

The best words, in the best order.

A toolkit for making poems in dementia care settings.



Welcome

This toolkit is designed to support poets, care staff or anyone interested in running a dementia poetry project take their first steps. We've broken this toolkit down into smaller sections to help you find the info which is most relevant to you, peppered with poems created during our projects to help illustrate our points. Why not settle down with a cup of tea and look through the whole toolkit – there is plenty in here to inspire even the most nervous poetry virgin!

For further information please contact us at

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www.courtyard.org.uk/aop

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WHO WE ARE AND WHAT WE DO

Established in 2011 The Courtyard's Arts and Older People project aims to 'reduce isolation for older people living in our rural county through direct access to the arts'. We deliver a wide range of creative activities for older people of all ages, from regular classes here at our arts centre, to community projects, to longer term projects run in residential care settings.





The Arts and Older People Project is based at The Courtyard Centre for the Arts in Hereford. This unique project was established in 2010 and has enabled local arts practitioners to deliver participatory arts based workshops for older people across the county. The project aims to combat isolation for older people living in rural areas through direct access to the arts, and improve their personal independence by allowing them to become more active, improving health, wellbeing and quality of life.

In 2012 we became the first arts centre in the UK to join the Dementia Action Alliance (DAA), which is made up of over 100 organisations committed to transforming the quality of life of people living with dementia and their carers.

Providing creative opportunities for older people is integral to the Arts and Older People Project as we believe that growing older should still be a time for discovery and rediscovery. Our projects focus on the importance of learning in later life, and how new skills and experiences can provide continuous mental stimulation, which can have a hugely positive effect on participants wellbeing.



It brought some variety to my life - something different that wasn't a game. It had a process and an end result. I was able to show people about me and what I am.

Resident

Participation

The Courtyard's successful mentoring model project seeks to encourage creative participation and sharing of experiences, as well as the development of communication and creativity through working with older people using arts based activities.

We run weekly classes at The Courtyard accessible to older people living independently in the community and care settings.

We work in partnership with other local organisations to deliver projects within the community.

Training - we offer a variety of training and networking opportunities for artists, care staff and carers; aiming to build stronger local communities who have the skills to support older people. These enable creative practitioners, health care professionals and carers to develop skills to enable them to provide arts based activities.

Awareness raising - we raise awareness of older people's issues whilst promoting models of best practice developed through projects we have initiated. We have held an annual arts event '*Remember Me*' during Dementia Awareness Week at The Courtyard Centre for the Arts since 2011.

Venue mentoring - we provide advice and guidance to arts venues that are looking to work with older people and people living with dementia, looking at the venue itself, activities and programming, events, training and evaluation.



