

CREATIVE HOMES

EVALUATION REPORT

December 2013

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Sharing event with participants from Frank Whymark and Ronald Buckingham housing schemes and Bubble staff, at Bubble HQ, September 2013.

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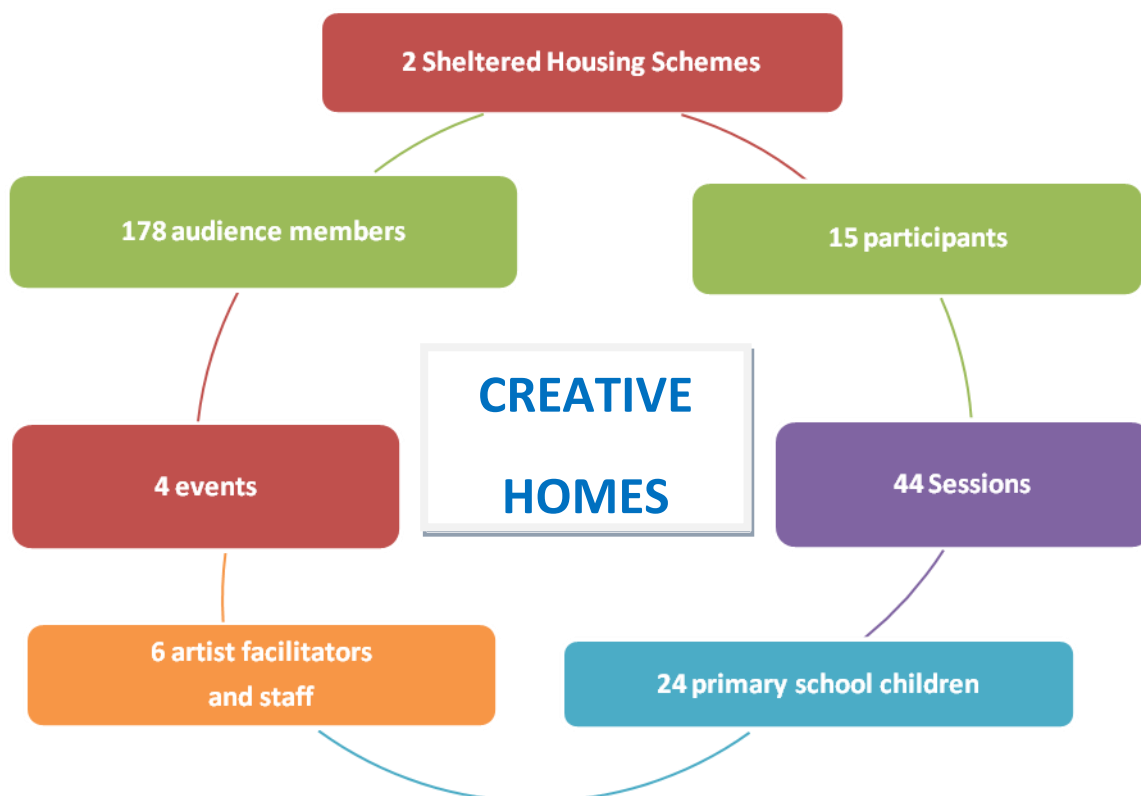
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Ronald Buckingham participants perform at the sharing event, Bubble HQ, September 2013

The project at a glance.....



1. OVERVIEW

"If art is a form of agency, it might become increasingly important as we get older and begin losing other capacities for action, once taken for granted."

Francois Matarasso, Winter Fires: Art and Agency in Old Age, Baring Foundation 2012

This report is not only about evaluating the Creative Homes project. It is also concerned with learning as much as possible from the work that has taken place in two sheltered housing schemes with two groups of older people over a year. Through reflecting on this work with those involved we hope to start modelling the work, to situate it contextually, and perhaps most importantly, explore how it might further develop in the future and expand its offer to more groups of older people.

Health provision has over recent decades expanded beyond the direct treatment of ill health to include notions of well being and active prevention, tackling inequalities and offering early interventions. The complex relationships between emotional and physical health are increasingly accepted and beginning to be better understood, which provides a backdrop for the growing evidence of links between arts and well being outcomes for individuals, groups and communities.

This has specific connections with the spotlight on our increasingly ageing population¹ and the idea that longer life should be accompanied by continuing opportunities for health, participation and security. The World Health Organisation has adopted the term 'active ageing' to promote this vision: "Active ageing is the process of optimizing opportunities for health, participation and security in order to enhance quality of life as people age"².

There is an emerging sector of arts practice that specifically involves older people. This is underpinned by a growing body of evidence of the positive impacts of arts opportunities for older people, in particular supported by The Baring Foundation. Related research makes connections between arts involvement and health outcomes, and with well being in its broadest sense and the Baring Foundation commissioned 'An Evidence Review of the impact of Participatory Arts on Older People'³, (Mental Health Foundation) in order to consolidate the growing evidence base for positive and health related impacts for older people through involvement in a range of arts based activities. It considered both mental and physical well being as well as impacts on communities and wider society. Whilst it was able to report on much that was positive (despite a relatively weak evidence base), it noted that "the needs of older people and the potential benefits of participatory art in promoting wellbeing amongst older people continue to be generally overlooked in policy and service provision."

In 'A New Age: An examination of the changing state of health funding for arts activity with, by and for older people in England'⁴ Hebron and Taylor note that the sector is a diverse one that encompasses a wide range of activities some of which are targeted at specific health issues, but that there is an "underlying belief that the arts can positively impact on people's lives". However they also find that funding for this type of work is fragmented and often short term, which has particular resonance with this report. There is also the issue of whether projects like Creative Homes sit under a 'health' or 'arts' umbrella and therefore where the best fit is in relation to possible funding sources. With the current challenges facing the NHS in terms of reduced budgets and an increasingly elderly population, the case for preventative initiatives and work that can attract multiple funding streams is arguably strengthened.

