

# Older People, isolation and civic engagement



## Symposium Report

December 2014



## Introduction

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In December 2014, with support from the Baring Foundation, Entelechy Arts in partnership with the Albany, hosted a national symposium exploring the potential role of arts and museum spaces in supporting the visibility and cultural engagement of the isolated old. The event will brought together cultural leaders and civic strategists interested in the design and development of cross sector alliances that support communities in developing their capacity to nurture rich and engaged lives for vulnerable and frail older people.

At a time when current day service models seem no longer fit to meet the needs and challenges of increasing numbers of the isolated old, the symposium examined initiatives that place the individual at the heart of a network of dynamic, locally based creative relationships.

The event focused on three questions:-

*How can arts, museum and library spaces become critical points of engagement for the isolated old?*

*How can arts and museum teams work with local government and their communities to support the needs of our oldest citizens?*

*How can older people be supported to take centre stage in this process?*

## Event Structure

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### Contributors

The symposium was structured to give equal value to the experience and reflections of contributors who were working nationally with a strategic perspective, and those who were directly involved in day to day practice experience. This meant that the stage was shared by a line up of strong and varied contributors ranging from Alan Walker, Professor of Social Policy and Social Gerontology, University of Sheffield, Danny Ruta, Director Public Health London Borough of Lewisham , Vicki Amedume, Director of contemporary circus company Upswing and older participants Lillian Bartholomew (from Entelechy in London) and Florence Rimmer (from Freedom Studios in Bradford). The event was chaired by David Cutler, Director of the Baring Foundation.

### Audience

The target audience for the symposium was a national representation of health and social care commissioners, public health and adult social care teams in addition to representatives from the arts and cultural sector. We were successful in attracting a geographically wide reach of delegates from across England from Devon to Northumberland. It proved more of a challenge to achieving a balanced attendance from non arts sector attendees despite direct approaches to public health and commissioning teams.

There were a total of 75 delegates. They comprised of:

- 6 Health Social Care sector
- 14 Cultural Venues
- 8 Local Authorities Cultural Teams
- 6 Funders
- 16 Artist/ Producers
- 6 Strategists: Ageing Policy
- 19 Older people

### Programme Summary

**Prelude:** Two poems from older participants **Rosie Wheatland** and **Pat Errill**

**The National Perspective:** Arts and Older People a national overview, **David Cutler**.

National Policy/ Research Context, **Alan Walker**, Professor of Social Policy and Social Gerontology at The University of Sheffield. He was the Director of the combined research council New Dynamics of Ageing Programme

**The Meet Me at the Albany** model: Short video made by MA documentary students from Goldsmiths College, **David Slater**, Artistic Director, Entelechy Arts: Designing 'Meet Me at the Albany': National and International influences on the practice model. The Artist perspective: **Vicki Amedume**, Artistic Director of Upswing, Contemporary Circus Company spoke of shared vulnerability between artist and older participant.

**The Participant Perspective:** participants and volunteers from Meet Me at the Albany & Freedom Studios in Bradford talked about their involvement in creative programmes:

**The Public Health perspective:** **Danny Ruta**, Director of Public Health for the London Borough of Lewisham.

**The participant challenge:** **Lillian Bartholomew** presented the older participant challenge: **'If not now, then when?'**

**Break out groups focusing on the question** How can arts, museum and library spaces become places for isolated older people to connect with, and contribute to, their communities?

## Summary of Contributions

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### **David Cutler, Director, Baring Foundation**

David presented an outline of the Baring Foundation's contribution to the arts and older people's practice with an investment between 2010 and 2014 of around £3 million. The objective of the programme was to support work that increased the quality and quantity of the arts for older people, especially vulnerable older people. The Baring Foundation has taken a leading role in advocating the case for arts and older people. In 2011 they funded an independent review of the scientific evidence to date by the Mental Health Foundation. This concluded, 'the studies in this review suggest that engaging with participatory art can improve the wellbeing of older people and mediate against the negative effects of becoming older.'

