

arts together



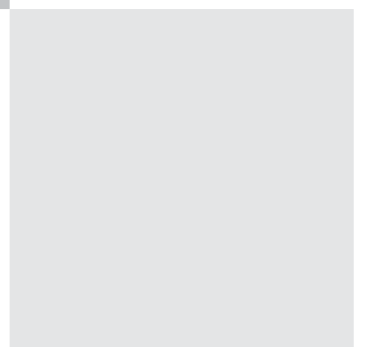
An arts project
with older
people living in
Wiltshire



**Focused Review Information
for Wiltshire Social Services
Department & other
Partner Agencies
2000 - 2002**



Commissioned by
ArtSpark
March 2002





arts together

Focused Review Information for Wiltshire Social Services Department & other Partner Agencies

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*“Thank you for
opening up my life
again. After living
a very busy and
full life, I find it
difficult being
inactive.*

*So Thursdays are
good to look
forward to”*

Group member



CONTRIBUTIONS AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This focused report and the main review and report on which it is based were prepared by Colin Whittington* working closely with Jeff Pigott and the team at ArtSpark whose knowledge of Arts Together and support of the review process were indispensable.

The chief contributors to the report are: the older people who participate in the groups, the project manager and fellow members of the ArtSpark team of arts facilitators, the volunteers and carers who support the groups, and representatives of the partners agencies.

Their contributions have been integrated from the written materials they have produced, provided or appeared in, and through their recorded comments on drafts of the report and on the project itself. The core of the report is, therefore, the edited content and analysis of contributions which these people and organisations have collectively authored.

Thanks are given to all contributors.

*“Unexpected
february
sunshine lights
up the room as he
places the LP on
the turntable.
Vivaldi’s Four
Seasons ‘Spring’.
The opening
notes swell to fill
the room and
there are smiles
of recognition.
Then feet began
to tap and some
close their eyes -
not sleeping but
enjoying private
thoughts. The
music ends and
there is a burst
of applause.*

*Jean Edmiston
storyteller*

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INTRODUCTION

Each week, for 30 weeks of the year, older people in the Arts Together project meet in their groups in Devizes, Marlborough and Pewsey to talk and share in creative workshops facilitated by professional artists. The first group started in 2000 and members produced *Words Together*, an illustrated book of their poems and stories. Since then the number of groups has increased to three, their arts activities have widened and the results have been published in illustrated newsletters.

The review and report of the project have been commissioned by ArtSpark who run Arts Together on behalf of partner agencies. ArtSpark is a small, non-profit making, artist-led organisation based in the area served by the project. ArtSpark is committed to equal opportunities, to respecting difference related to age, gender, ethnicity, culture, religion, health and ability, and to working directly and with others to support social inclusion.

Government policies on social inclusion and the National Service Framework for Older People (2001) both require authorities to ensure that local services are culturally appropriate meeting the needs of increasingly diverse communities of older people. ArtSpark is committed to these aims and to working with key stakeholder agencies in monitoring both their referrals to the project and the Arts Together service.



1

ALIGNMENT TO NATIONAL, REGIONAL AND LOCAL POLICY

(see Main Report, Section 3)

Arts Together is based on a partnership of statutory and independent sector agencies and upon involvement of group members themselves. It aims to increase social contact and participation among members, to stimulate new interests and ideas, to provide satisfying opportunities for the exercise of skills and talents, to recognise and value the contribution of older people and, thereby, *to increase well-being and support independence.*

The project's structure, aims, arts methodology and participatory ethos therefore align directly with national, regional and local policies such as:

- Modernising Health and Social Services: National Priorities Guidance 2000/01-2002/3
- The National Service Frameworks for Older People
- The National Service Frameworks for Mental Health
- The Health Act, 1999
- The NHS Plan, 2000
- Fourth Age Learning Report, 2000
- Wiltshire Community Care Plan 2000-2003
- Wiltshire Health Improvement Programme (HImP) 1999-2002 and related Joint Investment Plans (JIPs)
- Kennet District Council Four year strategy 2000-2004
- Kennet District Council's Taking Leisure and Arts to the Community
- Draft Health Strategy for the Southern Arts Region

"ArtSpark has given me an interest in my life I thought I had lost."