In a report titled 'Creative Homes: how the arts can contribute to the quality of life in residential care'⁵ the intention was to both promote good practice in relation to arts work with older people in homes as well as inspiring and informing future projects. Their findings suggest that good practice offers multiple benefits in homes settings and that these apply to both staff and residents. They

¹ At the beginning of 2010, there were 87 million people aged 65+ in the EU, more than 17 % of the total population

² World Health Organisation (WHO) (2002) Active Ageing. A Policy Framework. A contribution of the World Health Organization to the Second United Nations World Assembly on Ageing, Madrid, Spain, April 2002 (http://whqlibdoc.who.int/hq/2002/WHO_NMH_NPH_02.8.pdf)

³ The Mental Health Foundation, 2011

⁴ A New Age: An examination of the changing state of health funding for arts activity with, by and for older people in England, Arts and Health Forum, D, Hebron & K. Taylor, September 2012

⁵ 'Creative Homes: how the arts can contribute to the quality of life in residential care' Nov 2011, The Baring Foundation, NAPA and NCF.

also pointed to the importance of involving residents in choice and ‘expressing their agency’, involving families and communities and working with professionals and arts organisations.

The Bubble has a fundamental belief in the value of creative opportunities and inclusive participatory theatre making. This is overlaid by an imperative to develop their work with older people and their intergenerational work, alongside the desire to further explore the potential well being impacts of arts activities with this group. As they state in their Creative Homes rationale:

“We know that gentle drama activities create playful spaces where people open up and enjoy each other’s company. We believe that shared creative challenges (in this case contributing directly or indirectly to the making of a performance) build positivity and resilience. Studies, and our experience of working in this way indicate that regular creative activities can address mild depression and anxiety and lead to reduced use of medication and increased motivation.”⁶

These motivations fit within Bubble’s drive to have impact, and to build and invest in relationships with individuals and groups across their local catchment area.

2. THE CREATIVE HOMES PROJECT: Motivations and aspirations

Creative Homes was a response to Bubble developing work with older people in order to ensure its reach to people of all ages. It came in part from the experiences of working with older people in the Grandchildren of the Blitz (GotB) project which ran from May 2010 to January 2012. This not only involved a number of older people but led on to conversations with two local homes for older people, which then formed a basis for the funding application to the Baring Foundation.

Consultation with residents and managers of two homes led to the ‘Creative Homes’ project idea. This drew on elements that had been successful within the GotB including discussions, interviews, social events, seated workshops and the opportunity to take part in, or attend, performances. However the new plan was to deliver a series of regular creative workshops within two local homes over a significant period of time (12 months) that would link to other organisations and events, thereby using these as the foundations for a larger project that would be *“worked on and seen by a wider “audience” of people, including other elders who live nearby, and decision makers who may help us to continue and/or replicate such work.”⁷*

Whilst there were some initial ideas about themes which had arisen from conversations with elders and stakeholders, the intention was that the subject matter would be chosen, shaped and therefore owned by the participants. The process involved was described as a “creative discussion” that would not only involve the older people in the sheltered home settings but also bring in children, young people, artists and creative practitioners into these settings.

⁶ From Bubble application to the Baring Foundation January 2012

⁷ From Barings Foundation stage 2 application

It should be noted that between the project development and inception one of the partner homes changed⁸ and that the two homes that hosted the Creative Homes project were Ronald Buckingham Court and Frank Whymark House. These are both managed by social housing providers (Circle 21 and Hyde respectively) who have social impact aims additional to their housing provision. For example Housing 21⁹ who are a specialist housing provider for older people, state that they “work closely with local communities to develop new services that meet the needs of older people and their neighbourhoods” and that all of their work is “guided by our determination to see older people as individuals”. This social remit therefore makes social housing providers potentially ideal partners for this type of intervention.

In their Project Plan Bubble listed the positive impacts they hoped the project would have on the different stakeholders, as follows:

On the participants:

We aim to have a significant positive physical, social and emotional impact – engendering a sense of connection and continued social awareness in the elders and developing knowledge and social awareness in the younger people and artists.

On the homes:

A key aim is to strengthen our shared sense of partnership and trust. Over time the impact should be in the development within the homes of an atmosphere of creative enquiry, and the residents should have an increased feeling of connection with the wider community. Evidence of the positive effects of the project will it is hoped support the development of similar programmes in the future.

On London Bubble:

The impact we seek is to move Bubble towards a position where we have a growing, symbiotic relationship with Creative Homes, whereby we help animate the settings and the residents help us create high quality and relevant performances for the wider community. We want this new relationship to lead to greater inter-generational knowledge and respect within our staff and artists, developing skills that we can pass on to others.

On the wider arts and voluntary community:

We believe we are well placed to influence practice in our sector¹⁰. We wish to demonstrate with this initiative that it is relatively simple for arts organisations and local residential homes to establish mutually beneficial creative relationships that are innovative and artistically nourishing to both parties as well as being beneficial to the local community.

Intergenerational encounters:

⁸ This was because the newly formed TRA decided at the point funding was secured that they already had as many activities programmed as they could manage.

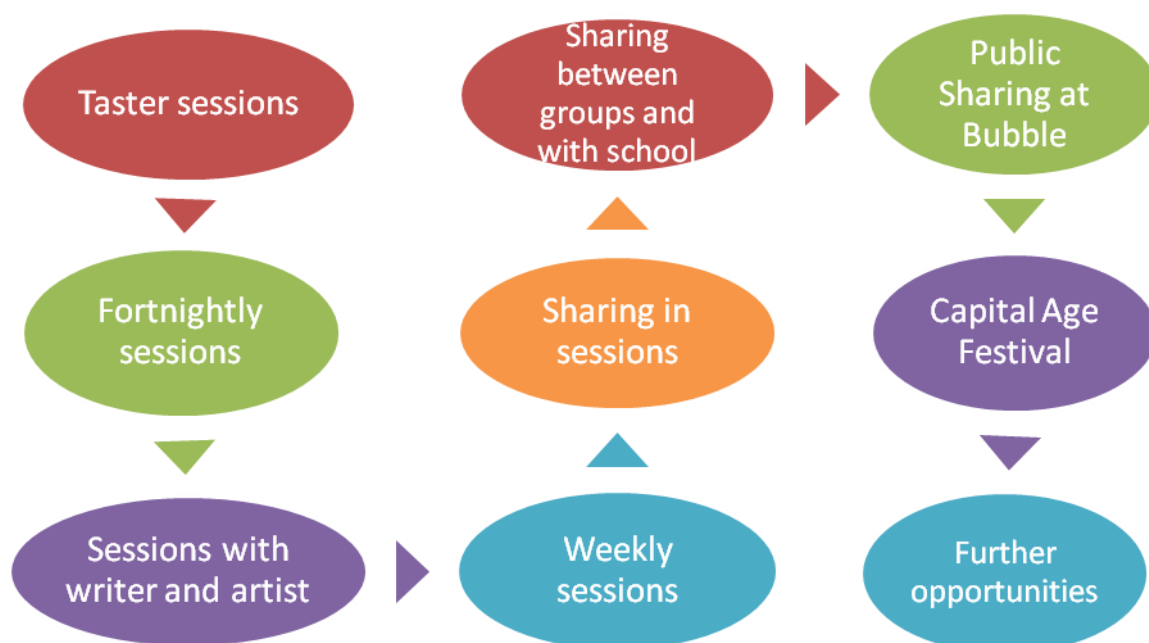
⁹ <http://www.housing21.co.uk/about-us/>