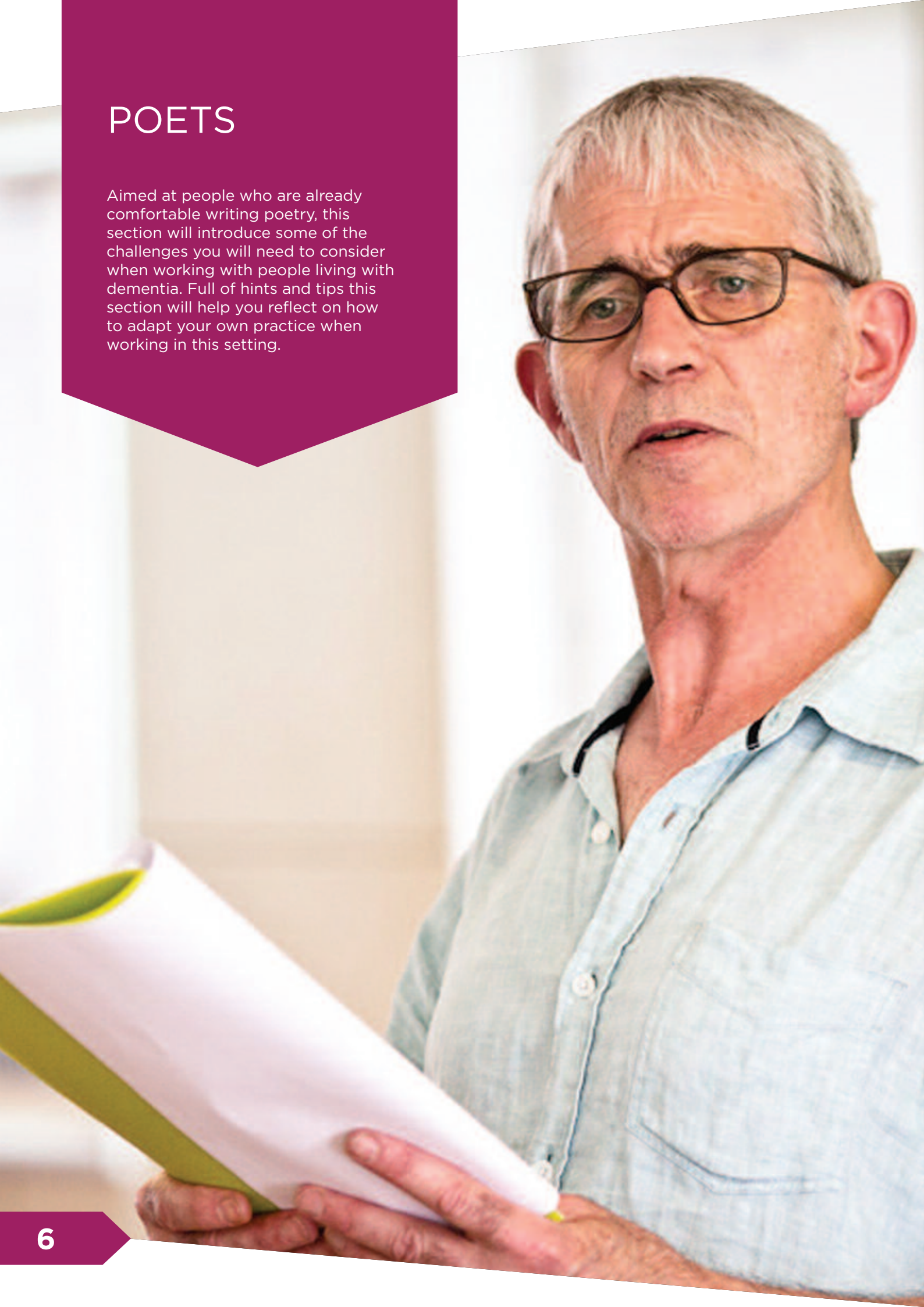
Poetry Mentor – John Killick

For 30 years John was a teacher in further, adult and prison education. Since 1989 he has been a freelance writer. For the past twenty years he has worked with people with dementia, publishing five books in this area, many book chapters and papers, and edited six books of poems by people with the condition.

John has spoken and given workshops in over a dozen countries, and broadcasts on the subject of communication on BBC Radios 3, 4 and the World Service. For six years (from 1999 to 2005) John was Research Fellow in the Arts at the University of Stirling. John is currently a Mentor for *Making of Me*, the Poetry and Dementia Project at The Courtyard and Writer in Residence for Alzheimer Scotland.

POETS

Aimed at people who are already comfortable writing poetry, this section will introduce some of the challenges you will need to consider when working with people living with dementia. Full of hints and tips this section will help you reflect on how to adapt your own practice when working in this setting.





One-to-Ones

This is a personal process, and the poems which result are individualistic. There should be no coercion to take part. The process is a gradual one and based on mutual trust. Most one-to-ones develop out of conversations, and at some point the poet may invite the person to agree to their words being written down or tape-recorded. At that juncture the poet withdraws from talk as much as possible and adopts a listening role.

The task is to capture as much of what the person says in their own words. The resulting written piece (or later transcription) is material from which the poem may be made. If the material has possibilities, the rules are that the poet may omit words or passages, and move text around, but is permitted to add nothing. Repetitions which do not occur in the original are allowed. If a poem results, then this can be offered to the subject for his or her comment or criticism. Changes suggested by the subject must be accepted. Although the poem is a kind of collaboration, it belongs to the person and not to the poet. It is theirs to do with what they will: destroy, keep to themselves, or share.

What constitutes a poem in this context? We are not talking about poems which rhyme or scan. This is free verse, which is concise, vivid, memorable and embodies a person's speech-rhythms, as in the following example:

You may also be interested in using group poems see page 15.

TO GET ME THROUGH THE DAY

Being active is important
to get me through the day.

That's why I'm doing crochet
doing something for someone else.

I don't want to sleep
to get me through the day.

I don't want to be miserable
for the rest of my life.

I'm trying different things
to get me through the day

AUDREY GIBBS

Permissions

Because people with dementia may appear to lack coherence at certain times, the ethical aspects of the work assume special importance. It may be necessary to seek assurances at regular intervals that a person is comfortable with all aspects of the process. It is especially important to institute a procedure where sharing a piece of work is involved.

A person may not want a poem to be shared with anyone and that must be respected. Then there are various levels of possible sharing: with relatives, with other people with dementia, with staff and with a wider public. The means of sharing can vary too: through typed copies, or recordings, readings, broadcasts, or published books and pamphlets. A form needs to be designed which will cover these eventualities. The author of the poem should sign it, if able, or give verbal consent for an advocate or other appropriate person to sign on their behalf. This can then be referred to regularly to ensure that the person remains happy with what has been agreed. Relatives may well be at variance with the decision to share, but unless there is general agreement that an individual lacks competence to come to a decision then the person's will should prevail.

