



## Lost in Art too....?

# Evaluation of Art Sessions Provided by Denbighshire County Council



Canolfan Grefft Rhuthun  
Y Ganolfan i'r Celfyddydau Cymhwysol

Ruthin Craft Centre  
The Centre for the Applied Arts





This report is dedicated to Geoff, an artist who will be greatly missed by the group

*Evaluation by Katherine Algar, Dementia Services Development Centre,  
Wales, Bangor University. May 2012*

**Lost in art too.....?** was a project aimed at people aged over fifty with dementia, along with their family members and carers. It followed a successful action research project initiated by engage Cymru called Lost in Art. In the current project, participants worked alongside artist Sian Hughes for ten weeks to explore the potential of cyanotype (a photographic print process) on a variety of materials with the gallery acting as starting point and inspiration.

The project aimed to explore the role of visual arts in addressing issues which can affect people with dementia, including social isolation, confidence, communication and quality of life and wellbeing. It was hoped that the benefits would be two-fold, with the carers as well as people with dementia getting enjoyment from the project. At the end of the ten weeks, a celebratory exhibition was held in Ruthin Craft Centre. This evaluation is a result of observation, artist notes and focus groups with the participants and the project partners.

### **The team:**

- Sian Fitzgerald: Project Coordinator; Community Arts Development Officer, Denbighshire County Council
- Sian Hughes: Professional Artist
- Jo McGregor: Assistant to Sian; Freelance Arts Co-ordinator, Denbighshire County Council
- Elen Bonner: Gallery Facilitator and Liaison; Education Officer, Ruthin Craft Centre
- Kat Algar: Project evaluator; Research Project Support Officer, Dementia Services Development Centre, Wales , Bangor University

### **Partner Organisations**

The project was led by Denbighshire County Council's Art Services in partnership with Ruthin Craft Centre and the Alzheimer's Society. The project was funded by Denbighshire County Council and Ruthin Craft Centre.

The evaluation was done by a member of the Dementia Services Development Centre, Bangor University.

The term 'project partners' in this report refer to Sian Hughes, the artist, Jo McGregor, artist assistant, Elen Bonner, Education Officer for Ruthin Craft Centre, and Sian Fitzgerald, Community Arts Development Officer for Denbighshire County Council.

## The Project

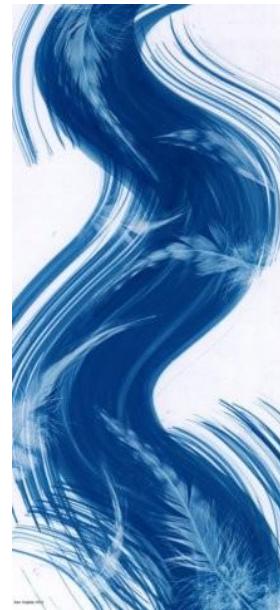
Lost in Art? was a previous project held in Ruthin Craft Centre in 2010 for people with dementia and their carers. It was led by engage Cymru in their action research focussing on engaging older people in art and gallery activities. Lost in Art too....? ran between January and March 2012 and aimed to continue in the success of the first project. It set out to explore whether working with a family member would benefit the person with dementia.

Participants were invited to take part in the evaluation at the beginning of the project. They were given information sheets and made aware that this was optional and would not affect their participation in the art sessions. All participants agreed and signed consent forms.

## The Artist

Sian Hughes is a professional artist who has held arts in health residencies in Caerphilly District Miner's Hospital and Glan Clwyd Hospital in Rhyl. More recently she has been involved in providing workshops in a variety of settings, including art galleries, for participants with mild to moderate mental health issues such as anxiety, stress and depression.

Sian focuses on the Cyanotype process in her professional work and is still exploring its potential through layering, text, photography, fabric and bookmaking. She runs a wide range of workshops to enthuse other people to this vibrant camera-less photographic medium.



## The participants

Participants were recruited with help from the local Alzheimer's Society. Sian Fitzgerald, Sian Hughes, and Jo McGregor were invited to a Memory Cafe where they discussed the project with the group. They aimed to recruit ten people, so five people with dementia each with a family member carer.

