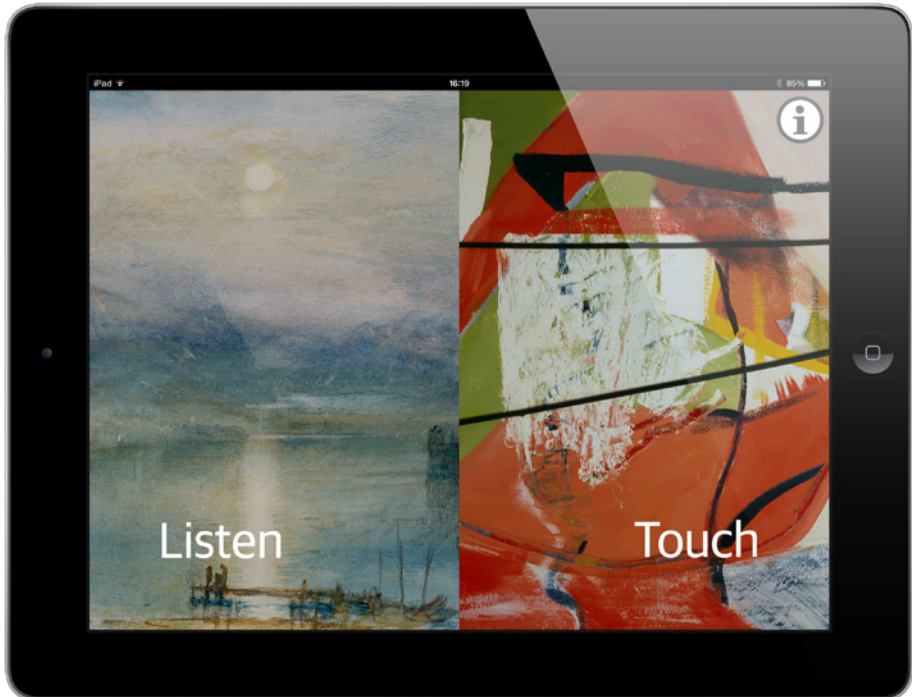
The digital exclusion agenda is still salient

It was noted in the 2012 paper that the 'digital divide' and the 'digital exclusion' of older people was an issue that many artists were interested in exploring in their work with older people. This issue was also felt to be a limiting factor to working in this way with older people, as many older people's fears and uncertainties led to a lack of willingness to get involved in projects and activities using creative technology.

In wider public policy terms, there has been a continued emphasis since 2012 on digital public service delivery as a means of achieving public sector efficiencies, and digital communication has become an even more important means of person-to-person interaction.

It is clear that digital arts projects alone are unlikely to make a significant contribution to the challenge of tackling digital exclusion. However artists

Art Sense Screenshot. Photo courtesy of The Whitworth



working in this field make a convincing case that if older people become more familiar with technology in a fun, stress-free environment, they are more likely to consider it is a positive light and engage proactively. As one interviewee said:

"It's hard to overstate how important it is that older people are familiarised with technology in relaxed settings... being more comfortable with the tablets has meant that some of the more able residents have taken up emailing and skyping with their family, reading e-books, browsing the web."

Artists continue to face challenges in the care home environment

Many artists and practitioners working with more vulnerable older people reiterated many of the challenges of working in the care home environment that were also discussed in the 2012 report. In general, care homes remain technologically-deprived environments where computers and tablets are not integral to carers' work, and residents are not routinely provided with access or support to use them.

Filming of Armchair Gallery Tours. Photo courtesy of City Arts



Even where residents are not provided with access to or supported to use modern devices, the basic infrastructure necessary for using creative technology – alone or as part of a professionally-led project – is not always available. Data on the technical infrastructure in care homes is sparse, but as an example, a 2013 survey found that only 17 percent of care homes had internet access available to residents³. For many arts projects with older people, the pre-existing care home infrastructure doesn't matter greatly – specialist equipment usually arrives and leaves with artists. But for projects using iPads and more generic forms of technology, some of the wider benefits of this kind of work – e.g. introducing older people to technology in relaxed settings and enabling greater self-directed activity – are put at risk by a lack of digital infrastructure. Older people in such circumstances are often prevented from continuing to enjoy being creative in these ways once professional artists have left.