¹⁰ Grandchildren of the Blitz recently won an award for inter-generational practice from United for All Ages. The Bubble led Ages and Stages conference brought over 100 delegates together from a range of arts organisations and academics to discuss inter-generational performance – resolving to continue the debate through similar gatherings.

We also hope to see **an increase in positive intergenerational encounters**, shared wisdom, reduced isolation, increased fun and the establishment of at least 30 new social connections or “friendships”. All to be noted, evaluated and reported on by an external monitor.

So the impacts of the project were envisaged as being multi-layered and involving a range of stakeholders. The project planned to achieve these impacts through its delivery of a year long programme of sessions in the two local older people’s sheltered housing schemes. The sessions were planned to build towards a final sharing event. After initial contact and discussion the Bubble began delivering them every two weeks commencing in September 2012 these increased to weekly sessions in June with the final event taking place in September 2013.

2.1 The Delivery



The Bubble has built on and developed partnerships in order to deliver this project. Firstly with the homes themselves; whilst there had already been contact with Frank Whymark through GotB, the connection with Ronald Buckingham was a new one. However the relationship with each is different because of their different management set ups. Ronald Buckingham has a warden whilst Frank Whymark does not. Those involved spoke of a different atmosphere at each of the sheltered schemes, and in terms of the project, arrangements were far easier to make with Ronald Buckingham as the warden supported and facilitated the project. At Frank Whymark two of the residents took on the facilitation role which involved making sure all of the residents were informed of sessions, events, etc.

A relationship with a local primary school became an important part of the project. The school (in particular a class and teacher) were invited along to the first ‘sharing’ event and have continued to have positive ongoing contact, for example the pupils were doing a project about WW2 and came to talk to some of the older people about their memories and experiences of this.



Participants from Ronald Buckingham and Frank Whymark homes

3. EVALUATION: Approach and methodology

The evaluation set out to look at project delivery, progress, achievements and outcomes and assess these against the original aims. Has the project been beneficial, who for and in what ways? What evidence is there to support this? What can we learn from the project about its impacts and how might we ensure that these are facilitated and enhanced by subsequent programmes.

There was interest in learning and therefore considering where delivery might have shifted from the initial project vision as well as highlighting good practice and areas for future development. The evaluation was also concerned with how this work might be taken forward (should it be deemed positively impactful) and if so what shape this might take. Can the project be modelled and if so what elements are essential and where does there need to be room for adaptability.

The evaluation involved collecting a range of data which included:

- Project information – (funding application, online information, etc.)
- Desk based research
- Interviews with project staff
- Interviews with housing staff and residents
- Participant snapshots – baseline, mid-point and final
- Participant before and after slips
- Observations – attending sessions and events
- Audience feedback.

This produced considerable data, much of which was qualitative. 'Snapshot' questionnaires were used to establish a baseline starting point initially, which were then revisited at a mid project point and then again at the end. It should be noted that these were conducted in a thorough way with a Bubble member of staff talking them through with individual participants; however they were only completed with about half of all of the participants. The 'before and after' slips likewise are useful and often informative and eloquent, but do not offer a full data set, making tracking individuals weekly throughout the project difficult. We will therefore present examples, comments and some of the strongest emergent themes from across the data with a focus on the quality of the delivery and of the experience rather than a more qualitative analysis which would be inappropriate given the scale and data involved.

Centrally the evaluation was concerned with hearing from those involved what the project had been about and what it had meant to them both during the actual sessions and in the wider context of their lives.



Frank Whymark participants perform at the sharing event, Bubble HQ, September 2013

4. KEY FINDINGS

The key findings presented below draw on all of the data collected and particularly the more qualitative where those involved have reflected upon their experiences of the project. In bringing together the available information key issues or areas of comment have been grouped under the following headings. These cover how the sessions made participants feel; the attraction of creativity; the value of social interaction; issues with performance; and what considerations there need to be for this kind of work with older people.

3.1 The best medicine

Before the formal sessions started Bubble staff went to meet and talk with residents at both of the homes building on any connections they already had. This involved tea, cake and conversations and laid the foundations for the sessions. However recruitment wasn't necessarily straight forward with there being some resistance. As some of the participants have explained this is due in part because of the idea of 'theatre' and the fact that this can be seen as 'childish', 'not for me' and potentially risky or challenging. In fact some of the participants who later were extremely positive about their involvement admitted that they had had to overcome initial doubts and reservations, with the childish or risky aspects instead becoming seen as positives.

The Bubble therefore offered taster sessions so that people could see what it would be like without feeling like they had made a commitment. The Bubble practitioners described their carefully considered approach to initiating 'creative discussions' through 'interactive workshops'; for example making contact with the homes through residents they already knew and trying to ensure that the session were as welcoming and accessible as possible.

The delivery sessions began in the two homes in September 2012. At the beginning they took place every two weeks. The workshop leader described the structure and approach to the workshops as follows. She said that initially the 'welcoming' was important with an imperative of 'being present' and of welcoming each other and getting ready to begin. The next phase is a physical and vocal warm up. This is not only common to theatre based work broadly, but the workshop leader said that she uses this technique whatever group she is working with. However she adapted this somewhat in awareness of different levels of health and physical strength, for example she said that the participants preferred to do this sitting on chairs within the circle. This exercise literally moves "awareness into our bodies and voices" and away from more cerebral activity. It also offers the opportunity to release tension and to relax.