Group member



2

SUMMARY OF ACHIEVEMENTS TO DATE

Words Together

(see Main Report, Section 2)

Arts Together grew out of the pilot project *Words Together*, a facilitated creative writing group of twelve older people from the Kennet, Wilts. area. It was instigated in 2000 by officers of Kennet District Council and Wiltshire Social Services, overseen by an inter-agency steering group and project-managed by ArtSpark. The project was set up to explore alternatives to day care provision, increase choice, provide opportunities for mental stimulation and improve quality of life. It aimed to attract socially isolated older people who would not normally use local authority services.

The policy rationale for the project closely matched local and central government social policies on social inclusion, community health and modernisation, including the use of partnership solutions that cut across boundaries of departments and services.

The group was led by an artist/facilitator from ArtSpark who is experienced in working with groups of older people and an expert in story-telling and story-making. Group members read and listened to stories, wrote poems and stories and compiled favourite work into a printed booklet.

The commissioned evaluation report concluded that the project was highly successful from the viewpoint of the participants and of the supporting agencies.

Arts Together

(see Main Report, Section 5)

The three Arts Together groups established in 2000 and 2001 in Devizes, Marlborough and Pewsey each has a team of two artist/facilitators who attend regularly, supported by a volunteer who goes each week. There is also a carer for each group and, in some cases, a group member's personal carer attends. The project is led and managed by ArtSpark in consultation with the partner agencies. Up to twelve members participate in each group and are referred by Wiltshire Social Services Department and Sarsen Housing Association. Most members are in their seventies and eighties and one is over 90.

Creative work undertaken by members include a booklet of poems and stories, written reminiscence and other creative writing, book-





making, digital photography, basic computing, newsletters, decorated mirrors and picture frames. They have also produced beautiful bookmarks, mats, memory boxes and handmade Christmas cards.

The close alignment of Arts Together's aims and methods with local, regional and national policies is outlined at the start of Section 2 above. In a written evaluation in May 2001, members commented that what they liked about their group was:

- contact with people (meeting and talking to friendly people, making new friends and being stimulated by conversation)
- and*
- the opportunity to be creative (making things, writing stories, sharing work and widening interests).

These comments reflect significant aims of the groups.

Related achievements and developments (See Main Report, Section 6)

The development of the Arts Together groups and the specific work of members have been accompanied by a number of achievements and activities at group, local, regional and national levels. They include:

- Poster presentation of the projects at the South West Public Health Conference, 2000 at Wessex Institute of the University of Southampton
- Arts Together Newsletters
- Group members works exhibited at Arts Day and at joint project group meeting in 2001
- Training workshop planned for 2002 for volunteers, carers, artists and housing wardens
- Publication of the Words Together book
- A second book of poems and stories is under discussion
- An exhibition/display of work produced so far is being planned for 2002
- Project Arts Day, July 2001
- Website name "ArtsTogether.com" registered prior to development of a project website

"Our country is getting older. That's not a burden, it is an opportunity."

*Tony Blair, The Times,
15 June 1999*

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- Award of £200 from GWR FM Radio Community Trust
- Creative writing project commended in the Social Services Inspectorate-Audit Commission Joint Review of Social Services in Wiltshire, 2000
- Article in NewsLine, the newsletter for Wiltshire Social Services
- Feature on BBC Wiltshire Sound in April 2001
- 'Highly commended' in the national Community Care Awards in 2000
- "Awards for All" grant of £5000 for computer, camera and Newsletter costs

3

EVIDENCE OF REVIEW, CONSULTATION AND EVALUATION

(See Main Report, Section 7)

Progress review of the project and of participating members consist of meetings by ArtSpark with key staff of the partner agencies, by regular contact with front-line agency workers by telephone, email and letter and by a meeting of the project manager with the social worker or community care assistant, carer, volunteer and housing warden at the mid-point of each group;

- Member feedback has been both impromptu and systematic. The former is encouraged throughout sessions and at breaks and mealtimes and is used to develop the groups and their work;
- Systematic evaluation and feedback have been done through:
 - a qualitative Words Together evaluation in 2000
 - through a questionnaire to Arts Together members in May 2001 which included questions related to the service agreement objectives;
 - and via the present review and consultation.