Artists using creative technology in these settings also reported cultural challenges with the care home environment. Two of the most commonly cited challenges are the lack of a culture of creativity in many homes – usually reflected in the lack of a dedicated activity coordinator post, and the tendency of some care home staff to be nervous or even hostile towards participatory (as opposed to performance-based) activities. One digital arts organisation who operate in both schools and care homes noted the marked difference in the cultures and atmospheres of the two environments. While most schools see facilitating learning and creativity as core to their purpose, the same cannot be said of care homes – which place a much greater emphasis, understandably, on minimising risks and keeping people fed, clean and comfortable. This continues to have knock-on effects, particularly for artists working in new and unfamiliar ways such as digital art.

However artists working in this way note some positive signs of change

Generational change means greater demand for digital opportunities

While the 'digital divide' and older people's digital exclusion remain important issues, many artists interviewed for this report discussed a generational shift that they already see occurring, and that will likely continue over the next decade.

Several artists interviewed for this report noted that while over-75s remain relatively excluded from the use of digital technologies, this is far less true of

3 www.ageuk.org.uk

the 65-75 generation. These artists are finding that there is increasing interest and engagement in digital arts and creative technology from this younger generation. Many cite anecdotal evidence of newer arrivals in care homes, who are much more likely to have had PCs or internet connections in their homes, or who have experience of using smartphones and tablets.

It is likely that as this process of generational change continues, demand will grow for technologies that facilitate these older people's creativity and access to cultural opportunities. Some artists are beginning to test ways of meeting these demands, using digital tools and media that are appropriate and useable – particularly for people with experience of technology, and who are now living with dementia. One practitioner also spoke about their concern that these demographic changes could risk widening the 'digital divide' between different generations of older people, who possess varying levels of comfort and experience with technology.

The challenges of the care home environment may be lessening

In addition to the generational effects among older people, and despite the challenges that many artists still face in their work in care homes, there has nevertheless been a marked change in many artists' perceptions of care staff since 2012 – particularly in their levels of comfort with some forms of technology. The 2012 report noted that not only do care staff often lack the time and the inclination to integrate creativity into the lives of the older people under their care, they also often lack digital awareness themselves. In 2012 many artists felt that this caused them to be nervous and reluctant to work with the older people in their care using creative technology.

While all artists and practitioners interviewed for this report still discussed significant challenges that they face when working in care home environments, the overall tone of these conversations was much more optimistic than in 2012. Some talked, for example, about the impact of the continued rise and popularisation of smartphones, and how this has made many care workers much more familiar with the operating systems and interfaces of technologies such as tablet computers. One interviewee went even further than this, saying that care staff in one home were now much more comfortable with helping and participating with digital arts projects than traditional media, with which they were actually less familiar.

Technological developments have produced hardware that is cheaper and more appropriate for older people

In 2012 relatively new, mainstream technological devices seemed increasingly well-suited to the needs of older people. As we said at the time:

Not only are the user interface and software of mainstream technological devices such as camera phones and iPads becoming easier to use, but recent design trends have meant that the weight and form factor of these everyday tools makes them increasingly accessible to people with limited mobility. Many arts organisations have therefore rightly concluded that such tools can, and should, play a more common role in bringing creative opportunities to older people, both within participatory projects, and in their day to day lives.

Digital Arts and Older People (2012)

This process has, if anything, accelerated since 2012. The design of tablet devices make them easy to use, even for older people with limited dexterity. Their many visual and audio features enable multi-sensory stimulation as well as a variety of different means of being creative to suit different needs – including sound, image and video capture, editing and playback. Finally, their touch-sensitive screens create ‘immediacy’ in older people’s interactions with what is on-screen.

Some artists currently working with older people and tablets discussed how changes to form factors in the last couple of years, including tablets generally getting lighter, and the increasing prevalence of smaller ‘iPad mini’-style options, have made this even easier than before – especially for older people with limited physical function.