The next phase moves into starting to create using physical and verbal improvisations. This creation can be stimulated by a range of tools such as objects, pictures, objects, sensations and music. Hats and gloves were particularly successful and the addition of a gold picture frame to focus the face or the hands introduced the first touch of presentation. Whilst memories may provide material, the workshop leader was keen to stress that the work is not about reminiscence but is clearly in "the now" and that there is a freshness and newness to the process.

Slowly stories and ideas develop into characters and dialogue. After each participant or pair of participants, share what they create, the group are asked to offer feedback, to suggest developments and give encouragement. Care and empathy is present as participants give up their work for consideration and responses are offered. At the end of each session feedback will be sought and a closing game or song will bring a positive end to the work.

Some participants spoke of not really knowing what to expect. They began exploring ideas and "playing". Several people mentioned feeling childlike, behaving "like a kids been let out to play" and

doing things they hadn't done since they were young. Anecdotally one participant said that another had said "she didn't feel like a coffin dodger when she was here."

The enjoyment of the sessions was echoed throughout with people particularly mentioning the opportunity to socialise and get to know people, the relaxation and the singing. One interviewee said that it was "good to see people doing daft things" and that "you didn't feel a fool, you felt accepted". So the sharing of fun and playfulness drew people together.

There was a consciousness of individual's lives outside of the sessions. Sometimes these impacted to the point where someone either didn't attend or had to drop out due to ill health for example. Several of the participants had recently suffered bereavements and one participant spoke of her struggle with chronic depression. The sessions offered a counterpoint to this. The Bubble practitioner spoke of the balance of acknowledging difficult issues but not allowing them to dominate the sessions. This balance clearly seems to have worked for the participants for example one commented:

"When we got there we really enjoyed it – even when we were feeling low, we had a giggle, once it started we looked forward to it though sometimes you had to make yourself go"

The importance of having something to look forward to that "got us out" was evident as "you get stuck in a rut". It is interesting that the sessions were positive both in the future, the present and the past. The project was described both as "a year to look forward to" and as "something that is still really alive in my head."

The participants were asked to fill in small slips before and after each session. These were used as an emotional and physical litmus test, both for themselves and for the practitioners, alongside other techniques. These elicited very succinct honest comments such as:

- "I am treated for depression but these sessions are very beneficial"
- "very much feel like laughing"
- "feeling more active had a few bad days"

The comments were frequently simple and direct with a range of emotional levels described as follows:

Low: Weary, low, bit down, not too well, sad, upset, not very good, poor

Middling: Not too bad, up and down, OK, getting over my bit of bad news,

Good: Great, happy, much better, brighter, feeling fit, getting there, fine,

However what was evident from these 'before and after' slips was that there was most usually an improvement or increase from one level to another. The following two tables give examples of before and after comments from 3 participants earlier and later on in the project. These have been chosen as being representative of the majority rather than simply to reflect a positive view.

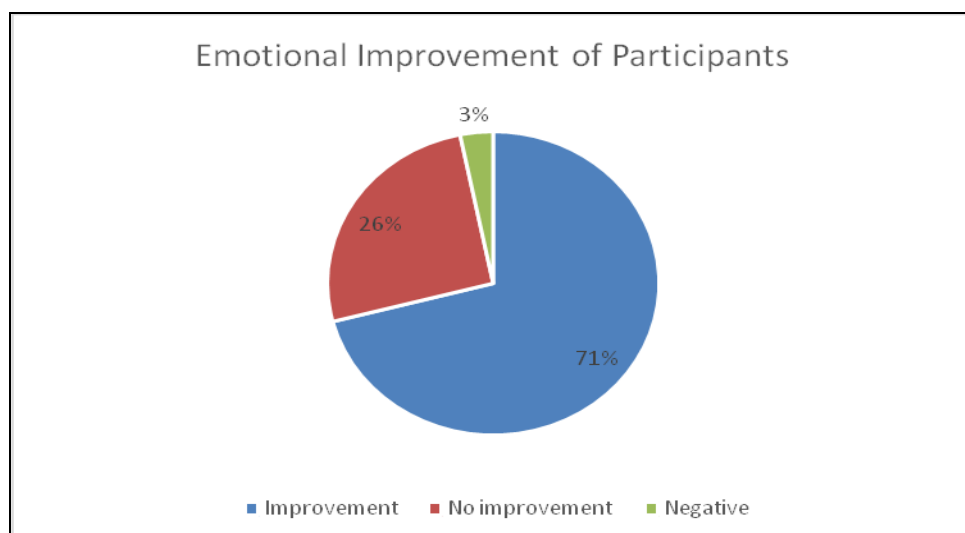
27th Feb 2013

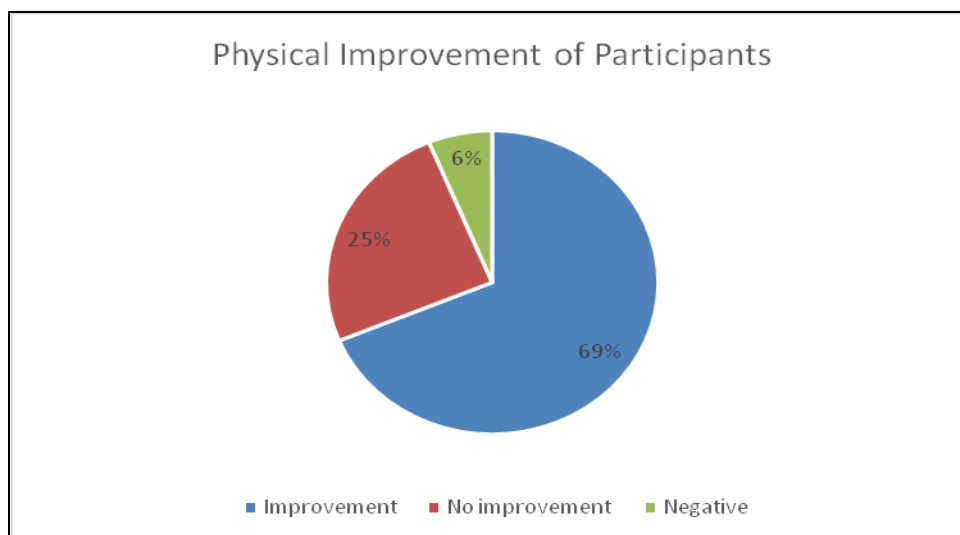
<i>How are you feeling.....</i>	Barbara	Iris	Eleanor
Physically before	Painful and tired	Headache - migraine	Not bad
Physically after	In pain (not so much)	Better	Better now than this morning
Emotionally before	OK	So so	Fine
Emotionally after	Cheered up	Much better	Very good