In total, five people with dementia and nine people in total were recruited on the project. There were three couples where the person with dementia came with their spouse, one lady who came with a support worker, and one lady who came on her own. The ages of the participants ranged from 75 to 86. There were three men and six women in the group. The three men and two women had dementia.

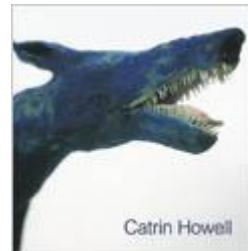
The lady who came on her own stopped coming after week four so the core group consisted of eight. There were five weeks with full attendance and absences on other weeks were due to hospital appointments, pre-booked holiday and a fall.

In between the sessions, Jo McGregor rang the participants to ask if they would be attending the next session.

## Inspiration

The art sessions were held in the education workshop space in Ruthin Craft Centre. Participants were given tours of the exhibitions in the gallery on two occasions. These were led by Elen Bonner, the Education Officer at Ruthin Craft Centre, and were in week one, and again in week four after the exhibition had changed.

The exhibition in week one consisted of bright woven textiles by Ptolemy Mann and in week four, participants took inspiration from Ann Gibbs' and Catrin Howell's work.



The participants used Studio 5, a studio space with a large window fronting the centre's courtyard, to display an ongoing exhibition of their own work. At the end of each session, participants were encouraged to take work over to be displayed in the window. There was a door panel with text explaining about the project. The final celebration exhibition was also held in here.



## The Art Sessions

The art sessions were designed for each couple to work together on a project exploring the process of cyanotype. This is a “camera-less photographic process developed in 1842 by the scientist John Herschel. Paper coated with a light sensitive solution turns green. When this is exposed to sunlight or ultra violet light it changes to a rich indigo. Objects placed on the paper, blocking the light, leave precise white photographic images” (taken from [www.sianhughes.net](http://www.sianhughes.net)), as seen to the right.



The process was introduced to the group in the first week and then over the next sessions, participants began to bring in objects from home. This ranged from wheat from one couple’s farm to stamps from another participant’s collection. Each participant developed their own individual theme that ran through their work. As the project went on, it was clear that both the person with dementia and the family members/carers should work on their own pieces.

The room was set up with each stage of the process in a different part of the room.

Sian prepared the paper with the light sensitive solution before the session, and gave out paper as and when needed, as it needed to be stored in darkness.

The participants first arranged their objects on the paper at the main table.



Then they moved to an area with a small hand held vacuum where they placed their paper with the objects into a vacuum pack bag and sealed it to stop any movement of the objects.



The next stage was to place the vacuum pack containing the objects on the light sensitive paper underneath a light box for an allocated time. This started off at ten minutes, but as the weeks went on and people were using different materials, Sian was able to give a suitable time frame for each participant. Once the paper had turned from green to a grey-blue it was ready.



When the time under the light box was over, the vacuum pack was opened, the objects returned to the table, and the paper put into a tray of water to rinse off the solution. It was suggested that this take at least five minutes to ensure all of the solution was properly rinsed off. The paper would turn into a deep indigo once the solution was washed off, leaving areas where objects had been placed white.



Once the allocated time was over, the participants dried the paper using newspaper to soak up excess water, then left their artwork to dry on a rack near a heater.



The group also had the opportunity to try the process outside a couple of times using sunlight instead of the ultraviolet light boxes. However as the project was run from January to March, there weren't many times it was possible. This did add a new dimension to the sessions and showed that the process could be done at home.

Participants asked for paper to take home with them to experiment with, and Sian also gave each couple a flower press to take home to press any flowers that they wished to use for their pieces.



The visits to the gallery were also an important part of the sessions. This happened twice to reflect the changing exhibitions. Elen Bonner, the Education Officer at Ruthin Craft Centre led these visits and they were held at a pace suitable for all, including those using walking aids. Elen was able to explain about the exhibitions and answer any questions. The format was of a group discussion to begin with and then time for everyone to look around at their own pace. Sian Hughes and Jo were also there to help with discussion. These visits provided inspiration for some of the work, as well as gave ideas for the ways that the work would be displayed in the final celebration exhibition.