Another change seen by artists working with older people and creative technology since 2012 has been the increasing affordability of some forms of hardware. Tablet computers are by no means the only technology used by artists in their work with older people, but they are an extremely important subsection of this field. In 2012, most projects using tablets were using Apple iPads. The cost of these at the time was felt to be relatively high – especially if they were to be bought by care homes, or older people living in their own homes, rather than by artists who would use them across different projects. Since 2012 the growing availability and popularity of cheaper, mainly Android-based tablets, has meant that this cost barrier has been reduced, and some artists themselves have also switched to these kinds of devices.

Improvements in software have made touchscreen devices easier and more productive in creative work with older people

Since older people, particularly those with barriers such as dementia, are often less familiar with how to use modern devices such as PCs, smartphones and tablets, much has been made of the benefits of recent touchscreen technologies. Many artists working with older people using digital technology claim that touchscreen hardware such as tablets allow for much more direct and intuitive

controls, which are easier for many of these older people to learn and make use of. However most are also quick to point out that the creative value of these forms of technology is also dependent upon selecting and using the right software, and doing so in an appropriate context and with a 'person-centred' approach.

In the 2012 paper we noted that there was a disparity between the fast-paced development of 'assistive technology' for older people with dementia, and the fact that relatively few of these technological innovations had been designed specifically to enable creative expression. Since that point, a number of artists and organisations have begun to develop bespoke apps specifically to enable older people's creativity. The Whitworth's [Art Sense](#) app and the NML [My House of Memories](#) app are two excellent examples of these (see case studies 5 and 6). By capitalising on the simplicity and multisensory capacity of touchscreen devices, both sets of app developers were able to craft simple, easy-to-use software designed specifically around the needs and abilities of older people living with dementia.

Others in the field have focused not on developing new apps, but on marshalling knowledge of different pre-existing apps. The 2012 paper featured the Memory Apps for Dementia project, an initiative of [Alive! Activities](#) (see case study 7) – which aimed to collect together and share ideas for using touchscreen technology to benefit individuals with memory difficulties. Another organisation in this space – [iPad engAGE](#) (see Case Study 1) – has also published a list of apps⁴ for organisations and individuals to try out in their settings, primarily focused at people living with dementia.

Nearly all artists who work with tablets and apps (whether bespoke or not) nevertheless emphasise that this kind of work requires experience, an understanding of context, and a willingness to follow a non-directive, person-centred approach. The NML app, for example, is accompanied by a wider training programme for carers on practical memory activities, as well as non-digital resources and toolkits. iPad engAGE provide training on their own model for using iPads in care environments. They emphasise the deep experience that an artist or carer needs so they are able to accurately assess different individuals' needs and capabilities and respond to this with a tailored creative experience using appropriate apps.

⁴ This list of apps can be found here: ipad-engage.blogspot.co.uk

Case studies

Case Study 1: iPad engAGE

iPad engAGE aims “to inspire creativity through iPads” in order to improve engagement and digital confidence. iPad engAGE is particularly focused on individuals living with dementia, though they also run ‘silver’ workshops aimed at the over-50s, to help them become more confident in using iPads.

Claire Ford, the founder of the project, began experimenting with iPads while working with older people living with dementia using more traditional artistic media. She found that traditional media didn’t enable her to improvise quick enough in response to the incredibly diverse needs of the older people she was working with. She found that iPads were extremely flexible, multisensory tools that allowed for touch, sound and visual stimulation and engagement. After working with iPads for a while, other benefits of this way of working became apparent – particularly the sense of fun, playfulness and curiosity that they can engender.

iPad engAGE have developed a model for working with older people living with dementia through a person-centred approach. Through the iPad engAGE toolkit and the organisation’s extensive knowledge of pre-existing apps, many of which were not designed with older people specifically in mind, artists and carers bring together a personalised package of different apps to give an older person a set of creative opportunities that respond to their aims, capacity and needs.

In addition to running projects directly, iPad engAGE now provide training and support for carers and others to set up their own iPad projects in different settings.