29th May 2013

<i>How are you feeling.....</i>	Iris	Edith	Rose
Physically before	Head ache	Not too bad	Not too bad, chesty
Physically after	Good	Bit puffed	Feel better joining in
Emotionally before	Jittery	Don't know	Feel fairly fine
Emotionally after	Calm	Joyful	A bit brighter having someone to talk and laugh with

All of the 'before and after' were collated and analysed in order to assess how many respondents were reporting physical and emotional changes from the beginning to the end of the session. The two pie charts below show that this was the case for the majority (three quarters) of participants.





3.2 Lifelong creativity

For some individuals the creativity involved was the primary attraction. The lead practitioner described the project as “inviting people to go on a creative experience”. As well as creativity, participants spoke of theatre specifically as being of interest and also self expression. Some participants described themselves as having creative interests in the past.

The Ronald Buckingham group developed a theatre piece called ‘Windows’ which involved characters that they had developed who lived on a single street. These characters provoked laughter, song and creative exploration through role play. One resident when asked about how she might like to see the sessions run in the future said ‘I would like to try another character, totally different’ and another said that she was surprised by the character that came out of her.

The Frank Whymark group used hands as their theme and collaboratively created a poem about hands that was then turned into a song (see Appendix B). The project drew on Bubble expertise as well as responsively identifying needs for specific professional skills including a hand choreographer and musical composer. The Bubble practitioners offered a range of skills including leading workshops, creative facilitation, writing, producing and directing. The professionals involved worked closely with the groups and helped them translate their ideas and material into more finished pieces of work. The Frank Whymark group worked with both a hand choreographer and with a writer / director. One of the participants described how he wrote down their words and “we was amazed, choked, proud” by the song this then became.

3.3 Opening the doors

One of the strongest benefits apparent in all of the accounts is the sociability and opportunity to be with and get to know new people. This relates to the sessions in terms of working with neighbours, older people from the other scheme, staff, practitioners and school children. This was enhanced by the special or one-off events that took place within the project which included: a visit by a local primary school, attending and performing at the Capital Age Festival, performing as part of Bubble’s open ‘Well Being Week’ and the final sharing event at the newly refurbished Bubble HQ.

The opportunity to socialise was valued by those taking part and corresponded with notable increases in confidence, for example an interviewee spoke of finding common ground with others saying “now I’ve got much more confidence to speak to people, I was shy, I feel more at home now with the bingo people”. This also relates to people feeling a part of a wider community both within their homes and beyond. For the manager at Ronald Buckingham this was particularly striking; she spoke of her residents now being greeted in the street by local children that remembered them from the visit. This was a real surprise for the residents and so she is working on building on this relationship with the school.

The use of space in this project has been interesting as it has spotlighted issues of comfort and discomfort, familiarity and newness, being ‘at home’, having the ability to open doors and welcome in, what constitutes ‘community’, and the confidence to travel beyond comfort zones. The delivery started separately within the two homes but during its course it shifted the parameters through facilitating residents visiting one another, school children visiting and the participants getting to know the Bubble. It was notable that one participant said that she and another resident were ‘outsiders’ until this project; that is they weren’t from the local area and therefore didn’t have local or familial connections nearby which a number of other residents did.

The home Manager also spoke about how the relationship between the residents and the outside had changed as a result of the project. She said that the residents used to be “precious about the space” and about ‘outsiders’ coming in, but that they are more flexible and porous now. The residents were delighted by the school children’s visits and were welcoming to the Frank Whymark residents when they attended events and joint sessions.

The Bubbles’ flexible, welcoming and familial ‘space of participation’¹¹ has now extended its reach to the Creative Homes participants which will continue beyond the project lifetime. As Rooke and Kendall write:

“New participants quickly become part of an evolving group of community performers from diverse backgrounds, and are subtly ‘inducted’ into the inclusive culture of the company as they move through the multiple spaces of participation that London Bubble offers”

The participants are not only part of the Bubble but it seems now feel part of a wider community that extends beyond the doors of their homes and sheltered housing gates.

3.4 A different light

The participants seemed to be unaware at the outset that their involvement in the sessions would lead to performance events as one performer said we “didn’t dream it was going to become a show”. The transition from the interactive workshops to developing and rehearsing performance content was sensitively handled, but even so some people dropped out as a result which changed the dynamic of the group. For those that continued some found performance easier than others.

¹¹ Taking Part Case Study: London Bubble Theatre, A. Rooke and D. Kendall, CUCR, Goldsmiths.
<http://www.gold.ac.uk/cucr/research/takepart/>

One interviewee said that she didn't feel any pressure or anything negative about working towards performing as "I committed myself to it". Another interviewee said that the only difficult bit of the whole process was performing. However the older people supported each other through the process.

The first 'sharing' they did was when a group of primary school children visited Ronald Buckingham Court and Frank Whymark House from a local school. Whilst there was a lot of nervousness it was very successful with the children being an engaged and well behaved audience. The groups were clearly boosted by this and by the exchanges involved. For anyone there is personal gain in successfully achieving something difficult, as one of the performers describes being "interested in the challenge to myself" and how since her involvement "My other half said I'm very different now".

One of the Bubble team elucidated this process:

"The act of 'performing' to an audience of outsiders, raises the bar and transforms the work that is shared from a private rumination/sketch to a presented piece of art. The makers themselves see what they made through other people's eyes. The process tests and strengthens what has been made – and part of the art that is theatre, is the performer. So, performing participants inherently feel tested and strengthened.