Once participants were familiar with the technique, they started to use various materials in the cyanotype process. Some participants used tracing paper or fabric, and all participants used objects that they had brought in from home such as parts of model planes, photographs, flowers from the garden, stamps, and blouses. Some participants traced images onto acetate to transfer onto the light sensitive paper. All of this helped to make each participant's work so individual. Sian also transferred decal images of the participant's work onto ceramic plaques and little dishes, adding another dimension to the work.

## Celebration

At the end of the ten weeks, a celebratory exhibition was held in Studio 5, where there had been an ongoing window display. The exhibition was curated by Elen Bonner. Each participant's work was given a focus demonstrating how their individual interests had influenced the development of their own work. Objects related to the production of the work were displayed alongside to suggest the making process. Elen had commented that whilst setting up the exhibition, she had been asked by several visitors to the gallery whether the items were for sale.

All participants were encouraged to attend and to invite friends and family along. Representatives from interested organisations, such as the Alzheimer's Society and the Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board Arts in Health Steering Group were



also invited. The exhibition was opened by Philip Hughes, Gallery Director who commented that the exhibition was to a professional standard, a feeling that echoed an earlier comment by Sian:

*"we knew we had the support of the craft centre and I think linking with the exhibition and this display now I think it really gives them and the course, and their work, a lot of validation and status...and value."* Sian Hughes, artist

There was a friendly atmosphere and all participants seemed very proud of their work and talked happily with the guests. Light refreshments were provided and most people stayed for over an hour. It was commented on by many people that they would have liked the exhibition to be up for longer than one day.

## Evaluation

The project aimed to explore the role of visual arts in addressing issues which can affect people with dementia, including social isolation, confidence, communication, quality of life and wellbeing.

In the first session, all participants were invited to take part in the evaluation of the project, to help Denbighshire County Council Art Services demonstrate the value and evaluate the service. It was explained that participation in the evaluation was entirely voluntary and that deciding not to take part would not affect their participation in the art sessions. They were also assured that they would not be identified by name in the report. Participants decided that they would prefer to be given pseudonyms rather than be referred to by participant number ie. Beatrice, rather than Participant 3. All participants agreed, and signed a consent form.

The evaluation process results from a group discussion with the participants, and a group discussion with the project partners. It was decided that Sian Hughes should lead the group discussion with participants as they had built up a good rapport. Sian used a topic guide developed by Kat Algar from discussions with the project partners mid way through the project. The group discussion took place on the last week around a table with tea and cakes. The group responded well to Sian, and it was noted that not many prompts were needed for all to take part, and it wasn't just carers who spoke as had been expected. Although not everyone contributed to the discussion, all were actively listening and agreeing and nodding to several points.

The discussion with project partners for the evaluation was held a week later on the morning of the celebratory exhibition, and was led by Kat. Sian Hughes also made notes at the end of each art session which were circulated and the researcher also

observed several sessions. All of these aspects have been fed into the following results.

## The Outcomes

Three main themes emerged from the focus groups with both the participants and project participants:

- “It’s been really, really positive”
- “There were a lot of component parts”
- “...when those bits aren’t in place, it doesn’t work as successfully”

Within these themes, there were various subthemes. The themes and subthemes are discussed below.

### **1. “It’s been really, really positive”**

Both the participants and the project partners reported several positive effects on the participants attending the art sessions. One striking quote from Marian, the wife of a person with dementia, describes what an impact coming to the sessions had on her husband.

*“Then he does want to move and he knows he is coming here and he seems to build up something and he gets quite excited, you know, and he keeps an eye on the time and everything. But other than that, if we are at home and things, he forgets really that we are going to do this and that. But when he comes here...he is different; he just wakes up, should I say? He likes it really.”*

Another quote from the project partners’ discussion demonstrates the positive transformation shown in the participants with dementia in the sessions compared to the carers’ experiences of home life.