You can find out more about the work of iPad engAGE on their website, here: ipad-engage.blogspot.co.uk

Case Study 2: Imagine Live Streaming

City Arts, an arts charity based in Nottingham, lead the consortium delivering Imagine – a three-year programme of arts activities for care home residents in Nottingham, jointly funded by the Baring Foundation and Arts Council England. One project that City Arts is leading within the Imagine programme is the live streaming of concerts directly into Abbeyfield (the care home partner in the consortium) care homes.

In March 2015 a trial was conducted in which Ingrid Jacoby's piano concert in the Royal Concert Hall was streamed into the Millbeck House care home, in partnership with local organisations Notts TV, Spool Films and the Confetti Institute of Creative Technologies.

One of the Imagine programme's primary aims is to engage older people in care in cultural activities and events within their community. Care home staff in Millbeck House worked to recreate the atmosphere of the live venue, and the audience in the care home were directly acknowledged and welcomed from the stage in the Concert Hall itself. Rooting the livestreaming project in the local community, and allowing for a degree of interaction between the two venues meant that residents felt close to the performance, and gave it a different character to simply watching a concert on television.

"Today has meant a lot to me, especially as I am no longer able to attend events such as this. It was amazing that the pianist could remember all of her pieces – incredible! I would certainly welcome more events like this and with it being live you really felt part of something."

Betty, Millbeck House resident

This project indicates that local livestreaming projects can form a distinctive but complementary addition to the recent growth in cinema and home-viewing of livestreamed productions from high profile venues such as the Royal Opera House and the National Theatre. The Imagine consortium have plans to further develop these opportunities and have planned another livestreamed concert in Spring 2016, with the potential for other forms of performance to follow in the future.

One issue that was encountered in this project, which may have implications for the wider take-up of livestreaming opportunities in care homes, is the lack of high quality internet connections in many care homes. While on the venue-side, there is generally the right technological infrastructure to support filming and livestreaming, many care homes currently lack the high-speed broadband connections necessary to enable this kind of work.

Find out more about Imagine, and the livestreaming project here: imaginearts.org.uk

Case Study 3: Drake Music Scotland

Drake Music Scotland are a charity that aims to transform people's lives through the power of music. They work with children and adults with disabilities, creating opportunities for them to learn, compose and perform music independently. They are experts in inclusive and adaptive music technologies, and use a range of innovative digital tools to enable the people they work with participate in musical activities on an equal basis with others, and to develop their creativity.

Drake Music Scotland primarily work with young people with disabilities, and deliver projects across a range of special and mainstream schools in Scotland. For some time now they have also had a partnership with West Lothian Council, working in day centres and care homes with older adults, many of whom are living with dementia. Their work in these settings ranges from participatory activity sessions through to installations and exhibitions.

Drake Music Scotland's latest exhibition featuring their work with older people was [Transmission](#) – an audio-visual installation piece exploring the relationship between music and memory. Transmission was created by composer Niroshini Thambar, in collaboration with photographer Anne Binckebanck, incorporating music and sounds that were created by older people living in West Lothian care homes.

Drake Music Scotland say that their work in these settings counters many lazy assumptions about older people and their willingness and desire to use technology and be creative in new and different ways. In addition to acoustic instruments, and intuitive learning techniques such as Figurenotes notation¹, older people working with Drake Music Scotland create music using a number of creative technologies:

- **Soundbeam.** [The Soundbeam](#) is a musical instrument that uses motion sensors and switches to translate body movements into music and sound. It was designed specifically around the needs of people with limited motor control or movement, and it allows them to play music expressively.
- **Skoogs.** [The Skoog](#) is a soft, tactile, colourful, and touch-sensitive cube that enables musicians of all abilities to explore sounds and play music. The Skoog is highly adaptable – different coloured buttons are programmed from a vast bank of sounds and instruments and it can be played by people with different degrees of mobility, who control sounds through pressing, squeezing, rubbing, stroking, tilting or shaking the Skoog in different ways.
- **Thumbjam.** [Thumbjam](#) is an intuitive, easy-to-use music creation app for iOS. The interface is split into lined sections, where each section plays a note when hit. The app only displays notes of the selected key, with no gaps between notes, making it extremely easy to play. The app is also adaptable for people with different degrees of mobility – allowing you to adjust the size and number of the sections on screen. And by making use of tilt and shake functionality of the iPad to add

vibrato, tremolo, note bends, and volume swells, it allows for expressive, immersive interactions.