With interviewees (both staff and participants) the evaluator questioned whether the experience of performance and the build up to it was a critical part of the project successes. Also how this might be managed to extend the involvement to both those who were prepared to try performing and those who did not want to. Would the sessions work in the same way if they were not developing towards something? One of the interviewees responded "I would like it to escalate. I would like it to get more exciting, a weekly session and it does need to work towards something." Whilst some said they preferred the sessions before "the rehearsal ones" there was also acknowledgement of the buzz involved. Making clear that the offer of participation is adaptable to suit the individual seems paramount, which would allow for those ready to be challenged whilst allowing others ongoing involvement which is able to flex or increase over time.

3.5 Considering age

The involvement of older people in creative and theatrical processes offered learning for both participants and practitioners. Initially some of the older people had felt that this kind of activity was not for them either because of age or past experiences (i.e. not ever considering themselves to be 'creative').

For the lead practitioner developing London Bubble's understanding of working with older people and particularly those who may be physically frail or emotionally vulnerable, was central. She wants to develop a 'gentle practice' that can connect with people who are fragile or vulnerable which fits within the Bubble ambition of making inclusive and accessible theatre. She spoke of needing to have a sensitivity about the fact that the people she was working with were, as a group, closer to

death; both their own and through bereavement of friends and family. She also recognised that they experienced greater frailty and more health issues than many other people. She said that it felt like a challenge “to meet that level of struggle and difficulty” and that there was a very fine balance to be found between acknowledging and honouring this lived reality and not allowing these personal circumstances to dominate the session.

The project co-ordinator already had experience of working with older people locally and in fact knew some of the residents at the homes; however she wanted to find people who were “new to the Bubble” through using her pre-existing contacts. She also had a good understanding of some of the issues involved for e.g. the practicalities of getting to sessions. However her starting point was that “they are able and they are capable” and therefore that issues arising can be overcome.

Through delivery it was noted how various factors could affect participation such as weather, season (darkness or light), and location. There were also factors which could not be so easily anticipated including family commitments, mental or physical ill health and bereavement.

The building of relationships and friendships (on an individual and organisational level) helped counteract some of this with a stronger desire to attend and to overcome any difficulties. The Bubble staff always checked and reminded participants with regards to dates and activities particularly where these changed from the usual. They also offered extra support for example providing transport if needed to get to a venue or event.

At Frank Whymark House the residents had to take on the organisational aspects themselves as there were no dedicated housing staff. One of the residents who has lived there the longest (over 20 years) described how things have changed there over time as they have got older and less active. The residents took up the challenge of hosting the sessions and helping with communication and recruitment. This project has motivated them to get involved, to connect more with each other and with people more widely. Those who are more active have supported those who are less so. One participant said “With our age group memory was an issue, remembering the words of the song”. The practitioners therefore developed mimed actions to go with the Hand song that would help to trigger the performers’ memories.

In reflecting on the delivery and thinking about how delivery might be informed next time the lead practitioner mentioned being less tentative with regards to moving around and using the space more. This would be assisted by setting up the space in advance of the session so that it is not ‘as usual’ and is not restrictive to movement and activity.

She also reiterated the necessity of having sensibility with regards to difficulties in people’s lives. She said that you neither ignore it nor focus on it but instead ‘carry and then park’. This could relate to physical and emotional well-being.

Providing an opportunity and purpose for residents to come together was clearly important. That this was done in the homes and therefore in comfort and associated with sociable activities including tea and cakes made this accessible and welcoming rather than off putting.

3.6 What participants said they got from the project

The following section summarises the data analysis from the 'snapshot' questionnaires that were conducted at the beginning, middle and end of the project with some of the participants. The main points are grouped into themed sections. These echo and support some of the findings in the preceding sections.

What did participants get from the project?

- 100% of the participants said that they got fun and enjoyment out of the project.
- Participants got more than they had hoped or expected to get out of the project.
- The majority of those involved said that they got personal skills as well as practical skills from the project.
- Initially, just 12.5% of the participants thought that they would gain practical skills through talking part, but by the end of it 57% said they had gained practical skills.
- Over 70% of the participants gained new experiences and creative skills from taking part in the project.
- 43% of the participants said that they the project had made them more confident.

Connecting with people

- Before taking part in the project, half of those who got involved said that they would like to know more people than they did at the time, however at the end of the project, just one person said that they would still like to know more people than they did.
- The respondent that said they would 'like to know more people' than they already did also said that the thing that they most valued that they got from the project was regular contact with the other participants. They also said that they had "more confidence" and "less timidity in approaching others".
- Over 70% of those involved mentioned the relationships with others involved as what they valued most from what they had gained from the project.
- Before the project started, half of those to be involved said that they mixed with people from different ages; however the majority of people said that this was the case after the project had finished.
- At the beginning of the project, 37.5% of participants said that they would like to know more people of different ages but by the end, no one said that this was the case.
- The same number of people said that they would like to feel more a part of a community at the beginning as at the end.

Shaping the project

- 43% said that there was nothing that could've been improved about the project. As one interviewee responded "don't change anything"
- With regards to what could be improved the main thing mentioned was having more regular sessions.

What changed?

- 13% of people felt that 'talking wasn't really their thing' at the beginning of the project, whereas no one said this at the end.

- Similarly, the number of people that said that they found it hard to say what they meant halved between the beginning and end of the project.
- No one described themselves as a creative person at the beginning of the project, but 13% of participants did at the end.

Overall the comments that people made were extremely positive. This may be in part because of a desire to please or be polite to the staff involved, however they are in accord with other data collected (for example interviews, observations and informally talking with participants). For instance the Manager of one of the schemes described how at the beginning she had to persuade people to come along, but found that when they did “they just loved it”. She felt this was due to the fact that “it was not just bingo” and that the Bubble sessions “reached out to people in a different way”. It attracted those that were already socially networked within the scheme and those who had, until this point been more isolated. For some it was the creativity and theatricality that attracted them while with others it was the opportunity to do something sociable.

3.7 Project aims and impacts

Here we consider if and how the project can be seen to have impacted positively on its target groups and if by doing so it has therefore achieved its original aims.