The Foundation has run four open grants programmes initially starting with support for core organizational costs in 2010. There was a huge interest in this initial programme with 129 eligible applications. Only ten grants were able to be offered. The high rejection rate caused the Foundation to re-think its strategy and combine smaller more targeted open grants rounds with more strategic grants, many in partnership with the UK's four Arts Councils. The most recent grants round in 2014 was called Late Style and supported the commissioning of significant artists aged over 70 to work on the theme of ageing.

David spoke of Festivals becoming an increasingly important way to showcase arts work made with older people. He cited the example of the Bealtaine Festival in the south of Ireland that has been running every year since 1996 and one happening in Wales called Gwanwyn. Working in partnership with Creative Scotland the Foundation has supported the Luminare Festival that now hosts over 400 events across Scotland every October.

There has been an investment in work with people living in care homes, developed through a partnership with Arts Council England. Four awards were made from a £1 million funding investment. These have been distributed to Arts and Health in Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly; City Arts in Nottingham; the Courtyard Theatre in Hereford and We Do based in Huddersfield.

### **Alan Walker, Professor of Social Policy and Social Gerontology, University of Sheffield.**

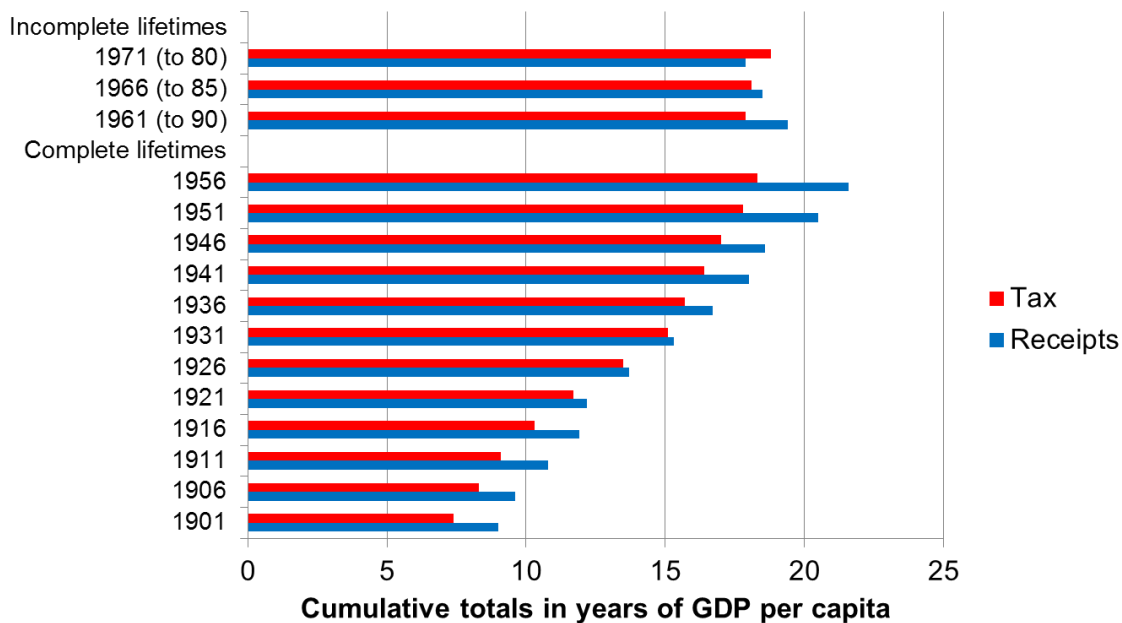
Alan spoke of the journey from an ageing society in the UK with currently around 18% of the population of 65 to a super-aged society by 2015 with just under 30% of the population aged 65 and over. There is a projection of almost 600,000 centenarians by 2070. Policy makers and the media usually start from a burden perspective when talking of an ageing society. Headlines talk of the 'dependency time-bomb', of 'the silver tsunami'. There has been a preponderance of books prophesying doom 'Agequake', 'The Pinch'. One of the narratives is of how the baby boomer generation stole their children's future. Alan outlined the fallacies of the doom sayers arguments:-

- Not all of the baby boomer generation are affluent
- One-fifth are not physically or mentally fit to work until 65
- Older women are poorer than men: they have lower pensions, more live alone, many in homes in poor repair.
- Income and wealth gaps are bigger within generations than between them.