Drake Music Scotland have found that many of these tools and techniques from their work with children translate well into their work with older people. However, particularly when using complex equipment like soundbeams – which require space and time to set up, with laptops, wires, MIDI connectors and speakers – they have found the care home environment a challenging one to work within. Because of this, they now predominantly use more portable equipment such as iPads, as they have found these technologies better suited to the spaces available in care homes, and more conducive to tailored, one-to-one working with older people.

To find out more about Drake Music Scotland, click here: drakemusicscotland.org

Case Study 4: Imagine Armchair Gallery Tours

City Arts, Abbeyfield and Nottingham City Council – the primary partners in the Imagine programme (see Case Study 2) have teamed up with iPad engAGE (Case Study 1) and artists Sam Metz and Andrea Haley to jointly deliver a project that will bring the experience of visiting and exploring galleries and collections directly to older people living in care homes.

This project is still in its start-up phase, and the team are working to create opportunities for people living in care homes to participate in tutored virtual visits of museum and art gallery collections and exhibitions. The project partners' aims are

...to enhance participants' communication skills and raise their curiosity about digital technology and engagement through the arts.

Imagine Arts website

The team have brokered an initial partnership with Chatsworth House – the home of the Duke and Duchess of Devonshire. For the first virtual tour, the Duke and Duchess will select their favourite pieces from the Chatsworth collection, and personally introduce a series of short films and photographs that reveal and explain these to the virtual visitors.

Imagine intend that Chatsworth House is the first of a number of venues that will come together to form a 'Grand Tour' of museums and galleries, accessible by older people living in care. They are in discussions with a number of other venues that could form the next locations on this tour.

The team intend that in addition to the virtual tour, specific pieces of work from different venues will form the focus of interactive workshops with older people in care homes. Initially these would be led by the artists involved in the project, but in the longer term they intend to train and enable care home activity co-ordinators themselves to offer similar opportunities, widening the reach of the project. The team are also exploring the development of a tablet app for longer term use as an outcome of the work.

To find out more about the Armchair Gallery Tours, click here: imaginearts.org.uk

Case Study 5: My House of Memories App

National Museums Liverpool have, as part of their House of Memories programme, designed and released a free app that allows people living with dementia and their carers to explore objects from the past and share memories together.

House of Memories is a dementia awareness training programme, pioneered by National Museums Liverpool. Through partnerships with museums around the country, the programme provides health, social care and housing workers with practical skills and access to cultural resources, helping them to support others to live well with dementia.

Museums across the UK are expert at recording and caring for people's memories - whether they are thousands of years old or within 'living memory'. Great museums enable people to explore and connect their histories, to engage in relevant and meaningful cultural activity.

[House of Memories website](#)

Primarily a one-day interactive training programme, House of Memories also equips participants with resources to take back into care settings. These include:

- **Memory toolkit.** Participants are provided with a 'how to' guide for designing and running memory activities in different settings.
- **Memory suitcase.** Local museums run object loan programmes, with suitcases containing objects, memorabilia and photographs to help carers engage with the people living with dementia.
- **The My House of Memories app.** A cross-platform, multimedia app that allows older people and carers to virtually browse museums' collections, and save objects

to personalised memory trees, boxes or timelines.

The app allows older people and their carers to browse through curated objects from the 1920s to the 1980s, supplied by a range of UK museums. The objects stimulate memories and spark conversations, and the app encourages older people and carers to work together to build, save and display objects in memory trees, boxes or timelines.

The app is designed specifically around the needs of people living with dementia. There are simple touchscreen controls, and objects are accompanied by music, sound effects, videos and narration, which provide multisensory stimulation.

The app also acts as an ongoing learning device for carers and families. It includes a dementia awareness guide, tips and ideas and resources for memory activities, as well as an interactive quiz and a number of informative films.