On the participants: The project has produced positive impacts for participants in relation to physical, social and emotional well-being. It has developed connections on individual and organisational levels and increased awareness between different generational groups.

On the homes: The project has impacted on the homes that were involved. It has increased the sociability and positivity within the homes and has opened them up to positive interactions with the wider community. The relationship that the individuals and homes now have with the Bubble that involve trust, exchange and collaboration.

On London Bubble: The impacts on the Bubble cannot be fully accounted for here as this is an area of ongoing development and learning. There is undoubtedly learning emerging with regards to Bubble’s knowledge and practice particularly in relation to working with older people and their inter-generational practice. The relationships developed with residents and with the homes are also ongoing, for example one resident now attends one of the adult theatre groups, and there are plans for further performances. More strategically there is also the intention to take the methods piloted by Creative Homes into more settings involving older people, both locally and London-wide.

On the wider arts and voluntary community: While no further funding has yet been secured, the project is already attracting interest from social housing providers, older people’s organisations and potential funders as well as other participatory arts organisations. The project has been able to show how relationships can be established with local homes that have community wide benefits. Bubble is contributing to the arts and care debate and will continue

to do so through the dissemination of this project and the development of future work informed by Creative Homes.

Intergenerational encounters: The project has provided opportunities for positive intergenerational encounters. Connections and friendships have developed as a result of the project both across generations and amongst them. Fun¹² has been one of the strongest themes of the sessions which have, at the same time noticeably impacted on the isolation experienced by some residents. The example of children living locally saying hello to residents and addressing them by name is simple and yet significant.

5. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Creative Homes project clearly responds to all of the Bubble cross-cutting themes. These are that through theatre making the Bubble aims to engender:

-  Well Being
-  Communication
-  Connection
-  Community
-  Creation
-  Agency for Growth.

The project built on local connections and relationships and there is hope that in the future both the homes and their individual residents will benefit from and sustain a greater openness and connectivity. There was undoubtedly a feeling of more mixing and socialisation by the end of the project which was borne out by the interviews with participants. Connections outside the homes are also continuing beyond the project lifetime particularly with the Bubble and with the local school.

The school children's visit was considered a highlight of the project. When they visited they were fascinated to be allowed into a space that they had only ever been on the outside of; Ronald Buckingham had a 'secret garden' and an Easter egg hunt was arranged in it for them which emphasised this. The intergenerational aspects of the project were regarded as being particularly valuable. For instance the children came back as they were doing a project about WW2 and so the relationship has continued.

The project has been experienced as successful for all of those involved in it, partly because it works, subtly on a number of levels, developing in careful stages. Participants became involved weekly in sessions within their own environments, which then took them on a journey, linking them into widening spheres of activity and connection which they hadn't envisaged at the start. As the lead practitioner explained "it's about growing communities".

¹² It should be noted that one of Bubble's cross-cutting aims is to engender 'joy' in people.

The connections that are made are done so on a basis of sharing and exchange, with the older people as active performers with something to offer. The participants were facilitated to explore their creativity and to communicate this through performance based events. As Rooke and Kendall observe, echoing the significance Matarasso gives to 'agency':

*"within London Bubble, participants are not merely passive consumers of cultural activities and products and the visual pleasure of theatre. Instead they are cultural co-producers. Through the multiple spaces of participation that the company offers participants opportunities to develop a sense of agency"*¹³

This sense of agency, of having something to offer that is of interest to others and of having some purpose is particularly poignant given the age of the participants and their experiences as older people in sheltered housing. It allows them to see themselves and to be seen by others as more than "coffin dodgers".

There was an undoubted benefit for participants in "having something to look forward to" and evidence that this can make a real difference in terms of someone's week and in fact their life. The project highlighted how older people in these kinds of homes can be isolated from the surrounding community and also from each other within the homes. Creative Homes created opportunities to meet and get to know each other, to break down barriers of privacy, and to offer activity that was "not just bingo."

The project outcomes cited by participants included fun and enjoyment, thinking of the future, feeling creative, able to mix with people and communicate, all of which are clearly important to everyone but are seen in a different light given the context of ill health, isolation, depression, etc.

This work would perhaps therefore benefit from more quantitatively focused evaluative work that focuses specifically on health impacts resulting from the benefits that have so far been evidenced. One member of staff said that some of the strongest anecdotal evidence of benefit came from family members and therefore it would be worth gathering further information from both families and health and social care professionals.

5.1 What next?

Those involved in this project were conscious of both how the relationships established might be sustained and how the work can be continued beyond this piloting phase.

The home manager said that she is mindful of the issue of what happens "when these things stop" but is also well aware of the limitations of her role and resources and it is therefore important to be careful about making any promises. For example she said that "It needs a resident to take on the link" with the school as she is not always there given her other management responsibilities. However she also added that "the hope is that the invitation to come here will grow".

¹³ Taking Part Case Study: London Bubble Theatre, A. Rooke and D. Kendall, CUCR, Goldsmiths.
<http://www.gold.ac.uk/cucr/research/takepart/>

Bubble staff continue to have contact with the homes and the residents¹⁴. After the project concluded this initially involved them going to meet and chat with the residents to talk about 'what next' and to see if they were able to support any of their needs or aspirations. The staff also recognised that their role too was, by necessity limited and that they need a "signposting strategy" that would include perhaps closer links with other organisations that focus on work with older people.

However if there was further funding there is the aspiration to build on the work with the two current homes as well as extending the work through using the model in new settings. The original group/s could become involved in wider exchanges with schools for example and with new groups.

The homes were very different and as such have provided learning about what is needed in order to offer this kind of programme. The home with the warden was considered to be more robust and helped provide an environment that was welcoming, safe and where good communication and resources actively supported the work.

5.2 Creating a model: ideas for future practice

Developing practice depends literally, on practicing, and therefore this takes time, investment and understanding. The abilities of experienced practitioners can from the outside be seen as seamlessly intuitive, whereas they are the result of accumulated experience from reflective practice and thoughtful planning. It is possible to outline a model of practice that has been applied and developed through the Creative Homes project, but this isn't to say it is the finished article.