It is rather easy for an inexperienced writer to undervalue confidentiality in working with people with dementia, and staff in institutions may need reminding of this important aspect. It is part of the role of the mentor to keep this moral imperative in the forefront of everyone's minds.

NOT MY BEST SELLER

.....
It was classed by the publisher as 'a great little book',
and the agent went to The American Bookstore
and got some interest there,
but there was no follow-up.
It was about a little grey elephant going across
the plain
but there were walls and tents in the way.

They said it was a great possibility
coming up to the Christmas season.
I should have dressed the elephant up more
It was based on a story I told my
daughter Pippa.

Elephants are the only creatures that grieve,
apart from mankind.
I saw a group of small elephants
at Dudley Zoo and the keeper
told me they had lost one of their number.
They formed a circle and mourned the loss
with their trunks all laid on the floor.

When I was fifteen or sixteen,
that was my most prolific period.
Things come to me in a flash,
and as long as I write them down it's alright.
I've kept a copy of the book ---
it could be my only chance of being known.

.....
VALERIE WALL
.....

Celebrating the work

Of course the creative process in action is central to such a project, and we must never forget that to the individual this can be very special. However, when there is an end product there are various ways in which what has been achieved can be publicised and shared and provide the person with further strokes.

Poems framed and hung on a wall in their room is one way, and the same applies to group poems which can be displayed in a public area. A book or pamphlet can be bought and give pleasure to family and friends. A calendar can be produced which will be appreciated by the same audience. Public readings in a day centre, care home, hospital ward, arts venue, library or any suitable public space brings the material to a wider audience. Wherever possible, the person whose words are being read out should be present. The reading provides the most dramatic means of celebrating a person's achievement.

Anyone whether they have dementia or not is stirred by recognition in these ways. For people with this condition, whose words tend to be undervalued, and whose personhood is so frequently undermined, this has a special significance, an informal therapeutic effect.

I feel certain that sharing the poetry enhanced individuals' quality of life and reduced their isolation. Several of these people repeatedly told me that they looked forward to the poetry, and were – as often – very affectionate and told me how it made them happy.

Poet

WORKING ON PADDY'S MOTORBIKE

.....

We worked at Ross for seven years.
We made a mess.

We had a big jackhammer
on Paddy's motorbike.

There was the captain. He
was as hard as a major in the army.

It's a silly old job because then
we'd have to put it all back.

We dug a big hole once and a lorry
fell in a hole and we lost it.

We used to have half-an-hour,
and twenty minutes for lunch.

Ah, but we used to go ten minutes early
and go back ten minutes late.

If it was good we used to have an hour
and sixty minutes. Which is two hours.

.....

JOHN RUCK

.....

Reading

There is another aspect of the work which is important both for its own sake, and for the way it can feed into the writing, and that is reading with and to people. Very few members of the general population spend time reading poetry to themselves, though when they encounter a familiar poem (often from schooldays) they express pleasure. The reading of poetry is an enthusiasm which can be rekindled with people with dementia. A short selection of poems on a theme (love, landscape, work etc.) can arouse positive appreciation. It may be good to distribute copies of certain poems so that people can follow the text with the reader, and take the poems away afterwards for further private scrutiny. There are some poems which stir memories and arouse enthusiasm, but new or recent poems can also evoke a response. It is a mistake to think that people can only cope with material that could be classified as 'reminiscence'. There is an openness which can be appealed to by the presentation of new and often challenging work.

A special use of reading can be at the beginning of a session. A few well-chosen pieces can set the scene and put participants in the mood for creative uses of language.

Residents were often conscious of having captured in their poems thoughts, memories and tales that are of a key importance to their sense of self. In this sense the poetry is connecting them to their own pasts, and helps them to reflect on life.

Poet

Relationships

All this work is taking place in social settings and the relationships with people with dementia are crucial. Without meaningful interaction true communication will be stymied. It requires special personal skills from the poet. First of all you have to use your personality to make the initial contact and establish confidence. Then you have to subsume it within the creative process, allowing the person's own individuality to shine.

Then there are the relationships you must build with staff within the establishment. If the project is to be valued and encouraged, their role is essential. Staff members who express indifference or even hostility can undermine any good work that you may do. Participants in your project will be sensitive to such expressions of disapproval in word or body language by those with whom they share the facility in all the hours when you are not present. Time spent 'winning over' staff is time well spent. Go out of your way to speak to them when you are on the premises, show appreciation of their role, and tell them about your aims, objectives, problems and achievements. This will break down barriers. An initial session in which you take them into your confidence, help them to get to know you, and give some examples of what is possible from other projects, can be very valuable. You won't get everybody there, but if you make a good impression, the word will soon get around. Try especially hard to get the manager to participate, and if other pressures prevent it, go out of your way to obtain an individual interview with him/her.

