Developing a Creative and Theatre Based Intervention for Young People with Dementia and their Carers

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A focus on younger people with dementia

- Young onset dementia (< 65 years)
- 17,000 to 18,500 diagnosed in the UK
- Diagnosis is complex
- Symptoms may differ from those with older onset dementia; behavioural and speech problems more prominent
- Social and ‘life phase’ implications
  - Employment
  - Financial
  - Social isolation
  - Stigma
  - Family
  - Mental health
  - ‘it’s not the retirement either of us had planned’
A focus on younger people with dementia

- Lack of service provision for this age group:
  - Access care services for older age group - who are in a different stage of dementia and less physically active
  - Focus is on respite and longer term care
  - May not be able to access support if <65

- Benefits of service provision:
  - Can improve behavioural issues
  - Provide carer respite
  - Improve wellbeing
  - Provide social engagement and support
  - A feeling of normalisation
‘[provision of activities allows people with dementia to do] not just ordinary things, but great and amazing things, [it] is transformational...And it enables people to take the lead, to take responsibility where... they can learn each week to do a little bit extra. So how lovely to go home and have something to talk about...’

(Lynda Hughes, Occupational Therapist, SCIE, 2013a)
Why be creative through theatre & drama?

- **Range of activities:**
  - Music
  - Drama
  - Art
  - Poetry
  - Dance

- **Focus on dramatic engagement**

- **Creativity can:**
Creative Engagement – Current practice

- Reminiscence Theatre; Storytelling and Improvisation based drama
- Ladder to the Moon
  - Incorporate carer training with improvisational film shoots
- To Whom I May Concern
  - Sharing personal stories through performance
- TimeSlips
  - Storytelling

(Ladder to the Moon, 2013)
He's got long legs. Oh boy!

He sure is jumping. He is into the music.
What can we learn for a new intervention?

- Person centred care
- Recognise the diversity within dementia
  - Build in interests and needs of participants
  - Focus on abilities
  - Focus on the person
- People can do more than we may realise
  - Where it doesn’t work and how you can’t fool people!
- Flexible approach
- Clear aims of the intervention
- Build in success
- Developing a model aimed at the person with dementia and the carer
- Developing a model of support within the intervention
What can we learn for a new intervention?

- Reflective model of participation
- Clear communication
- Use of:
  - Music
  - Movement
  - Storytelling
  - Improvisation
- Consider practical elements:
  - Transport
  - Environment
Applied Drama Model

- New intervention will be based on applied drama methods and structure:
  - Open communication
  - Reflection in and on action: taking learning forward
  - Development of a safe, trusting environment
  - Respect
  - Working to the needs and experiences of participants
  - Ownership of the work is with the participants
  - Distance provided through creative process
  - Use of tools e.g. role play, improvisation and games
  - Focus on fun and joy of the process
Living Stage Theatre Company (1995)
Proposed methods and engagement

- Intervention is being developed with a theatre company:
  - Series of weekly workshops run with people with young onset dementia and their carers
  - Developing communication skills
  - Social interaction and sense of normalisation

- Research methods:
  - Participant observation of sessions
  - Pre and post interviews with carers and people with dementia
  - Photo/video diaries

- Celebrating the work:
  - Development of a video of the work undertaken to share with friends/family and aim to be posted online to share with the wider community
References

Questions and Feedback

www.northampton.ac.uk