

OPAN Case Studies

OPAN Older People's Arts Network

OPAN is a newly created network of older people's arts providers within the borough of Lewisham. Our aim is to help find a way to articulate the local arts/ culture / participatory offer for older people and improve the coherence of what is provided; sharing expertise, practice, research and training. OPAN members include Age Exchange, Entelechy Arts, Montage Theatre Arts, The Albany, the Horniman Museum and Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance.

Case Studies: Examples from four organisations within OPAN and their work with older people in participatory settings.

These case studies provide a snapshot of current practice taking place within arts organisations in London regarding artists working with older people in participatory settings. The information is designed to inform discussion concerning the most effective support for artists and practitioners working in those settings.

Age Exchange Theatre Trust

Artistic Director, David Savill

Mission of the organisation

Age Exchange reaches out to people using memories and the arts to help them understand and express who they are, to value their experience, to strengthen their relationships and to bring them together

We aim to help people feel good and to live the lives they want by increasing

- self-confidence, self-esteem and wellbeing
- the feeling of being part of and contributing to family and community
- communication between individuals, formal and informal carers and others in the community
- access to arts, reminiscence and creative activities

Artform(s) Theatre, Film, Fine Arts

Who are the organisation's main clients?

NHS Trusts – Housing Organisations – Arts Partners.

We work with people young, old and in between individually, in groups and in communities. We work with family carers and with professionals, supporting and training them in reminiscence arts to enable them to use them day to day. One of our strengths is mixing the generations and enabling them to share their experiences and memories and to understand and learn from each other. And we are expert at working with people with dementia for whom the spoken word may not be their main method of communication.

When was the organisation founded? 1983

What proportion of your work is targeted at older people/participants? 80%

When did you start working with older people/participants? 1983

How is your work for older people/participants funded?

Currently NHS Trusts, HLF, Arts Council, Private Trusts and Foundations, Housing Organisations, Local Authorities

What is the format of your participative work for older people? E.g. project duration, session lengths and structure, number of participants, profile of participants

Various models. Theatre productions might take months, or it may be older people contributing to a one off school workshop. We bring people together to offer opportunities and support to remember their life experiences and to participate in and enjoy artistic and creative activities which stimulate those memories. These activities - talking, theatre, music, dance, movement - stimulate all sorts of memories including deep seated physical [unconscious] memories. This is particularly important for people with dementia. The activities may result in performances, films, plays, musicals, visual art, craft, exhibitions and should always result in people feeling valued for who they are.

Why is the participative work designed the way it is? i.e. what have you learnt about what works and what doesn't work in delivering participative work for different groups of older people?

Age Exchange has changed over 30 years. Early projects were presented by professional actors performing shows based on memories shared by older people or productions written for older actors. Since 2000 productions have involved older people in improvisation in creating the production. Other forms of theatre have been developed in care settings where actors enable older people of whatever disability to tell their stories.

What are the main problems of working with older people/participants?

Depends in care settings it is getting the support of the staff and information about the participants. Participants are generally not the problem, although obviously frailty and health can be an issue.

What are you planning/hoping to change in the future?

Constantly working on creating better relationships with Care Settings. More developed models of creative arts with dementia. Creating an established training for artists working with reminiscence and with older people.

What is special about participative work with older people?

Older people's pride in discovering what abilities they have. Creating connections for them which may not have existed before

Entelechy Arts

David Slater, Artistic Director

Mission of the organisation

The following principles underpin and shape our work, helping us to decide between different demands and to build a shared relational practice that can be communicated between all those who contribute to Entelechy Arts, whether as professional or non-professional artists or in other capacities:

- Our work is developed with and not for others: shared leadership and equal ownership are central to the development of our practice;

- Our practice listens to the unheard, draws attention to the unseen and gives value to each person's contribution;
- Our work is nourished by a creative curiosity and openness to unexpected possibilities;
- Our practice is underpinned by the idea of membership and belonging. Relationships develop across boundaries of race, age, class, profession and ability as a result of identifying shared goals and ambitions;
- Our work values mindfulness, paying attention to the reality and possibilities of the present moment: art is created in everyday living;
- Our practice values the incomplete form; our process is as important as our products;
- Our work aims for delight through authenticity.

Artform(s) Combined Art forms

Who are the organisation's main clients?

- Young people who have long-term health conditions and complex disabilities
- Adults who have profound and multiple disabilities
- Older, old people (85 to 100-year-olds) who have learning disabilities or age-acquired disabilities

When was the organisation founded? 1989

What proportion of your work is targeted at older people/participants? 65%

When did you start working with older people/participants? 1989

How is your work for older people/participants funded?

Arts Council England, Baring Foundation, London Borough of Lewisham, Deptford Challenge Trust

What is the format of your participative work for older people? E.g. project duration, session lengths and structure, number of participants, profile of participants

Entelechy's world comprises of a distinctive methodology working within a series of interconnected zones or spaces of creative activity. Each space has a clear function in supporting the artistic journeys of participants, artists, audiences and other stakeholders. From intimate work shared with small groups of family and friends to practice presented on huge public stages, these zones define and clarify different registers of creative engagement.