*“They [carers] often commented they hadn’t seen their spouses talking, because at home, what we were picking up, is that at home they were very, very quiet, very depressed... You wouldn’t have thought that from the way they came in and worked.”*  
Sian Hughes, artist

Jo, the assistant artist, sums up the feelings of both groups

*“It’s been really, really positive, hasn’t it, and great for everyone”.*

The theme of positive effects on the participants can be further divided into several sub themes:

- ***"It's most enjoyable"***

When asked about general feelings about the art sessions, in both focus groups, the first and foremost feeling was that of enjoyment. It was also felt that the low dropout rate (one person) was down to this enjoyment.

*"It's most enjoyable. It has been. And interesting, hasn't it"* Martha, wife of a participant with dementia

*"We've enjoyed it so that's the main thing"* Marian, wife of a participant with dementia

*"There's no stopping us once we're started"* Gareth, a participant with dementia

*"...everyone has really enjoyed it and the fact that everybody has kept coming...I think it's testament that everyone stayed the full course."* Jo McGregor, assistant artist

- ***"A group was created"***

Both the participants and project partners commented on the how a group was created where everyone felt comfortable and safe, and everyone felt that they could talk to one another. It happened naturally and wasn't forced. The group dynamics were such that participants all helped each other and started to bring in materials for themselves and for others. Some felt that bringing in materials such as photographs helped participants get to know each other. Friendships were made between participants.

*"I think that is a strength...a group was created. The group feels themselves part of a group don't they."* Sian Hughes, artist

*"We've all made big friends really..."* Marian, wife of a participant with dementia

*"And also in the group, people bringing things in from home, they felt that opened up a bit more knowledge about other people. [Ronald] talked a lot about what he was doing, and I think [Gareth] had brought in things about the farm and [May] talked a lot about [a pet] so they got to know each other through their work in a sense. And not in a...we didn't do anything very staged did we... we didn't have any 'tell us about yourself', or anything like that, it just came out."* Sian Hughes, artist

*"You've got photographs of something in the past which we refer to and explain."*  
Gareth, a participant with dementia

*“On one level it is an art group but it actually has a whole lot of other ramifications to do with social interaction and an element of therapy...it’s not focussed on that but it comes out, doesn’t it, the way people support each other.”* Sian Hughes, artist

In some of the sessions, Sian suggested that people move around the table and work with others. This was met with positivity and gave a further chance to get to know one another better, and increase confidence:

*“We moved people around and they then saw [Gareth] and [Gordon] having a great chat and a laugh and they’d [the carers] never seen them socialising before”* Sian Hughes, artist

*“We’ve certainly seen the confidence grow haven’t we, over the course. Like you were saying about [Gareth] and [Gordon]. And [Gareth] has started having jokes with everybody and taking the mickey out of people and stuff which he wasn’t doing at the beginning”* Jo McGregor, assistant artist

- ***“broke down social isolation”***

Another positive effect mentioned by the project partners was that of breaking down social isolation. The term ‘social isolation’ is often used when talking of people with dementia and refers to the decline in social engagements that often happens after a diagnosis of dementia. The project partners felt that attending the sessions helped ease this:

*“It is a chance for everyone to get together. And the fact they’ve kept coming and have enjoyed it so much. It has definitely...affected the isolation...”* Jo

*“Yes definitely [it] broke down social isolation, I’d say”* Sian Hughes, artist

- ***“almost as like new memories were being created”***

An unexpected but positive outcome talked about in both focus groups was that of ‘new memories’ being made for the participants with dementia. Partners had noticed that their spouse with dementia could remember the names of other group members:

*“...he remembers everybody’s name. Because his short term is gone but he’ll remember [Ronald] and [Gordon]. And when [Olwen] phones, he remembers who she is, which makes quite a difference really. And when Jo phoned yesterday ‘who was that’ he’ll say. Then I’ll say it was Jo asking if we are coming to the class. So that makes a difference for me because it does stimulate him in another way. That he remembers you know things really. So I find that very good for him.”* Marian, wife of a participant with dementia

*[Olwen] and [Marian] said that [Gordon] and [Gareth] remembered everybody's name. So it was almost like new memories were being created through the group*"  
Sian Hughes, artist

- ***"it worked well...for the carer as well"***

Another positive outcome from the sessions discussed in the focus groups was the benefit to the carer as well as the person with dementia; something that had been hoped for in the aims of the project. Because the carers were fully taking part in the sessions as well, some felt that a form of respite was being provided. It also became apparent that interacting with other carers provided extra support.