*"I feel more alive
and alert"*

Group member

4

EVIDENCE OF ACTIVE INVOLVEMENT OF GROUP MEMBERS

(See Main Report Section 5)

The ethos of the project is for the artists to be facilitators rather than leaders. This way of working encourages a high level of collaboration and negotiation.

Examples of active involvement include:

- Individual members presenting their work to the group
- Members of a group meeting independently during holiday breaks, especially during the summer, with most group members taking a turn in leading a session
- Members representing their groups or the Project at the Community Care Awards ceremony in London and at the Arts Day.
- Active contributions to the Arts Together newsletter
- Members who were dissatisfied with the quality of the lunches provided voting to make their own meal provisions with carer help
- Members organising a bring-and-buy sale to raise funds to buy a video player for use by the group
- A member's request for more new technology led to work with a digital camera and lap-top computer
- Regularly bringing items like pictures and personal treasures that focus the sessions
- Contributions to the present review.

"I don't think the organiser could have envisaged the benefit that the group has brought to everybody... I just love it - it's been very good for me."

Group member



5

SERVICE AGREEMENT OBJECTIVES AND INFORMATION FROM THE REVIEW

(See Main Report Section 7)

Service Agreement Objective

Relevant information from the Review (sources: 2001 member questionnaire and 2002 member consultation)

To prevent loss or further loss of independence amongst vulnerable older people.

All but one of the group members responding (17) said feelings of independence had been affected (increased) a lot or a little (one was unaffected) (2001).

To reduce isolation among older people living in Kennet by giving them an opportunity to participate in a group activity with an Arts focus.

Eleven members said their social life had been increased a lot. Just two reported no effect (2001). The importance of the project in giving valued social contact and reducing isolation is illustrated in the 2002 consultation.

Sixteen liked the group for contact with people and for the opportunity to be creative (2001). Respondents in 2002 describe both the creative and social benefits.

To provide an opportunity for mental stimulation.

Fourteen of 16 described the stimulating effects of group membership on the rest of their week (2001). Increased stimulation is cited by members in the consultation (2002).

To build self-confidence and self-esteem.

Over half of 17 respondents said their self-confidence had increased a lot (2001).

Respondents in 2002 placed high value on one another and the actual and potential contributions made, with evident potential for increased confidence and self-esteem.

To improve older people's quality of life by giving them the opportunity to be creative and learn new skills.

Eleven members had learned or developed a lot and five said they had learned a little (2001).

Evidence is given of the prized social and interpersonal benefits the enjoyment of the creative and social aspects of the groups and enthusiasm for expressing and learning skills (2002).

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**Service Agreement
Objective****Relevant information from the Review
(sources: 2001 member questionnaire
and 2002 member consultation)**

To increase older people's choice by offering activities outside existing services provided by the voluntary and statutory sectors.

A clear extension of choice is offered by the distinctive combination of supportive social contact and the facilitated expression and development of creative skills (2001; 2002)

To promote a model of sustainable and self-supporting groups

In demonstrating that objectives are met and that local and national priorities are served, the project contributes to the goal of sustainability. A capacity for partial self-support has been demonstrated by the active participation of members and the continuation of group meetings in the recess between the formal cycle of sessions (2001; 2002)

6

CONCLUDING COMMENTS

(See Main Report Section 8)

This report marks the end of the 2000-2002 phase of the Arts Together project. As ArtSpark and those involved as participants, facilitators and supporters prepare for a further phase in the life and development of the project from April 2002, it is timely to be able to summarise the evidence of this review, that Arts Together:

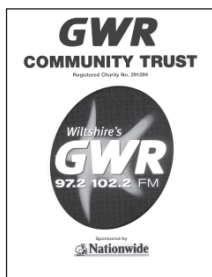
- is clearly relevant to local, regional and national policies in social care, health and the arts;
- has a sound record of participation, evaluation and consultation with the service users, that is, the older people themselves;
- is providing a service that is valued by the service users and that delivers on its service agreement objectives;
- is an effective and developing methodology making a high quality contribution to socially inclusive local services to older people.



Principle funder:



Other funders:



Support in kind:



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