The app is cross platform and free to download on both iOS and Android devices. You can find out more about the app, or download it, here:

www.liverpoolmuseums.org.uk

Case Study 6: Whitworth Art Sense app

The Whitworth, part of the University of Manchester, strives to be an age-friendly place, and has a stellar record of engagement and research with older people⁵. In 2013, in partnership with the Workers' Educational Association, they launched an iPad app designed to bring items from the Whitworth's collection directly into the reach of older adults living with dementia.

The app – Art Sense – is free to download, and available on iOS. While the app can therefore be downloaded and used by anyone, it is rooted in the idea that sensory play – free from rules, and engaging different senses, is particularly beneficial to people with dementia by triggering memories and reducing anxiety.

The team behind the app were concerned that in many settings the tactile, resources used with older people for sensory play were inappropriate – such as toys designed for children. The app brings some of the Whitworth's vast collection into the hands of older people themselves, enabling them to engage with age-appropriate material in an interactive way. Users are able to explore touch or audio-focused sections of

5 See, for example their Handbook for Cultural Engagement with Older Men (2015), accessible here: <http://documents.manchester.ac.uk/display.aspx?DocID=24251>

the app. In one half of the app users can listen to sounds that reflect and enhance the paintings and images they are looking at, and in the other half of the app, they interact with content that is brought to life through touch – e.g. by adding colour to paintings where they are touched, or by manipulating a virtually-hanging tapestry.

To ensure that content was engaging and appropriate, it was selected (and the interface tested) in partnership with older people themselves. The app at present contains a relatively modest selection of content. This is partly due to the team's desire to keep the end product as simple and easy-to-use as possible, however they are keen to explore the possibility of adding additional features or content to the app in the future.

You can find out more about the app and download it here: itunes.apple.com

Case Study 7: Alive Activities' Guided Reminiscence sessions

Alive! Activities are a Bristol-based charity that aims to improve the quality of life for older people in care by enabling their participation in meaningful activity. They do this by playing a championing role – advocating for activities, reminiscence and life story work with older people, training others to run these sessions, and by running activity sessions themselves in over 350 care homes and day centres.

Alive! place digital technologies at the heart of their reminiscence sessions, making use of iPads, video projectors and the internet. According to Alive! digital technologies bring unique advantages to guided reminiscence work, helping older people relive their experiences and reinvigorating their memories in a more direct, meaningful way. The internet allows for a responsive, person-centred approach – where the input and direction of older people themselves dictates the images they see projected onto screens or on the iPad in front of them.

The internet is an unlimited resource for reminiscence materials and it enables us to respond instantly to requests, so the content of the session is in the hands of the residents. We use sites such as Google Earth, and Google Street View to show residents where they grew up or got married, Wikipedia to pursue their interests and YouTube to search for and play films that residents recognise from their youth.

Alive! Activities website

Alive! also emphasise how digital projection facilitates sharing and conversations between older people in their sessions. Exploring individuals' memories and stories via projected images allows all present to identify shared experiences and interests, and creates a focus for open, inclusive conversations.

In September 2015, Alive! will launch a new pilot of a intergenerational project based around the iPad, called 'iPals'. iPals will connect care home residents with local primary school children through the use of iPads. As well as learning how to use iPads to access the wider world, the project aims to help the older people involved to "re-connect with their identities, passions and interests and to develop fulfilling relationships with the younger generation."

To find out more about Alive! Activities' work, visit their website here:

aliveactivities.org

Case study 8: Playlist for Life

Playlist for Life are an Edinburgh-based charity, established in 2013 by the journalist and broadcaster Sally Magnuson, who had been struck when her late mother was living with dementia by the effect that personally meaningful music had on her. The organisation was founded on the idea that being able to respond to music is the one thing dementia cannot destroy, and that development and widespread availability of personally meaningful music for people living with dementia will benefit the economy and wider society.

Playlist for Life recognise that music is a powerful tool for supporting people living with dementia. They have researched and collected evidence that when a person living with dementia is given access to music that was important in their past life, they often become more relaxed, their memory can improve and they experience a range of other benefits.