Loneliness is a huge factor in older age. 7 out of 10 older people without partners report being lonely. Lonely people have higher incidences of low income and poor health, especially depression. More people over 80 are lonely. Men are more isolated than women. Projected care costs if nothing is done anticipate a total expenditure in long-term care costs by 2050 of 60 billion.

Alan spoke of a change in how we view the dynamics of ageing evidenced by the longevity revolution, the improved health and functioning of older populations, their higher average incomes and extended working lives. There was a cultural shift that is underpinned by a new science of ageing.

The economic burden myth is challenged by an analysis of the projected lifetime receipts from and taxes for welfare state by generations:-



The key message is that ageing is of course inevitable but it is variable and malleable. Extrinsic and often changeable factors can have greater impact than intrinsic (genetic) factors. So there are lots of examples of the effect of physical activity on disease. For example moderately active individuals have a 20% lower risk of stroke incidence or mortality. Very active people can lessen their risk of colon cancer by 40-50%. Alan outlined the essentials of an active ageing society:

- Focus on the whole life course
- Emphasis on prevention (both primary and secondary)
- The inclusion of both mental and physical capacity
- Ensuring that interventions are targeted at people of all ages –it is never too late.

Quality of life is maximized for older people by maintaining their health and independence. By ensuring that people have the opportunity to engage in social activities, living in supportive, safe and connected neighbourhoods. Participation is key within areas that have good local amenities and services, with access to transport. Having enough money is a key ingredient.

Older people have a human right to dignity and self respect. There is a public policy issue of social justice, needing to ensure that older people are afforded choice and control over their lives. Close attention needs to be paid to ensure that those with a cognitive impairment are afforded this equal right. Dignity is at the centre of an older person’s identity, critically important in the context of vulnerability.

In supporting the needs of more vulnerable older people there are many barriers to good quality care. There include:

- Low rates of pay
- Low status of staff
- High staff turnover
- Lack of training and the cost of training
- Lack of support for managers (CPD)
- Lack of confidence among care staff
- Isolation of staff
- Policy and budgetary issues

These factors result in some care settings becoming a breeding ground for neglect and maltreatment.

Promoting a culture that supports good quality care provision will involve a zero tolerance of abuse and maltreatment achieved by both training and detection strategies. It will involve the reframing of social care away from pre-set tasks towards personalized assistance and support.

There needs to be a recasting of social care as a high status pursuit backed up by increased pay, training and a changed public image. Change needs to be led from older people's perspectives on what they want and value. Older people and family carers need to be involved in commissioning and the monitoring of services.

In summary Alan said that we need to continue to challenge the 'burden of the burden rhetoric' that is often still predominant in our society. We need to understand that the changing dynamics of ageing demand that we fundamentally rethink both ageing and the public policy approach.

The research from the New Dynamic of Ageing programme points the way to a new positive vision of later life.

### **David Slater, Entelechy Arts: Meet Me at the Albany, the key ingredients**

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David gave a brief introduction to historical, national and international influences that influenced the design of the creative day programme Meet Me at the Albany. The 50 week a year arts programme has been designed to be responsive to the creative and social needs of isolated and vulnerable older people. It has been developed in partnership between the Albany Regional Arts Space, Entelechy Arts and London Borough of Lewisham .

The key objectives are to support the visibility and mainstream engagement of isolated and vulnerable older people, to support their agency and voice, to promote their independence and wellbeing.

