

Dementia and Imagination

Research Summary 1: Exploring the theoretical foundations of visual art programmes for people living with dementia

What is 'Dementia and Imagination'?

Dementia and Imagination was a large arts and science collaboration of universities, artists, charities and providers of cultural services. Our programme of work explored how arts 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.

We did this through five inter-linked projects. This research summary highlights the first phase of a project.

Why did we do this project?

This project explored the ways in which visual art interventions might lead to positive outcomes in people living with dementia at all stages of the condition.

Creating effective services first requires a strong understanding of how they may influence changes in patient outcomes. If the underpinning theory is incorrect, then the desired changes will not occur.



We used the findings to inform the development of our visual arts programme, which we then tested with people living with dementia over a six-month period (see research summary 2).

What did we do?

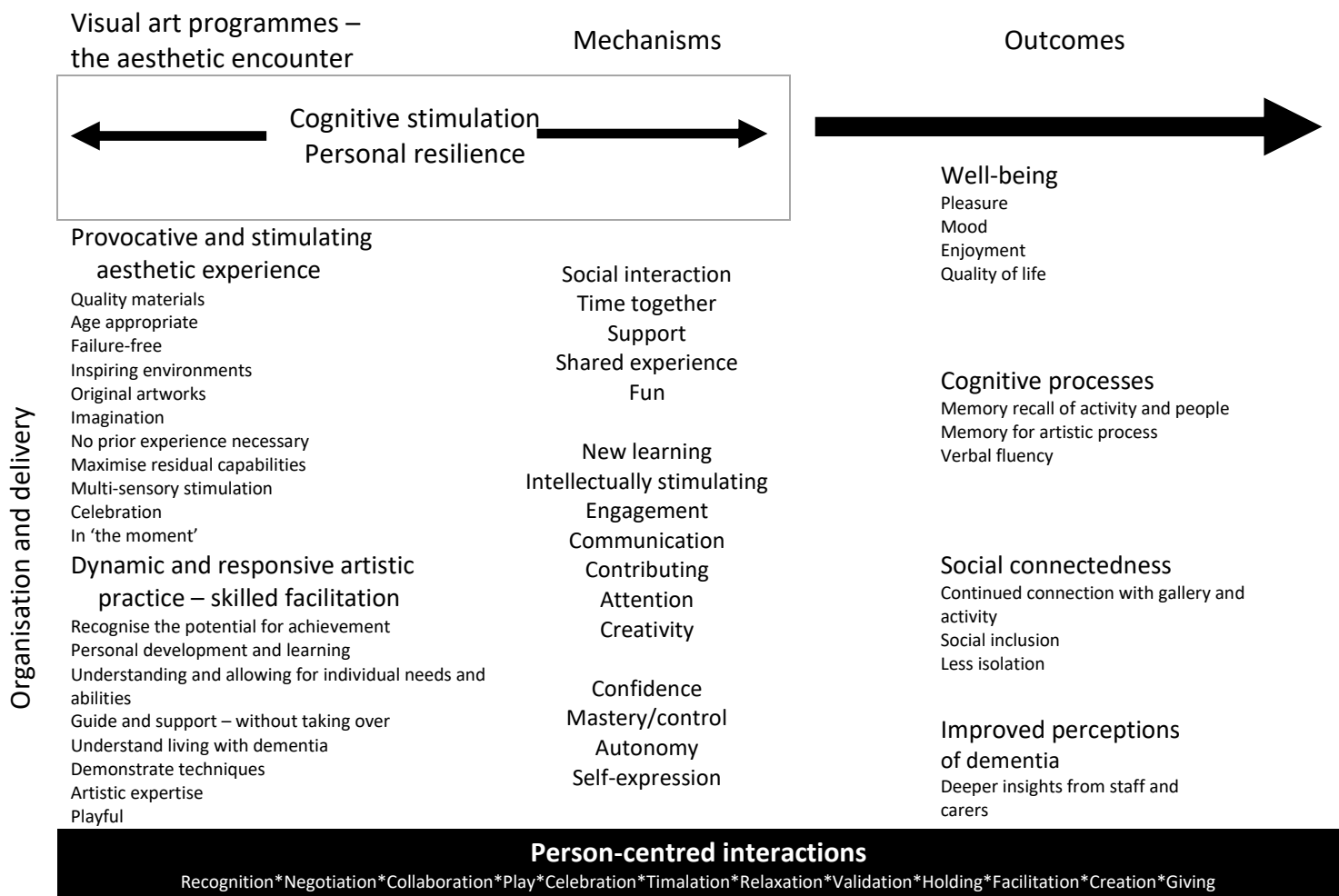
For this project, we undertook:

- A review of primary research on visual art programmes. We used a methodology that we aimed to uncover what works, for whom, how, why and in what circumstances.
- Two workshops with artists, exploring perceptions of their practice impact in dementia care.
- A qualitative exploration of stakeholder perspectives of art programmes.

We then synthesised these pieces of work to produce a conceptual framework for programme for developing and testing our visual arts programme, and to be useful for further research and practice.

What are the key findings?

This framework outlines some essential attributes required of the visual arts programme and the artist or practitioner that would enable a cognitively stimulating, person-centred activity.



“Empathy is everything. Meet the person you are working with as a valuable individual, regardless of their ability or cognitive capacity” (Artist facilitator, male).

Museums and arts organisations, with their collections and skilled staff, could make a significant cultural contribution to health and social care, delivering a high quality experience in a wide range of settings.

What are the outcomes?

This framework informed the content of our visual arts programme tested in our research (see research summary 2) and is freely available as a guide for practitioners and service providers who may wish to deliver similar projects. If you wish to access this booklet, please [download it here](#).

Visual art programmes are delivered in shared public spaces, such as museums and galleries, or specialist dementia care facilities, including hospitals and care homes.

Read the full publication

The full article describing the development of the programme is published in a peer-reviewed journal and is freely available. For further reading, see:

Windle, G., Howson-Griffiths, T., Gregory, S., O'Brien, D., Newman, A., Goulding, A. Exploring the theoretical foundations of visual art programmes for people living with dementia. (2017). [Dementia: the international journal of social research and practice](#). First Published September 15, 2017.