It is very possible that relatives will drop in specially, or find that their visits coincide with yours, and want to see what is going on, or even express the desire to participate; such engagement is welcome, but you must make clear that you are in charge of the proceedings, and outline the parameters of their involvement. You may well have to fend off criticisms of certain aspects of the project visitors to the group stepping in and speaking for them when their relative is struggling to express something, or objecting to the lack of veracity. Be prepared, keep calm, stand your ground, and always remember the primary beneficiary of the project is the person with dementia, whose needs outweigh those of anyone else in this situation.

AND THIS IS MY FAMILY

And this is my family
They're marvellous
They're my family and I love 'em
They took me on, bless their hearts
I'll never forget them
Because as far as I'm concerned, they're mine
You know I love them so much
The two of them
They've been so kind to me
I can't understand why they did it
Thank God they did
I don't know where I would have been
If it hadn't been for them
If it hadn't been for these
My friends, my people
What would I do without them?
Without these two I'm done
So. That's that.

HAZEL ROBINSON



Challenges

In some settings, however well you are treated personally by the staff, you may find that the general ethos is unsympathetic. It is unfortunately the case that not all institutions have heard of the person-centred approach, or if they have heard of it, they may have found it difficult to implement. This could mean that you encounter ways of speaking to people with dementia or the ways in which people's choices are limited, are at variance with your own attitude and practice. You have to accept that your role does not include correcting staff or objecting to the atmosphere in which you have to work. In these circumstances, reflect that your presence may, in however limited a way, counteract the negativity you encounter. You may not be able to effect changes in the system, but the individuals with whom you work will be benefiting from a more humane approach. In other words, your presence is especially valuable in these circumstances.

Of course, if the manager or staff make your attendance so unwelcome that it renders impossible the effective carrying out of your role, then you must inform the project manager, and your mentor as it may be that they can step in and save the situation. Occasionally this does not prove possible, and you may be offered a more productive placement elsewhere.

It is likely that you will have no say in the individuals or members of groups that you work with. This can lead to problems for you. A person who is there under duress is unlikely to respond to your approach, however sympathetic; such a person in a group can monopolise your time in unproductive ways, and you should suggest that they withdraw. You may be offered someone who appears to be unable to express themselves verbally, and it is reasonable, after you have attempted to communicate with them to little end, to suggest that they make way for someone else with less limited ability. You may feel defeated in these circumstances, but you should remind yourself that you are not a therapist, and have neither the time nor the techniques to cope with problems which may appear intractable.

IT MAKES YOU WONDER

I was thinking about
Our gentleman friend here
And I was with him
Just drifting
You're living the part that they're living
You always see it when you go for a walk
You stand still for a few minutes
And it's surprising what comes to you
I like reminiscing
It makes you wonder
What's round the corner
Or behind the hedge.

BERNARD WOODHOUSE

**For details of running Group Sessions see
pages 15-17 in Care Staff Section**

Evaluation

A lot of the estimation of the effectiveness of an arts project such as this is intuitive, but it is helpful to have some more objective evidence than the poet's view. Hopefully this will reinforce the facilitator's impressions, but it is also likely to cast light upon features that will have escaped his/her notice. Besides, it is essential to offer funders demonstrable proof of the value brought to individuals and groups other than that offered by outcomes. And, of course, such material is very helpful in seeking further grants.

It is possible to consult participants as to their opinions, and this should be done. Informal interviews can reveal much, and simple and straightforward questionnaires are also a possibility. Any reactions from people with dementia themselves is the best form of evaluation. Sound recordings and video material can also offer subtleties in the moment which might have been missed.

Staff need to play their part in offering opinions too. Interviews again can prove useful, and a more sophisticated questionnaire can be developed.

Finally, supporters (relatives and friends) can be asked if they noticed any changes in those they were visiting, or can report any apposite comments they heard. Of course, if they actually took part in or observed sessions they can give fuller accounts.

This view of evaluation does not attempt to measure any medical effects of what would be described as 'interventions'. These are far too difficult to attempt, and in our view are inappropriate. It would be extremely difficult to separate out all the different characteristics of a project, particularly the social from the artistic.

This view of evaluation is of an integral process, not something tacked on at the end. It is recommended that poets keep a reflective journal as this allows for immediate impressions to be recorded, and forms an invaluable aide memoire in assessing the highs and lows of a residency.

FEEDING BACK

At 93 years of age
I have never been
the subject of a poem.
I was helped to see me.

Parts of me were being
drawn out like a thread.
A relative stranger
seeing me from outside.