Key ingredients of the work are:-

- Embedded and sustained practice: staying connected with an arts space in your community
- Older participants, volunteers and artists sharing power to plan and deliver work together
- Working with uncertainty and vulnerability: older people by necessity, artists by design
- The artist embedded within a civic space that is safe and open and owned by the community
- A broad range of referral routes- self- referral, adult social care referral, family referral, GP referral
- Consistent team of 'holding' artists
- A dynamic volunteer programme

'After my stroke I couldn't walk much and it has really given me a purpose. It encouraged us not to stay in the house, shut away but to come out and meet other people. It's a good thing. Because there are some people you know, they stay in their house and the next thing you know they kill themselves because they so depressed. By coming in, see what happened to others, and you mix with them and everything works out fine. So we can say it done a lot for us.

*'Meet Me participant'*

### **Artist Perspective: Vicki Amedume, Upswing, Contemporary Circus Company**

Vicki spoke of work that she had developed with older participants from Meet Me at the Albany following the development of a performance: 'What Happens in The Winter'.

'In the first session I wanted to introduce myself. I shared my story about how I had found circus then gave a performance/demonstration. Afterwards I asked people if they wanted to try some of the work for themselves. One or two people immediately wanted to fly and went into the air, it led to a chain reaction of possibility with more people wanting to try once a few had been up before them. However, as we were working one participant said something that polarized the room. She expressed how she found the idea of asking her to take part in this was not appropriate or possible, she found it frustrating. She had been a dancer and felt that unless she could perform like I did in my demonstration it was not worth taking part. A discussion quickly unfolded around capability, around conscious and internalized judgments, about what how we judge what is and isn't of value or appropriate. Some people talked about how they refused to be limited and others talked about how they felt there was a stigma attached to acknowledging pain and frailty. We talked about adaptation and value, actually we did rather a lot of talking staying long past our allotted time.

Originally when I had talked with Entelechy about 'Meet Me', we had no idea what would come of this process. We knew that the idea of older people taking part in circus with the perceived risks would inevitably challenge people's notions of what was possible but by the end of that first session I realised that something very special was happening. The first session was completely claimed by participants it created a stimulus and space for a dialogue around topics that are hard to approach. I hope in future sessions we will find a way to reconnect with that conversation.'

### **Participant Perspective: Florence Rimmer, Community Performer, Freedom Studios Bradford.**

I'm eighty-one. When I lost someone last September, I nearly went under myself. He was my heart, my whole life. My sister saw an advert for older actors in the local paper and she dragged me to Freedom Studios and got me involved in this old people's play. Now I've got a new life. I've met new people. I enjoy it so much. It is something I should have done years and years ago.

The play is about people's concept of the elderly. People often talk about us old people as if we are not quite with it, not quite in the world of 2014. They couldn't be more wrong.

When I was sixteen it was a vastly different world in Bradford then. I worked in the weaving shed since I was fourteen. I was an innocent girl who always wanted to do some acting. But we were poor and I couldn't do it.

There was a big theatre down at the bottom of Leeds Road. One Saturday morning, very daring, I went down there and went up to this chap who was standing outside: "Do you need any actors or actresses mister?" He said "No". So that was that. I went home quietly thinking: "It's just for rich people." Me Dad said: "you won't get into theatre lass, you've got to know people."

Well after that I met my husband and that was my life. So I must have enjoyed the thought of it at sixteen, the theatre. I'd loved to have acted.