*"one of the strengths of this group was that it really worked well not just for the dementia...person but for the carer as well. So they were getting a lot out of it."* Sian Hughes, artist

*"So the carers were not only having time to do some art work but also to interact with other carers..."* Sian Hughes, artist

*"I feel I have achieved quite a bit. It's something different for me...."* Marian, wife of a participant with dementia

*"And they will talk to friends...and they will be able to say well it is a form of respite because you indulge in your own passion and you do get that free time..."* Sian Fitzgerald, project coordinator

*"One of the sessions I went to, I definitely felt that [Olwen] in particular had had a very, very hard night and couple of days, and morning in particular, and you know it was such a relief being there and talking to [Marian] who understood...The use was totally different to the sharing with a partner there wasn't it. It was more about the sharing with another carer who understood what she was going through."* Sian Fitzgerald, project coordinator

It was also noted that some carers were unsure of the capabilities of the person with dementia at the beginning but once people started to move places around the table, they gave themselves and their partners a chance to flourish

*"...the carers were often quite overprotective and over worried about their partners and over anxious about what they could or couldn't do...but we felt that sometimes that was, you know, in a way blocking what that person could do and also blocking the carer off from having their own experience so again once we moved things around, that really blossomed."* Sian Hughes, artist

*"I saw a huge change from being present at one of the first sessions and one of the last ones in that particular....I thought they were much more ready to go off and not*

*worry so much about their partner and do their own thing.”* Sian Fitzgerald, project coordinator

Also, because the carers were doing the same activities, some felt that it gave the couple something to talk about and do outside of the sessions.

*“We talk about what happened today, sort of thing. You know it’s a topic, something to get involved in.”* Gareth, a participant with dementia

*“I think we had something to do at home that we had to bring in the following week...I thoroughly enjoyed that”* Martha, wife of a participant with dementia

*“Yes, I think it was nice to go home and you compare what you’ve done and discuss and say ‘oo that looks really good, doesn’t it’, and ‘I made a mess of that part’.”*  
Olwen, wife of a participant with dementia

## **2. “There were a lot of component parts...”**

The second theme to emerge from the discussions was that of the Cyanotype process itself. It was felt that having a process with different components where you had to move around the room helped increase opportunities for interaction.

*“Olwen: I mean I have been to just an art class where you sit around and do a little bit and do your own thing. But you haven’t got to go get up and wash it off, and meet other people as you’re doing it.*

*Marian: And have a little chat*

*Olwen: It’s just that you can, you intermingle then don’t you, rather than just sitting on your own.*

*Gareth: While you are waiting for it, you do...it’s a chance to chat”*

*“I think the fact that it’s very fluid and mobile...that there are a lot of different aspects to each activity, rather than, you know, just sitting and drawing or whatever. There were a lot of component parts to it weren’t there. So it did mean that people had to move around”* Sarah, daughter of a participant with dementia

*“...it was an activity where you moved around the room a lot and there were different parts of the process where people might need help. People were helping each other”*  
Sian Hughes, artist

Once the cyanotype process had been learnt, it could also be applied to different materials, meaning that participants were happy to do the same process for ten weeks.

*“I think you’ve all taken the process in lots of different directions which is great. You’ve done fabric, tracing paper, and ceramics.”* Sian Hughes, artist

*“...they stuck with one process for ten weeks. I thought that was quite remarkable too.”* Sian Hughes, artist

The three subthemes within the general discussion of the process are discussed below:

- “...we were exchanging...”