It's been shown that if people with dementia are offered frequent access to the music in which their past experience and memories are embedded, it can:

- ***Improve their present mood.***
- ***Improve their awareness.***
- ***Improve their ability to understand and think.***
- ***Help their sense of identity and independence.***

[Playlist for Life website](http://playlistforlife.org)

In addition to encouraging and conducting rigorous research into the effects of music

on people living with dementia, Playlist for Life also advocate for these older people to be given iPods, enabling easy access to personally-meaningful music. The organisation runs a donation scheme for old, unwanted iPods, and have developed a model – along with training – for carers and families to support people living with dementia by compiling and sharing a playlist that taps into their life story.

Playlist for Life emphasise that an older person having access to a playlist of meaningful music is not the only benefit of their work. It is well-documented that older people – particularly those living with dementia – are often socially isolated and lack human interaction. The act of sharing a playlist brings them closely together with their loved ones and carers, and the process of thoughtfully compiling a unique playlist helps their loved one get to know them better and respect their individuality and identity.

Playlist for Life have recently partnered with Glasgow Caledonian University to begin development of a Playlist for Life app. The aim is that this app will be centred on music, delivering a ‘personal music intervention from diagnosis to end of life’. In addition to the all-important playlist function, the app will contain additional information about an individual’s identity – including photographs, videos, and autobiographical information, and it will be designed to assist future research into the effects of music on people living with dementia.

To find out more about Playlist for Life, visit their website here: playlistforlife.org.uk

Case Study 9: mix@ges

mix@ges was a project that ran from 2011 to 2013 across five EU countries: Scotland, Germany, Austria, Slovenia and Belgium. Funded by the European Union, mix@ges involved a consortium of partners who together explored techniques for facilitating intergenerational bonding via creative new media.

The project aimed to test different ways creating and running intergenerational projects, facilitated by creative technology. It worked by the five project partners each running a series of three experimental workshops in collaboration with local artists, museums, schools and community groups. The common thread for each of these workshops was that adolescents and older people were invited to explore creative technology together, and in doing so, to develop new relationships and mutual understanding across the age groups.

Given the sheer range of techniques and artistic practices that were used across

the workshops, we cannot summarise them all here. All aimed in different ways to produce digital products – including film made using iPods, digital museum guides, app designs, art blogs, wikis, digital music and photography. Some of the workshops were facilitated using specialist software, such as [Modul8](#) – which allows artists to create real-time video performance (“veejaying”), and [tagtool](#) – which facilitates live drawing and animation performances.

The mix@ges approach was based on the understanding that simply bringing together different generations is insufficient to create genuine, shared, intergenerational dialogue. The use of creative technology allowed them to appeal to the generations in different ways – both where the technologies were equipment commonly used by participants (particularly the younger generation) already and pre-existing expertise could be utilised and shared; and where the technologies were new to both generations and they were able to learn from scratch together and benefit from this shared experience.

While the workshops conducted as part of this project focused specifically on creativity rather than lessening the digital divide between generations. However, reflecting other organisations’ similar experiences, they note that these creative opportunities nevertheless produced the incidental benefit of improving older people’s digital skills:

Participants acquired media skills incidentally and in a very playful and joyful manner. ... They learned from each other – the non-formal cultural setting helped older people to overcome their fears of digital media and opened up to them access to technology in a meaningful way. The younger participants supported them in this.

The mix@ges Experience: how to promote intergenerational bonding through creative digital media (Fricke, Marley, Morton, Thomé)

The mix@ges partners produced a final report, full of practical and technical tips for creating intergenerational bonding experiences with new media, and which incorporates specific reflections on the different workshops that were run as part of the project. The report draws out specific lessons that were learned and eight ‘inspirational themes’ that are intended to act as a practical checklist for other organisations seeking to work in this way in the future.