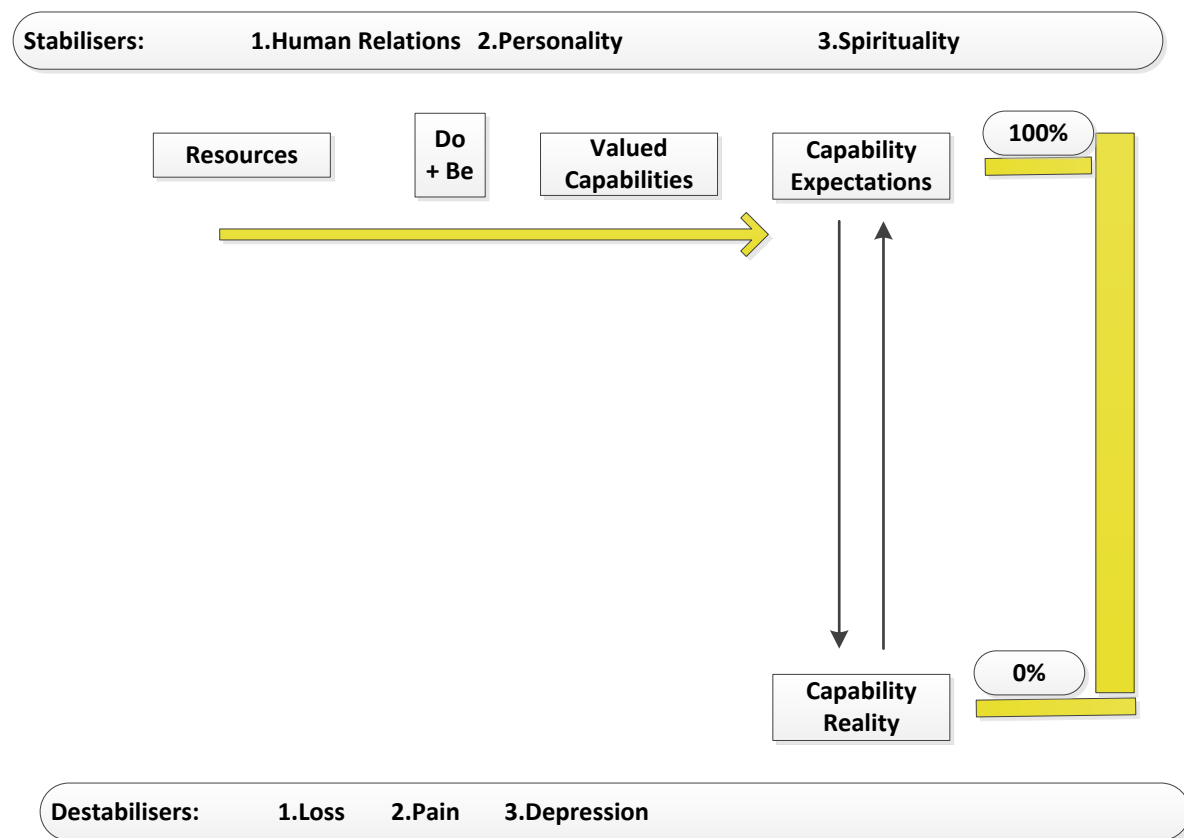
And now I'm here, sixty-four years later, I've done it. And I seem to have got into the part. Not just the lines, I've put my whole self into the person I'm playing. I've made a persona. That's enough for me. I've done what I wanted to do when I was sixteen.

**Danny Ruta, Director of Public Health, London Borough of Lewisham**

Danny spoke about his earlier research practice in the North –East Fife Outcomes project. The programme worked with older adults to determine which outcomes of health and social care are the most important to them. Fifteen years after the findings of this work, he said that services still do not routinely measure the outcomes that matter to older people when we provide care. He said that we need to start asking ourselves ‘What makes life worth living for older people? What are the key ingredients?’

He spoke about his quality of life theory. We start off with resources to ‘do’ things and to ‘be’ things. Value capability is a measurement of the ‘being’ and ‘doing’ in our lives that we value. Quality of life is defined as the gap between an individual’s capability expectations (what you would like to do and be) and their capability reality (what you are able to ‘be’ and ‘do’ in your life). When the gap is narrow you are a happy human being. When the gap is wide you are unhappy.

People are good at changing expectations. When an individual’s reality gets worse they bring their expectations closer to their new reality. The three stabilisers are human relations, personality and spirituality. The destabilisers are loss, pain, depression and personality.



The key message of Danny’s presentation was that in supporting the quality of older people’s lives we should stop and take time to listen to individual voices. He cited stories from his own family and Atul Gwande’s recent book ‘Being Mortal’. When time is short your horizon becomes narrow, your expectations become narrower, they become simpler and simpler. We need to be able to hear and respond.