Poems have been passed
on to my children and grandchildren,
something of me
to help me be remembered.

and will be included in
our family archive.
A completely new experience,
and very exciting.

FEEDBACK FROM RESIDENTS AT THE GARTH, ARRANGED BY JENNY HOPE

The participants were conscious of having captured in their poems thoughts, memories and tales that are of great importance to their sense of who they are. The poems also helped to enhance closeness and respect between the participants and their families, and I had warm feedback from family members.

Poet

CARE STAFF

Aimed at people who work in care this section will introduce how you can effectively use poetry in your setting. There is information about the logistics of poetry sessions; the benefits of using poetry; and top tips for creative conversations.



Why Poetry?

- Poetry deals with emotions, and emotional capacity is still there with people with dementia.
- Poetry has a strong sensual component, and this is something which appeals to people with the condition.
- Poetry gives pleasure, and gives people a sense of achievement.
- Poetry can be a means of sorting and clarifying thoughts and ideas for people who are trying to make sense of what is happening to them.
- Poetry has a summary quality; it doesn't waste words and can be 'the best words in the best order'.
- Poetry is playful with language; many people with dementia have an uninhibited approach to language, and in particular show an appreciation of simile and metaphor. This makes their poems especially rich. Here are some examples:

(of a stone) "It has tiger instinct. Makes me feel close to tigers."

(of another stone) "The person whose heart this is has had their heart broken, many times over. It's full of holes, like it's been stabbed."

(of a dog) "He was as daft as light, and had every lamppost in sight."

(of a person with an illness) "You're made out of the same wood as me. It's all according to the bark."

(of a dream) "When I wake it's always the same place, and not a happy place. It's always the first place I lose."

Working with Groups

In The Courtyard model poets are expected to work with groups and individuals (called one-to-ones). Group work is particularly valuable for encouraging socialising amongst people who might otherwise be experiencing feelings of isolation. It also builds confidence in those who might be upset by the spotlight being trained on them. Groups need to be set up carefully according to the following principles:

- They should be made up of individuals who have a common level of verbal ability;
- They must not be too large: 6-8 seems to work best;
- Staff or relatives can be included, but only in a supportive role to group members, they themselves are not invited to contribute;
- The creation of group poems works best if a common stimulus is provided: a photograph or painting or object, but each individual must have their own copy. Other ideas which have worked well are items to taste or smell or to wear, music to listen to etc;
- The poet invites verbal reactions from the participants all of which are entered on a flipchart. By a process of negotiation the poem is then teased out of this material, nothing is rejected, everything contributes to the whole. The title is also arrived at by this democratic process;
- The finished poem is then read out and all the participants applaud each other. The poem can be typed up and distributed to everyone, and perhaps displayed in a communal area with everyone's name attached. Here is an example of a group poem achieved by these means, based on a photograph:

It brought a greater understanding of our residents – they talked about things we didn't know – formed relationships and had a sense of social inclusion.

Activity Co-ordinator

IT'S A MYSTERY

.....

It reminds me of the woods
The woods on the top of the downs
The opening as you go into it
I think that's a reflection going out of the sun
The reflection of the sun on the leaves
The trees are falling
And the boughs are too
It's broken
It looks like a bird there
There's a bird of some sort
It looks like a squirrel
This looks like a rabbit's ears
Just peeping out of the woods
And that's more like his tail
Might there be a house behind there?
It looks like a roof with a chimney
The man is on a horse
Then again, it could be an ant's nest
There's a stream through there
There are flowers of some sort
They've got the leaves of a reed and three blooms
They're spindle berries
You'd smell the flowers
I can see the leaves
I hear the birds
I feel the sun on my face
There's shadows on the trees
It's a mystery.

.....

**VERA, JOHN, JOAN, VERA, MOLLY,
CAROL, GWYNETH, BRIDGET**

.....

More About Running a Group Session

Because Group Sessions can be quite challenging as well as rewarding to run, the following suggestions are made for easing the process:

PREPARATION

Make sure the space is adequate for the activity, and that you have all the materials ready before the participants arrive. Lighting, temperature, seating, table space (where you have control of any of these!) will all need to be taken into account. You must have a sufficient number of helpers to ensure that individuals obtain assistance if they need it.

BEGINNINGS

Introduce yourself individually to everyone and encourage the participants to do the same. Remember, you are responsible for your relationship to everyone in the room as well as for the group as a whole. The atmosphere should be mutually supportive at all times. Avoid presenting yourself as the 'expert'.

GIVING INSTRUCTIONS

Short-term memory loss can cause confusion over procedures, so break the task down into small units, use simple language, speak clearly, and don't be afraid to repeat yourself. Maybe a visual clue will help. Leave room for as much choice as possible. Respect the needs of the group and don't push them too hard: some people can only concentrate for a few minutes at a time. Never forget that there will be great differences in comprehension and response times within the group.

