

Dementia and Imagination

Research Summary 2: the impact of a visual arts programme on quality of life, communication and well-being of people living with dementia

What is Dementia and Imagination?

Dementia and Imagination explored how art can contribute to the creation of dementia friendly communities. Our programme of work examined how art activities:

- Are beneficial to people living with dementia and those who care for them.
- Help us understand the experience of living with dementia.
- Help raise public awareness of living with dementia.



Dementia and Imagination was a large arts and science collaboration of universities, artists, charities and providers of cultural services working

together through five inter-linked projects. This research summary highlights one phase of a project.

Why did we do this project?

Despite ongoing research, there are limited medical treatments available for people living with dementia. Opportunities to enrich quality of life through creative activities are therefore of international relevance.

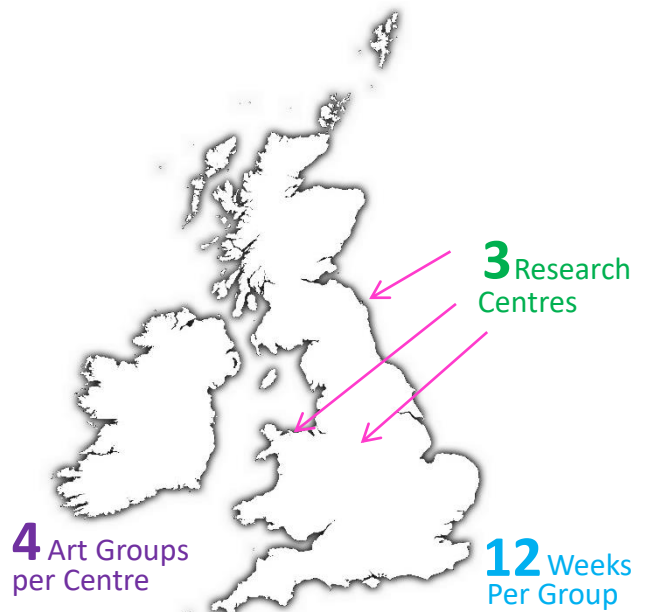
What did we do?

We developed a 12-week visual art programme (see research summary 1) and examined the impact on people living with dementia through a mixed-methods longitudinal investigation. We used four different methods to collect data, aiming to capture the impact 'in the moment' and 'over time'.



Who took part?

People living with mild to severe dementia were recruited across three research settings in England and Wales (residential care homes, a county hospital and community venues). This is one of the largest research investigations to test an arts programme in dementia care.



What are the key findings?

“The group sucks you out of the abyss, lifted me out of depression”

- Taking part in a visual arts activity was better for well-being than just taking part in a social activity, highlighting the unique contribution of the arts.
- Quality of life scores were significantly higher at the end of the programme compared to the start.
- The programme was a stimulating experience, enabling personal resilience and social connectedness.
- Participants reported the programme as being interesting, friendly, and enjoyable. They reported a high sense of achievement and felt involved in the session.
- The benefits were evident regardless of the setting or stage of dementia.

Read the full publication

Windle, G., Joling, K., Howson-Griffiths, T., Woods, B., Jones, C. H., van de Ven, P., Newman, A., Parkinson, C. (2017). The impact of a visual arts programme on quality of life, communication and well-being of people living with dementia: A mixed-methods longitudinal investigation. [*International Psychogeriatrics*](#), 1-15.



What are the implications?

- The visual arts programme delivered in this research was safe, effective, caring, responsive and well-led. Consequently arts and cultural activities should be embedded within routine health and social care provision.
- Currently in the UK the National Institute of Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) recommend cognitive stimulation groups as a psychosocial treatment for people living with mild to moderate dementia. Cognitive stimulation may be a key aspect of the art programme described here, as there is congruence between the 'guiding principles' of cognitive stimulation, and aspects of our arts programme.
- A possible future implementation pathway could be to consider an arts programme as a follow-on or perhaps an alternative to a conventional cognitive stimulation group.
- For people living with all stages dementia, arts and cultural organizations and community venues are ideally situated for delivering such high quality, socially inclusive, mentally stimulating activities.
- Social prescribing may enable health practitioners to refer patients to community arts initiatives.