## Participant Breakout Sessions

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The final part of the symposium comprised of participant breakout sessions exploring the question:

**How can Arts, Museum and Library spaces become places for older people to connect with and contribute to their communities?**

Each breakout session was convened by a specialist with experience in the field:-

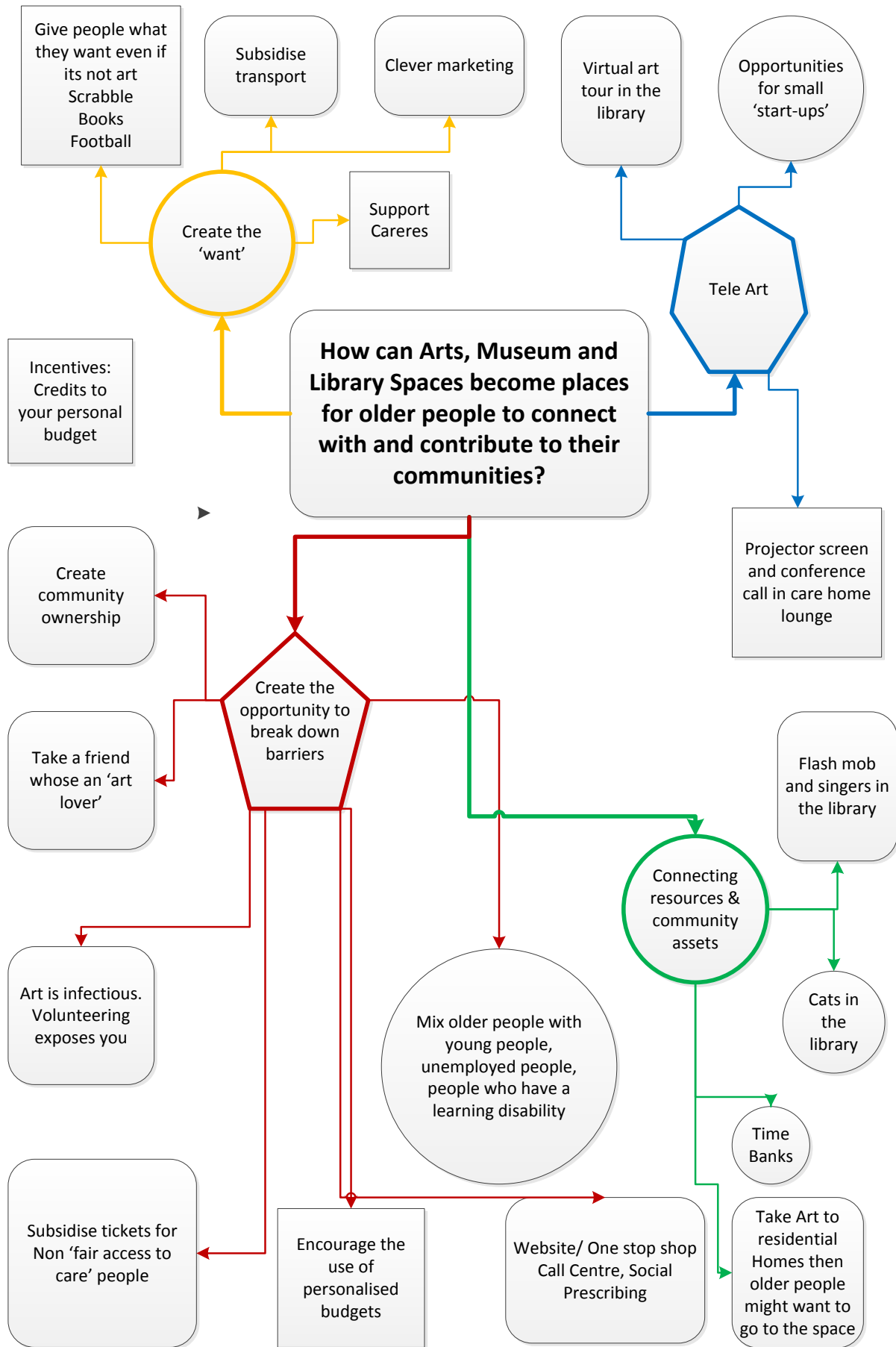
**Alice Twaite (Equal Arts, Tyneside).** Alice is the development director of Equal Arts in Tyneside who have been pioneering work in the north-east to provide dementia friendly arts centres across the region. In introducing the breakout session as spoke of the **Meet Me at the National Glass Centre** programme where each week 20 people living with dementia and their carers have been taking part in the informal sessions.