You can find out more about the mix@ges workshops and partners, and download resources from the project – including their final report – at their website here: mixages.eu

Case Study 10: Silver Stories

The Silver Stories Research Partnership, which ran from 2013 to 2015, was a cross national partnership of nine organizations, led by the University of Brighton and funded by the EU. The aim of the partnership was to expand the use of digital storytelling with community groups and elderly people. It did this by bringing together practitioners with different types of expertise – including digital storytelling, community engagement and education – to educate and instruct carers and training professionals in digital storytelling techniques.

To Silver Stories, digital storytelling is a person-centred approach. By placing an introduction to basic digital skills within a playful and creative environment, and by giving people the freedom to choose and direct their own storytelling, this method builds older people's digital capabilities, confidence and self-esteem.

The term Digital Storytelling describes a simple, creative process through which people with little or no experience of computers, gain skills needed to tell a personal story as a two-minute film using predominantly still images that can be streamed on the web, broadcast on television, or exhibited in a gallery. The stories are deeply personal and sometimes this is the first time they have been told. Usually narrated by the storyteller, they chronicle everything from school days to celebrating much loved pets, mourning the loss of a loved one, or the difficulties of caring for someone with Alzheimer's.

Silver Stories website

The project aimed to expand the use of digital storytelling with older people by running a series of 'train the trainer' workshops and events – equipping carers and their trainers with the tools and capabilities to assist older people themselves to become digital storytellers.

In addition to training materials produced by the partnership, and the pool of new trainers who passed through the Silver Stories workshops, the project also led to the direct creation of a catalogue of stories themselves. Six of these stories from each of the six participant countries (UK, Romania, Slovenia, Denmark, Finland, Portugal) were displayed in an exhibition at the end of the project, held in August 2015 in the Grand Parade gallery in Brighton, in which portraits of the storytellers accompanied the video stories, alongside an explanation of why they told their story.

To find out more about the Silver Stories partnership and digital storytelling techniques, visit their website here: arts.brighton.ac.uk

Conclusion

This report aimed to revisit and update the work done for the 2012 Baring Foundation publication [Digital Arts and Older People](#), exploring developments in the field and showcasing exciting and inspiring new case studies. The research undertaken for this report has reinforced many of the conclusions of that previous report about the opportunities – as well as the challenges – of participatory digital arts practice involving older people. However, given the developments in the field since 2012, such as improvements in technology and the slow generational shift underway, we can now go further and conclude that the potential for using creative technology to improve the quality and quantity of older people's access to the arts is greater than ever.

Nevertheless, despite these good prospects, there are still relatively few examples of participatory arts practitioners making use of creative technologies while working with older people. This field in 2015 is under-resourced and under-developed, therefore its potential remains under-exploited.

This report will therefore conclude with three challenges, issued to different actors within this field, and which, if acted upon, could lead to dramatic advances in the quality and quantity of creative opportunities for older people in the UK:

Challenge 1:

Funders must seek to do more to address older audiences directly.

Despite digital media being a high-profile area of mainstream artistic practice, digital arts funding and opportunities are still focused almost exclusively on the young. Particularly where arts funders host digital showcase offerings such as The Space – a collaboration between Arts Council England and the BBC, greater thought must be given to older people's engagement in these in both their role as audience and artist.

Challenge 2

Operators of new, technologically-driven channels for the arts – such as Sky Arts and NT Live need to pay greater attention to overlooked and marginalised sections of their audience, such as older people living in care homes.

There is likely to be a brokering and advocacy role to be played here by organisations such as the Arts Councils, funders such as the Baring Foundation, and artists themselves in drawing attention to this latent and untapped audience for live arts experiences.

Challenge 3

Artists working within this field need to proactively share good practice, and make the case for the value of their work

While – as the case studies in this report demonstrate – there are examples of brilliant practice within this developing field, it remains a ‘cottage industry’ of small, often dispersed and geographically isolated practitioners. While high-quality resources, guides and experiences are made available by some of the artists at the forefront of this field, often it appears that other projects have wasted time and money reinventing the wheel when it comes to relatively common practices – such as iPad-facilitated reminiscence work. For the full potential of this field of work to be realised, this situation must change or the artists currently in the vanguard will move ever further apart from the mainstream.

Annex: Relevant literature

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