It was noted in both the group discussions with the participants and the project partners that the participants were exchanging materials and ideas throughout the process. Some brought in materials for others to use.

*“We all sort of looked at each other’s things”* Marian, wife of a participant with dementia

*“I think we were exchanging our things as well weren’t we, and sort of making use of other people’s bits and pieces”* Olwen, wife of a participant with dementia

*“She often brought in...things to share or to show. [She’d say] ‘I’ve just brought this. Have a go, I don’t need it. Give it to everybody.’ So things like that worked well, I think.”* Sian Hughes, artist

It was also noticed that by interacting with one another, ideas were being shared, and the learning process maximised.

*“I think we all bring something to the table...What we’ve done might be missing a little fraction and somebody else brings something else and it’ll fit in sort of thing...”* Gareth, a participant with dementia

*“That’s the chance. By mixing together you pick out bits of someone else’s drawing and fits it in.”* Gareth, participant with dementia

*“...you learn because I heard you say to [Ronald] you have to make it darker when you are drawing because [Gareth] was sketching. So we learnt a lot...”* Marian, wife of a participant with dementia

- “And everybody...had different ideas”

Within the process, there was an opportunity for individuality and for participants to take their work in different directions using the materials that they had brought in. A whole variety of materials were used; such as parts of model aeroplanes, stamps, photographs, carrot tops, and pressed flowers.

“*And everybody wanted to do different, had different ideas, you know. Everybody! The men had their ideas. You know to do with what they had been doing, like aeroplanes*” Martha, wife of a participant with dementia

“*So you could develop your own interests while you were still doing the same process*” Sian Hughes, artist

“*I think a lot of that is down to the fact that it has gone at everyone's own pace, with their own interests...It's...here's an idea, a method, you know, or sort of style or whatever, and...people have brought their own things.*” Sarah, daughter of a participant with dementia

“*They had clear ideas of what they wanted to achieve with their materials*” Sian Hughes, artist

- “...they did remember the process...”

Another thing commented on about the process was the fact that the participants remembered the process, even though it was a new technique to all of them. Although the participants themselves didn't mention it in the focus group, some had mentioned it to the researcher in a previous session, and it had also been observed. The project partners' group discussed it as an unexpected outcome of the sessions.

“*...because at home... they had no recall at all even of how to get up and have a shower or anything simple like that. You wouldn't have thought that from the way they came in and worked. Because they did know, only with a bit of nudging, which stage of the process was which.*” Sian Hughes, artist

“*I mean the fact that they did remember the process...[was unexpected]*” Jo McGregor, assistant artist

### 3. “...when those bits aren't in place, it doesn't work as successfully”

Another area explored in the group discussions was the set up and structure of the sessions. The participants and the project partners spoke about practical and organisational matters that they felt made the project successful. It was felt that there needed to be at least one other person to support the artist. Both groups agreed that eight participants was the right size, as both the person with dementia and the carer

were taking part. It was also felt that two hours was the right length for the session and that it would be good practise in the future to have a separate table to have tea and coffee set up.

*"I think it is definitely a two person...project. I think you need at least two people, if not three"* Sian Hughes, artist

*"In terms of numbers - eight. I would feel eight was a maximum, which is four couples"* Sian Hughes, artist

*"It was certainly busy enough wasn't it, because you know if we put another couple in there or another two couples in there because we were initially thinking we should get 12 or 14"* Jo McGregor, assistant artist

*"Yes but I think that's what we have to remember. It's not just four and their carers. It is actually eight people."* Sian Fitzgerald, project coordinator

*"You don't want it too large otherwise you lose contact. I think the group here now is about right. I would say."* Gareth, participant with dementia

*"Maybe having a tea table in the room that's separate from the sitting table, partly to allow people to mill around when they come if they want, it's an easier way to interact and then I guess people can then go off and make themselves a drink during the session"* Sian Hughes, artist

*"Yes that would be better as it's on the table and you are trying to get your work done as well."* Marian, wife of participant with dementia

*"...when those bits aren't in place, it doesn't work as successfully."* Elen Bonner, Ruthin Craft Centre

Sian also felt that it was good practice to have a debrief with all of the team at the end of the session. It was also thought that Sian circulating her notes at the end of each session was a good idea.