**Helen Shearn (South London and Maudsley Health Trust)** Helen is the Arts Manager for SLAM. In her group introduction she spoke of the **Journeys of appreciation programme (JOAP)** This is an innovative three year programme funded by the Maudsley Charity, which engages inpatient service users and staff from the Mental Health of Older Adults and Dementia Clinical Academic Group in museum and gallery visits with follow-up creative and therapeutic workshops.

**Raidene Carter (Head of Programming , the Albany)** Raidene introduced her breakout session by speaking about the impact that Meet Me at the Albany has had on all areas of the Albany's delivery and development as a regional arts venue.

**Annabel Turpin is the CEO of the ARC regional arts centre in Stockton on Tees.** She opened her breakout session by talking about the Staying Out programme that ARC are delivering with health and social care partners The project aims to support some of the most isolated people in Stockton, on their discharge from hospital, to live healthy and fulfilling lives, and ultimately avoid readmission to hospital by engaging in arts activities within the arts venue.

**Danny Ruta,** Director of Public Health, London Borough of Lewisham



Summary of elements from the breakout discussions

## Symposium impact, responses and next steps

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One of the principal objectives of the symposium was to examine the effectiveness of the Meet Me at the Albany practice model against the broader landscape of national policy objectives and other creative practice models. There was positive feedback from delegates from the event with over 80% of attendees describing both speakers and the venue as 'excellent'.

***'Inspiring listening to the stories and recollections. Garnering lots of ideas for my own borough and looking forward to the projects that we will work on'*** Caroline Roe, Cultural Programming, London Borough of Waltham Forest.

***'Wonderful opportunity to celebrate participatory arts and initiate and continue a creative dialogue between arts, health and social care and the voluntary sector. Some wonderful work, insights and projects.'*** Sophie Evans, The Plough Arts Centre, Devon.

Practically there are examples of the impact of the event:-

- Essex County Council are keen to develop the Meet Me Model in two venues across the county – the Harlow Playhouse and the Mercury Theatre Colchester. Since the event a senior team of officers have spent a day visiting Meet Me and they are now drawing up plans to implement a programme.
- Farnborough Maltings have visited Meet Me at the Albany and sought guidance in the development of their new programme Meet Me at the Maltings.
- We have been giving ongoing support to the ARC Stockton in the development of their programming for isolated older people.

## Thoughts you might Like to take away with you...participant Lillian Bartholomew

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Older people, left alone in their home can become depressed which in turn leads to health issues and in turn leads to more GP visits, prescriptions, costing the NHS money. At the Albany, you may find the answers. Member's stories in a nutshell:-

"My life began again"  
"I'm a free spirit"  
"I got my life back"  
"It's a home from home"

Help us to find spaces to get together. We that are able will help those who need it. We are good listeners and can share skills with each other. Laughter is the best medicine, so we are told. So we share fun . Things like singing and poetry. We don't judge a book from the cover. We get to know other. Then we hear:

"My emptiness went; a new brightness in my life. When I walked in the door, I was allowed to sing and dance, grow and take risks. It's not just another over 60's club. I could draw. Play a violin and a zither. Young people join us so we share experiences."

Now, may I remind you, that one day you will be walking in our shoes. What we do now is your inheritance. Please don't waste it. Our challenge to all of us: 'How can we make this happen more and in different ways and different places. We have a dream and we need your help to achieve our dream. So please go forth and carry it on.'

**Meet Me at the Albany** is a partnership project between Entelechy Arts and the Albany. For further information on the programme contact Entelechy Arts:

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[www.meetmeatthealbany.org.uk](http://www.meetmeatthealbany.org.uk)