RELATIONSHIPS

Make sure that everyone is sitting next to someone they get on with. If conflicts arise, help people to change seats. If someone asks to leave the group for whatever reason, you may need to let them go. If someone is unenthusiased by the activity they should be allowed to exercise their right to withdraw.

ENDINGS

Let people know when a session is coming to an end. Talk about the process: what has been achieved, and encourage people to show appreciation of each other and the contributions they have made. Explain where the project is going next if there is to be a continuation. Check that no-one is taking materials away with them. Say goodbye to people individually and encourage everyone to do the same.

TELL ME ABOUT IT

Twilight

Dark, cloud, silence, peace

End of day, thundercloud

Cirrus, altostratus, cumulonimbus

Dark and light

Lovely sunset, tranquil

Horizon, in the country

Picturesque valley

Beach, water, wave

We all have a sunset I suppose

Wish I was there

We need a boat

I want to be on that boat

And I want to join you

YVONNE, IRIS, JACK, MEINIR, MARY,
LILY, DOREEN, GERTRUDE, JOAN,
PEGGY, DEREK, REG, JOHN, HUGO



We have a group of residents who, following the poetry sessions, have formed a social group even sitting together at lunch/meal times. They would all speak to each other before but just the odd comment. Now they actively ask/look out for each other.

Activity Co-ordinator

10 tips for a Creative Conversation

- 1. Establish good rapport before beginning the conversation.**
- 2. Sit on the level of the person and facing them. Keep still.**
- 3. Don't leap in. Take your time.**
- 4. Maintain eye contact as much as possible.**
- 5. Make it clear that you are there to listen.**
- 6. Show by the expression on your face and tone of your voice that you are interested.**
- 7. Try holding the person's hand to reassure them, if appropriate.**
- 8. Respect silences. Don't fill them with chatter. Don't finish people's sentences for them.**
- 9. Don't ask too many questions. Or suggest too many subjects.**
- 10. Write down what the person says if it would be helpful, and share it back with them; it can prove very reassuring to them that what they say matters.**

Talking to someone who listened was lovely. She was so easy to get on with. It meant I could do something that I used to do – it proved I can still do good things.

Resident

.....
I want to thank you for listening.
You see, you are words.
Words can make or break you.
Sometimes people don't listen,
They give you words back,
And they're all broken, patched up.
But will you permit me to say
That you have the stillness of silence,
That listens, and lasts.

.....
POEM EDITED BY JOHN KILICK
.....

PROJECT IN ACTION

Aimed at people interested in setting up a poetry project, this section takes you through the 4 year life of In The Pink, its history, its artists, its successes and its legacy.



Benefits of Participatory Arts

COMMUNICATION - Any communal activity provides interactions with others. Older people especially, for a variety of reasons, tend to become more isolated and anything which brings them together is to be welcomed. People with dementia tend to become even more isolated because of their cognitive problems.

ACTIVITY - People may have lost work roles and have become bored and depressed. Any activity will be welcomed, but a creative one is especially valuable and the possibility for sharing is considerable.

STIMULATION - This can be offered by developing, in the company of others, a hitherto un-awakened talent, or the re-engaging with one which has been practised previously but fallen into neglect.

ACHIEVEMENT - This arises where an art-object has been completed and is admired as a work of art. The approbation of one's peers enhances confidence and a sense of wellbeing.

DISSEMINATION - Of special significance to people with dementia: that of sharing thoughts and feelings with a wider audience: carers, professionals, and the public at large. This important characteristic is the potential for influencing minds and combating prejudice.



History

The Courtyard was the first Centre for the Arts to appoint an Arts and Older People Officer, John Killick was poet in residence at The Courtyard in 2011 and following the success of this was invited to co-devise a longer term Poetry Project.

In April of 2011 the project was launched with four poets and John as mentor.

Work began in care homes but has since branched out to include day centres and hospital wards. At the end of the first year a reading was held as part of the Ledbury Poetry Festival. Other readings have followed, and four books of poems by people with dementia have been published: *In the Pink*, *Singing Under Our Breath*, *Bees Knees* and *Pickled Onions* and *The Word Collector*. Articles have been published in *The Journal of Dementia Care* and *Writing in Education*. Personnel of the poets has changed during the project, but as poets dropped out, others have been appointed, and the standard has been maintained. In 2013 the project was formally named *In the Pink*.

Because mum has vascular dementia talking about the past is a lot easier than talking about now. Mum enjoyed sharing her memories, something she doesn't normally do.