The workshop lead practitioner was clear about the amount that she had learnt from working on the Creative Homes project. She is keen to take this forward and had a number of ideas about how the practice could be honed and enhanced. Her understanding of the issues related to working with older people had deepened and as a result she would like to see greater exploration of the participants' physicality and abilities. This would of course need to account for differing levels of physical ability and find a careful balance between sensitivity, limitations and when to push or extend. She also said that the strategy of honouring people's personal life and health challenges, "bringing into the room" but then "parking them" should also be developed and done more consciously. Interestingly the creation of a space, in which they were present but somewhat freed of more usual daily experiences or personas seemed to be one of the most attractive and liberating aspects of the sessions.

Some residents were put off by the idea of any kind of public event or sharing. Therefore it will be vital in the future to plan for how to involve and support those that feel this without putting pressure on them to perform. Relationship building is critical to the model, both between practitioners and participants but also between participants themselves. The social and group dynamics are the foundation and sustenance for the creative work and exchanges.

¹⁴ For example a number of the residents were recently invited to the Docks to Desktops performances as audience members and participants.

The project highlighted particular considerations for working with older people using theatre based techniques. These included mental and physical factors such as movement, frailty, changing levels of health, and memory.

5.3 Creating a model: contextual considerations

What was seen to work particularly well with this project was the links between the organisations involved including between the two homes, with the school and with London Bubble. This enhanced the work and enhanced the value of the experience for those involved. This needs to be clearly thought about and planned for in subsequent projects as well as potentially extended. The partnership worked on a number of levels, including offering the opportunity for intergenerational exchange through ongoing individual and organisational relationships. As has been noted above, this also warrants exploration in relation to pathways and support beyond the project lifetime with additional partners identified at the outset. The homes as partners (as an entity other than the residents) also add useful value and resources.

The relationship with the two homes and with their residents offers the possibility of involvement with future work in new settings thereby creating a widening network of 'Creative Homes'. The participants' experiences and work could inspire and attract newcomers, both new participants and new partners. Centrally there is the notion of "re-purposing what theatre is used for" and further exploring the relationships between care, health, recreation and ageing.

6. APPENDICES

Appendix A



ENTRY SNAPSHOT

This form is so that we can find out more about why people get involved in London Bubble and what they get from it. It helps us report to our funders and also helps us to develop the work we do. **Thank you for your time and co-operation.**

Name – *you don't have to give your real name if you would like this to be anonymous*

.....**Age**.....**Date**.....

What session/s are you attending at Bubble? / What project/s are you involved in with Bubble?

How did you hear about these sessions and why did you choose to come along?

What do you hope to get out of this project? *Please tick all that apply*

- ☐ Practical skills - *theatre skills, others?*
- ☐ Personal skills *e.g. more confidence, better communication,*
- ☐ New experiences *e.g. places you wouldn't normally go, making new friends, using new equipment etc.*
- ☐ Fun and enjoyment
- ☐ Fitness

☐ Creativity

☐ Other – *please specify*

Are there any other reasons you want to do this project?

What skills, experiences and qualities do you think you might be able to offer or contribute to the project?

Which of these statements best fits you...?

1. Friends and networks

- ☐ *I know a lot of all kinds of people*
- ☐ *I have a small group of close friends*
- ☐ *Most people don't know me very well*
- ☐ *I would like to know more people than I do right now*

2. Communication

- ☐ *I don't find it easy to say what I really mean*
- ☐ *I feel I can talk to most people*
- ☐ *I can talk to people I know easily*

- ☐ *Talking isn't really my thing*

3. Confidence

You are in a session where you don't really know anyone. You are asked to stand up and tell everyone about yourself.

- ☐ *I find it quite easy to be in the spotlight*
- ☐ *I don't really want to do this but you give it a go*
- ☐ *I hate having to do this as it makes you feel nervous / I don't know what to say*
- ☐ *I would rather leave the session than be put on the spot*

4. Learning Style

- ☐ *I prefer to learn through seeing*
- ☐ *I prefer to learn through listening*
- ☐ *I prefer to learn through moving, doing, touching*

5. Creativity

- ☐ *I would describe myself as a creative person*
- ☐ *I think that I can be creative sometimes*
- ☐ *I have never really considered myself to be creative*

6. Age

- ☐ *I mix with people of different ages*
- ☐ *I mostly mix with people of my own age*

☐ *I would like to know more people of different ages*

7. Community

☐ *I feel a part of a community*

☐ *I don't feel very connected to any community*

☐ *I would like to know to be more connected to a / my community*

Where you are now?

1. **Current employment status:** *(please circle any that apply)*

F/T empl
training

P/T empl
P/T training

F/T education

P/T education

F/T

Unemployed

Self-employed

Retired

Parent / Carer

Other

2. **Do you have any volunteering experience?** Yes / No

3. **Have you been involved in a project like this before?** Yes / No

4. **Are you involved in any other projects or groups?** Yes / No

5. **Interests and leisure:** What are you most interested in? What do you like doing in your spare time?

Appendix B – These Hands, written by the members of the Frank Whymark House Creative Homes group and writer Simon Startin.

Haggared now and weather beaten
Struggling to keep the heat in
Slowing down with holding back the years.
Knackered mate with all the hours
Scratching at this bed of flowers
Of the dreams I sowed here with my tears.
Children with their scuffs and knocks
Husbands with their smelly socks
C'est la vie or so it all appears.

These hands have smoothed the sheets of morning
These hands at evening time have prayed
These hands have held them oh so tightly
These hands my lovely life has made.

Memories of [me] picking fruits
Sewing buttons on their suits
Silly days spent doing this and that
Clapping soldiers on the shoulders
Paperwork in files and folders
Knitting Mr Sunshine's bobble hat
Bottling gin with red raw fingers
Loud applause in silence fingers
Slapping all the chancers where they sat.

These hands have smoothed the sheets of morning
These hands at evening time have prayed
These hands have held them oh so tightly
These hands my lovely life has made.

Winters coming, nights are colder
Loving hands are getting older
Always have my hand cream near to hand
Warmed by light from summers past
Hope this winters not my last
Hope to keep my handprints in the sand
Autumns leaves like aged palms
Winds that whistle distant psalms
Tell a tale of memories that were grand.

These hands have smoothed the sheets of morning
These hands at evening time have prayed
These hands have held them oh so tightly
These hands my lovely life have made.