*"It's good to have time afterwards to just talk about how we felt things happened. Because you're so...you've got an awareness of the whole class but often you are involved with one or two people and you don't get the full picture and that was when I realised that sometimes I hadn't you know had the chance to be with someone or things like that. So I think that is good to build in as well in some way."*

*"Sian's been doing notes every week which she circulates doesn't she and then if there has been anything that we felt needed adding then we've done that and I think that has been kind of another way we've been feeding in."* Jo McGregor, assistant artist

There are several subthemes within the subject of the success of the project which are discussed below:

- “***...a particularly strong group for carer relative and dementia person***”

Both the participants and the project partners discussed the success of the model or approach of the sessions. The focus was to have family member carers to attend with the person with dementia. This happened for three of the people with dementia. One lady was accompanied by a support worker, although her daughter did manage to come to a few of the sessions. Also importantly, the same support worker came each week so there was continuity session to session. The other lady came on her own and stopped coming after the fourth week. This gave rise for comparisons to be made. It was felt that this showed that the original idea worked well as the only person coming on their own dropped out.

*“I think the people who probably come with a family member have got more out of it because the anticipation is there. Because when mum gets home, the detail of it has gone, so...the detail and explaining is lost. Whereas you’ve experienced it.*

*Everybody else knows so you can share with them.”* Sarah, daughter of the participant with dementia who attended with a support worker

*“So there were a lot of other things happening that I think were very positive in making that group a particularly strong group for carer relative and dementia person. Whereas [May] didn’t get that.”* Sian Hughes, artist

*“For us it was very good. I like to see what he is achieving. I thought I would sort of sit and look. It was nice to be involved in the same sort of thing so we can discuss it at home and do things”* Marian, wife of a participant with dementia

*“It goes to show that the way we intended the project to work, worked, and that’s evidence that it did work...”* Elen Bonner, Ruthin Craft Centre

*“...we just lost...one participant and she was the one that came along on her own so she was the one person that had no support, wasn’t she. Apart from...Well I mean we did try to support her but, it’s interesting that the one person that left is the person who came on her own.”* Jo McGregor, assistant artist

*“Because at the beginning when Beatrice’s daughter said she is perfectly capable she’s only just been diagnosed and I felt that that wasn’t the point.”* Sian Hughes, artist

*“It’s more than having the technical ability to make the work. That’s not what it’s about.”* Elen Bonner, Ruthin Craft Centre

Although all agreed that this approach had worked, it was also acknowledged that there might be a need for a group for people with dementia who do attend with a support worker. However, it was felt that a different set up would be needed.

*“Maybe there is space as well for people coming with a support person of some sort. Which would perhaps need to have a different focus.”* Sarah, daughter of a participant with dementia

*“Obviously it’s good to have a group for the other kinds of people as well. But I understand not in the same group, it would be a different nature wouldn’t it.”* Sian Fitzgerald, project coordinator.

- “...weren’t just an administrator voice phoning up”

Another subtheme that emerged within the structure or set up of the sessions was the role for a referral officer. Jo McGregor, the assistant artist, also was the contact who rang every week to check whether people were coming. This role was discussed in the project partners focus group and briefly in the participants discussion. It was felt that it was a strength having one contact that rang every week and that Jo was also in the art sessions so that participants got to know her. It was also felt that the role was very important.