Resident's Family

Mentor and Poets

In addition to his work with people with dementia John Killick has co-written two texts on creative writing: *Writing for Self-Discovery* in 1998 (Element) and *Writing your Self* in 2011 (Continuum). He was a co-founder of the National Association of Writers in Education, and was also a small press publisher for ten years. His website is: www.dementiapositive.co.uk

All the poets who have worked in the scheme are published writers and were already experienced in running workshops in community settings. At the outset they received special training from John to prepare them for working with people with dementia, and since then poets and mentor have kept in close touch by email, phone and quarterly meetings.

Communication and Creativity

Many people with dementia experience problems with language. This can take the form of word-finding difficulties, failure to follow logical arguments or remember names and events. At the other end of the spectrum some experience loss of verbal capacity entirely and depend on non-verbal strategies. Obviously this project can only work with those who still have a degree of fluency remaining.

Losing the ability to communicate easily and coherently causes much distress to people, and the 'In the Pink' initiative has a strong emphasis on empowering individuals by helping them to express themselves, share their insights and thus gain the approbation, not only of others with the condition, but a wider audience.

This whole process is assisted by the creative potential of those who participate. Although dementia robs people of cognitive abilities, it does not affect imaginative potential. Indeed there is evidence to suggest that creativity is actually enhanced by the condition. In some this may be a consequence of dis-inhibition. In others it may be that the brain, finding one avenue blocked, discovers a new outlet for its need to keep active. By harnessing this capacity, a poetry project provides the opportunity for the release of otherwise pent-up ideas and emotions. Although it is not formal therapy, it does have an important therapeutic role to play.



‘It’s a picture or a stone,
it’s a focal point and it
evokes all kinds of
conversations.’

Rita Graham, Activity co-ordinator

When Jean came to the home to do the ‘*In the pink*’, it changed everything with regard to reminiscing, conversations, poetry and stories told.

The home buzzed, with different people coming together over a photo or an object and actually giving their stories and opinions which are sometimes not heard or are buried away somewhere deep, not being listened to.

The poems they produced were funny, emotional, detailed and personal.

Jean lit up the room with her enthusiasm that filtered down to my residents and the enthusiasm continued for a few days after she left.

The following session Jean would read the poems they had written back to them, clearly they remembered their poem when they heard it as they would giggle or nod their heads in recognition of the experience that led to the poem.

When the ten weeks came to an end we organised a celebration with cake, champagne, balloons and bunting, we had a lovely time reading the poems which were of course brand new.

As we produced so many poems, 56 in total, we decided to publish them for fund raising, but mainly to enhance the well-being of my residents in their achievements in producing a book that is theirs.

I continued the poetry sessions myself, in a small way, but a very effective way as the conversations continued and debates began, and more poems are created.

We have poetry sessions reading from the book. People remembering (a year later) the poems they wrote, they laugh, they cry, they talk and I can’t keep up with them, but it doesn’t matter as I love the togetherness a conversation can bring with my residents.

Making Poetry in Practice: Jean Atkin; Poet

I’ve had some wonderful results using our In The Pink core technique of A4 laminated pictures. Black and white images have worked just as well as colour. Recently I’ve been trying out painted illustrations for traditional fairytales, which seem to strike a chord – for example these sensitive and vivid lines emerged from looking at a Hansel and Gretel picture:

The children are lost.
They have no hats, no shoes
no hair-ribbons.

A tin full of pre-1971 coins has been very popular and often creates much laughter as residents talk about their lives with money.

It was good money, busy money!
You could go to work on the trolley bus
with tuppence for a rainy day.
You used to walk to school and save the
tuppence.
You could go to the cinema for sixpence.
That’s three bus fares.

Several white paper bags filled with old fashioned sweets went down very well, with much joking and exchanging of bags and memories. We handed round Dolly Mixtures, and Liquorice Allsorts and candy chews. Residents remembered childhood sweet shops, gobstoppers, holidays to the beach, sherbet fountains, trips on the bus.

I remember those little cigarettes made
of sugar.
They were red at the ends. You ain’t
supposed to smoke in the pubs
anymore.



STATISTICS



6

6 poets have taken part in the project



34

34 residencies



680

680 hours of poetry!



4

4 books have been published



340

340 poetry sessions



8

Average of 8 residents per session



2924

2924 attendances over the project



24%



76%

24% male 76% female participants

People told me again and again that they looked forward to the poetry, and were very affectionate and told me how it made them happy. Making poems together validated their capacity to think, communicate and recall, and sharing the poems clearly provided much pleasure and warmth.

Poet

Seeing the residents excited about what the sessions allowed them to articulate. Seeing our residents talking to each other about their favourite subjects and carry the conversation afterwards, sometimes for days at a time.

Care staff



61%

Have worked with 61% of the care homes in Herefordshire



12



133

12 training sessions have taken place with 133 attendances



800

Over 800 poems written!

