

Harmonious Place

Art/music projects alongside people with dementia

<http://harmoniousplace.com>



Dundee sense of place video soundscape project 2018

The project:

- 🎵 To make a video soundscape piece of artwork, co-created alongside people with dementia. We wanted to take a joyful, empowering and respectful approach, inviting people with dementia to make art and music with us.
- 📄 We worked with two groups of residents from Dundee council care homes during the idea generation and storyboarding phase of creating the piece. We came together for six sessions to explore imagery and sounds in response to the theme of what it means to belong to Dundee.
- 🎵 We created video sketches from the material generated during the initial sessions and returned to share these with the groups for feedback and tweaking.
- 📄 The final piece is a 30 minute long video soundscape - non-narrative, with a focus on symbolic imagery and sound, co-created alongside people with dementia to be accessible and engaging for people with dementia.

Partners:

We are Emma Ainsley – artist working in performance, sound and video - and John Phillips – musician, jazz trumpet player, songwriter and artist. We work together in a long term art/music collaboration as ainsleyphillips, making videos and performances that squash art and music together. Alongside our art and music practice we have both worked for many years in care environments, both in residential and community settings, and this project has sprung from our desire to serve people with dementia and their carers.

For this Dundee project we worked with Dundee Health and Social Care Partnership at Turriff House and Janet Brougham House, Dundee.

What we learnt:

- ★ Participants had brilliant levels of creative energy, they took-up the challenge and contributed a big pile of great ideas.
- ★ The people we worked with were very open to strange new ideas and approaches.
- ★ Participants embraced both high and low tech tools and resources - they were up for using whatever helps to communicate their ideas and feelings.
- ★ Co-creation is a great way of opening up ideas and sharing perspectives to create something that none of us would have made on our own.
- ★ Participants embraced co-creation as an approach and a concept.
- ★ Participants loved to take a playful experimental approach to developing the work.
- ★ Working with the groups was richly nourishing for us as artists.

What helped:

- ✂️ We created tools to help participants to be able to access and engage with the sessions, the tools were made to ensure that people could engage in different ways including non-verbally – we had large repositionable collage boards to help us all to explore visual themes with images, shapes and colours and a midi keyboard hooked-up to an iPad to allow everyone to explore, mix, and layer sounds and instruments.



Outcomes:

- ⚠️ Participants were actively engaged throughout the sessions, with people staying for the full hour. Staff reported that some stayed longer than they would usually for an activity.
- ⚠️ There was much play, joy and laughter during the sessions raising levels of physical, social and emotional activity. Playfully creating and laughing together improved mood and feeling of wellbeing - participants reported feeling good and having fun, staff reported that participants had improved energy, engagement and mood for the rest of the day.
- ⚠️ The co-creative approach and our tools enabled people to engage and share in different ways. Staff reported that people who don't usually engage in groups were able to take an active part, sharing and inputting into the creative activity.
- ⚠️ Staff said they had gained insights into how participants enjoyed and responded to the visual and audio material explored during the sessions, that would inform their work with them in the future.

- ✂️ We took a clown-like approach - playful, vulnerable and open.
- ✂️ Working as a pair allowed us to ask each other questions and open up discussions.
- ✂️ We avoided teaching or leading the sessions, instead we worked with the groups developing ideas, imagery and audio together.

What next?

- ▶▶ We are developing new participatory music sessions for care home settings. These have sprung from the initial Dundee sessions where the creative energy within the groups in the moment was striking - we're making sessions that focus on making music, jamming, in the moment, with no pressure to make any particular output.
- ▶▶ We are currently seeking funding to tour the Dundee video throughout Scotland next year. We plan to offer screenings alongside talks and participatory sessions - we want to share how positive the co-creative approach was for everyone, share skills and tools, and encourage artists, service providers, and service users to get some more co-creative projects going.
- ▶▶ Our co-creative partners were skilled, energetic, perceptive and sensitive creators as well as being people living with dementia. And through our work and the sharing of it, we want to make sure that more people can see how having dementia doesn't preclude having wit, creativity, skills and unique perception.