*“Your [Jo’s] vital role as well was the contact with people in between. And then because you were in the class as well you know how things are going.”* Sian Hughes, artist

*“The phone went and it was ‘oh that must be Jo”* Olwen, wife of a participant with dementia

*“I think it’s definitely useful being the one that phones and keeps in touch during the week and being in the workshop...because now...I phone and just say ‘Hi it’s Jo’ whereas at the beginning it was ‘This is Jo McGregor from Denbighshire Art Service’ but they know who I am now and it’s nice and then you get the continuity don’t you.”* Jo McGregor, assistant artist

*“...then they can tell you ‘well this has been going on’ or ‘we don’t really feel [well]’. But if I was just somebody who phoned them, I’d just be a voice and not somebody who was there.”* Jo McGregor, assistant artist

*“And that might have contributed to the group feeling there really was a group with a lot of support.... You weren’t just an administrator voice phoning up saying ‘you weren’t there last week what happened?’”* Sian Hughes, artist

*“But everyone has said that that is probably the lynch pin that is holding it together and making it work as it does. But when you look at the funding on paper, it is probably the first thing that you think well that can go to make it cheaper.”* Elen Bonner, Ruthin Craft Centre

- “**adjusting as I went along”**

The project partners spoke of flexibility as another factor that they felt was important to the set up of the sessions. Plans for the sessions needed to be adjusted.

*“I think an important thing that you did every week was adapt to what had happened. You know, in no way would you have seen it planned out like this right from the very beginning.”* Sian Fitzgerald, project coordinator

*“I certainly found myself...adjusting as I went along as to what we were doing...The first idea was that they would work together and make a book and then work at home together and collect things for the book. And then we realised that really they needed space for their own thing.”* Sian Hughes, artist

*“Well I think that is something to bear in mind isn’t it to try and be aware and flexible and to try and create different things and different spaces are needed.”* Sian Hughes, artist

## **Observations**

As well as the themes that came out of the focus groups, a few extra outcomes were observed by the researcher.

- The group dynamic changed when the group went outside to try the cyanotype process using the natural sunlight. Firstly it gave more opportunity for chatting and joking with one another but also highlighted the participants, both the carers and the participants with dementia, were using their own initiative to find materials that might give a good effect in the artwork. Ronald in particular, who was the quieter of the participants with dementia came into his element and went to find leaves and branches from the surrounding bushes without being asked. Although not discussed at length in the focus group, Marian did comment that there was a “zumm” when they went outside. Sian also noted it in her notes- *“Going outside created more opportunities for this”*
- Another observation, linked to the observation above was the fact that three of the participants with dementia used a mobility aid such as a walking stick, but this didn’t stop them from getting fully involved in the sessions and in the visits to the gallery. The walking sticks were never seen as a barrier to getting fully involved. In fact, once people arrived into the education room where the art sessions took place, the walking sticks were usually put to one side and left until it was time to leave.
- Another important observation that wasn’t picked up in the focus groups, perhaps as it took place a week before the exhibition, was the increase in self

esteem in the participants from the beginning of the project to the end. One participant, Ronald, was heard saying "*I can't do anything, I'm hopeless*" in the second session. However, in the tenth and final session, when everyone laid out all of their work ready for the exhibition, he said "*Don't tell me I can't do anything!*". All of the participants in this session showed an immense pride in what they had achieved, especially when Sian gave out the ceramic plaques and pots with their own cyanotype images glazed on. There was atmosphere of pride and a sense of achievement in the final session and during the exhibition. Sian wrote in her notes "...people felt comfortable as well as proud and surprised at seeing their work so well curated and set up as an exhibition in its own right".

## Conclusion

This evaluation has shown that the art sessions provided by Denbighshire County Council Art Service for people with dementia and their carers had several positive outcomes for the participants. They were found to have been positive and enjoyable, and to have created a group feeling that broke down social isolation. It was found that new memories were created, and that the carers benefitted from participating in the sessions as well. With regards to the process, it was found that it encouraged the exchange of materials and ideas, that everyone could express their individuality, and that all remembered the process. It was found that the set up and structure of the sessions made a successful project and the model of having a family member participating worked. Having a referral officer that attends the session was thought important and it was felt that the flexibility of the artist to change plans contributed to the success.

In sum, Lost in Art too...? was beneficial to both participants and carers, providing a stimulating environment which broke down barriers and provided a platform for peer support and the generation of lasting friendships.