I lived a completely opposite life to most of the other people and I'm sure they couldn't understand mine. I don't think I'm so alien to them now.

Resident



LINKS & RESOURCES

Websites

<http://www.dementiapositive.co.uk/>

celebrating the creativity, strengths and insights of people living with dementia.

<http://www.arts4dementia.org.uk/>

helping to develop and co-ordinate high-quality intergenerational arts opportunities for people living with dementia in the community.

<http://www.worcester.ac.uk/discover/association-for-dementia-studies.html>

Contributing to building evidence-based practical ways of working with people living with dementia and their families that enables them to live well.

<https://www.dementiafriends.org.uk/>

A social action movement lead by Public Health England and The Alzheimer's Society.

<http://www.courtyard.org.uk/aop>

an overview of the Arts and Older people project, events, training and projects, The Courtyard Centre for the Arts, Hereford.

<https://equalarts.org.uk/>

creative opportunities for older people

<http://www.u3a.org.uk/>

The University of the Third Age, a movement that offers retired and semi retired people the opportunity to come together and learn.

<http://www.ageofcreativity.co.uk/>

A UK wide site for professionals and organisations working in the arts and older people field.

<http://www.cecd-society.org/>

Sharing knowledge that focuses on improving the quality of lives of older adults and of people living with dementia, using the visual and performing arts.

<http://www.creativedementia.org/>

Promoting the use of creative arts as a means of improving the health and well being of individuals living with dementia, their families and communities.

<http://dementiapartnerships.com/category/innovation/arts-and-dementia/>

A range of creative activities, such as singing, music, storytelling, dance and movement, and crafts are helping people to live well with dementia.

<http://www.lightingup.org.uk/>

Artists working with people living with dementia, Bristol, UK.

<http://dementiaandimagination.org.uk/>

Looking at how art can make a difference for people with dementia living at home, being assessed by the NHS and living in care homes.

<http://www.dementiaaction.org.uk/>

Organisations across England committed to transforming the lives of people with dementia and their carers.

Online resources

Dementia – learning more, a reading list

[https://www.google.co.uk/search?q=Killick%2C+J+\(1997\)+You+are+words.+Hawker+Publications+London.&oq=Killick%2C+J+\(1997\)+You+are+words.+Hawker+Publications+London.&aqs=chrome..69i57.751j0j4&sourceid=chrome&es_sm=93&ie=UTF-8](https://www.google.co.uk/search?q=Killick%2C+J+(1997)+You+are+words.+Hawker+Publications+London.&oq=Killick%2C+J+(1997)+You+are+words.+Hawker+Publications+London.&aqs=chrome..69i57.751j0j4&sourceid=chrome&es_sm=93&ie=UTF-8)

<http://collective-encounters.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/AD-Report.pdf>

Arts and Dementia, bringing professional artists into care settings. Collective encounters, 2013.

http://www.dementiapositive.co.uk/uploads/7/7/9/6/7796394/jk_publications_march_12.pdf

Publications by John Killick.



Books

The edges of everywhere: poetry by people living with memory loss

Hayes, K (2007), City Chameleon.

The Things Between Us - Living Words: Anthology 1 - Words and poems of people experiencing dementia

Howard S, Miranda, J and Bellingham, L, (2014)

Hearing the Voice of People with Dementia: Opportunities and Obstacles Goldsmith, M (1996), Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

The Creative Arts in Dementia Care, Practical Person-Centred Approaches and Ideas

Hayes, J and Povey, S, (2010)

Provides a creative map of care with easy-to-follow examples and detailed case studies.

How We Think about Dementia: Personhood, Rights, Ethics, the Arts and What They Mean for Care

Hughes, J, (2014), Jessica Kingsley Publishers. Exploring concepts of ageing, personhood, capacity, liberty, best interests and the nature and ethics of palliative care.

Creativity and Communication in Persons with Dementia: A Practical Guide

Killick, J and Craig, C. (Eds), (2011)

Jessica Kingsley Publishers. Covers the nature of creativity, the range of possible activities, and some case studies.

Creative Approaches in Dementia Care

Adams, T and Lee, H (Eds), (2011), Palgrave Macmillan.

A practical introduction to the use of the arts in dementia care.

Books published as part of the In the Pink poetry project.

In the Pink Killick, J (Ed), (2011).

The Courtyard Centre for the Arts

Singing Under Our Breath Killick, J (Ed), (2012).

The Courtyard Centre for the Arts

Bee's Knees and Pickled Onions

Killick, J (Ed), (2013).

The Courtyard Centre for the Arts.

The Word Collector. Killick, J (Ed), (2015).

The Courtyard Centre for the Arts.



£2.50

The Courtyard Centre for the Arts,
Edgar street, Hereford, HR4 9JR
www.courtyard.org.uk/aop