'Home Space' supports a multi-stranded programme of creative encounters working with older people aged between 60 and 100-years-old. It comprises of five different groups meeting on a regular basis in residential homes, day centres and church halls. Musicians, dance and spoken word artists work with active older peer mentors to develop and support work with frail older, old people.

The 'Shared Space' holds semi-regular events that bring together different groups of Entelechy participants and their peers. It creates a time to reflect on experience and exchange artistic fragments and ideas. It is a safe arena where people with different ages, backgrounds and abilities can have their preoccupations and interests heard. It is a space that nurtures recognition, respect and trust.

An example of 'Shared Space' activity is Entelechy's 21st Century Tea Dance Programme developed in collaboration with The Albany. It is an eclectic mix of social dancing, digital screenings, theatre, song and storytelling performed by a cross-section of the company. It is

an opportunity to share work with a wider and engaged public. It takes the traditional form of the Tea Dance and re-imagines it. Guest artists and performers have ranged from tap legend, Will Gaines to Hip-Hop Edwardian Musical Star, Ida Barr.

'Lab Space' creates an opportunity to re-negotiate ways and means of conversation and exchange between Entelechy participants and associate and visiting artists. Lab Space creates time and opportunity to experiment, to stimulate, test out new ideas and improvise. It is where we work with risk and innovation. The Midnight Walk, a night adventure for 70yr olds designed in collaboration with Kings College and poet Inua Ellams is an example of lab Space practice

Why is the participative work designed the way it is? i.e. what have you learnt about what works and what doesn't work in delivering participative work for different groups of older people?

We have learnt to begin with not knowing. Not anticipating. To create a space that supports the energies and imaginations of older people. To design spaces for encounter and exchange. Exchanges with peers who have very different backgrounds and life experiences. Exchanges between visiting artists. Exchanges between different generations.

What are the main problems of working with older people/participants?

We have not encountered any problems working with older participants. There are challenges in sustaining long-term creative relationships with people whose lives are in transition from independence to dependence. Designing programmes that are able to respond flexibly to fluctuating health and mobility issues has to be a central priority.

What are you planning/hoping to change in the future?

We would like to work with others towards the creation of a society where it was an ordinary possibility for the very old to connect and contribute to the cultural life of their communities.

What is special about participative work with older people?

Often older participatory artists like to work of the edges of their experience. There are no longer any rules.

Montage Theatre Arts

Artistic Director, Judy Gordon

Mission of the organisation.

Montage Theatre Arts (MTA) runs a programme of 33 weekly community courses for 3 – 89 years and uses drama, dance and song and music to give people high quality arts experiences, thereby enabling them to develop their confidence, abilities and interaction within the local community.

Artform(s) Performing Arts: Dance , Drama , Singing, Digital

Who are the organisation's main clients?

MTA provides opportunities of artistic excellence for the community and particularly to its most vulnerable members, who through a combination of age and social disadvantage cannot, without support and guidance, access facilities that foster the development of new or existing physical and artistic skills. Current participants range in age from 3-89 years.

When was the organisation founded? 1998

What proportion of your work is targeted at older people/participants?

About a quarter of our annual programming and increasing. 4 weekly dance, drama and singing courses based in Brockley and Crofton Park and Greenwich Theatre with local and London-wide events including the Cultural Olympiad, Big Dance, Capital Age Festival and commissioned projects.

When did you start working with older people/participants?

Judy Gordon, Artistic Director, has worked with older people for over 15 years both teaching and creating new works with, by and for over 60's. MTA now has 3 specialist facilitators.

How is your work for older people/participants funded?

Through various funding streams: Trusts and Foundations; Arts Council; London Borough of Lewisham – RFO and local assemblies; Individual Donations - small participatory fees; Commissions: eg. Horniman Intergenerational workshops

What is the format of your participative work for older people? E.g. project duration, session lengths and structure, number of participants, profile of participants

Courses lasting anything from 1-8 weeks to weekly classes for a whole year plus one off events such as Lewisham Peoples Day. Participants join courses whenever they wish – they are all drop-in, however most attend regularly once started and particularly when working towards shows. Session lengths are 1 – 2 hours with about 15 per class. Some courses are non-performance. Depending on nature of course and location, profile of members vary. A group at the Elder People's Support Project have been working together for 7 years known as The Supertrouper and non-trained. The new performance group at Greenwich Theatre, many of who are very experienced practitioners.

Why is the participative work designed the way it is? i.e. what have you learnt about what works and what doesn't work in delivering participative work for different groups of older people?

The philosophy underpinning the organisation is an understanding that people who can maintain positive regular social contact, make a contribution to their community and learn new skills have a greater chance of maintaining good mental physical and emotional health throughout their life. The organisation engages with a highly diverse constituency of adults and children, and is strongly representative of the multi-cultural community in which it works, creating many intergenerational events as participants and audience throughout the year. As a facilitator, commitment and sensitivity, respect, trust, humour and generosity are key elements to the diverse range of experiences and backgrounds older people have. The learning is always mutual.

What are the main problems of working with older people/participants?

Being aware of their changing needs and abilities as older people's abilities can rapidly alter as health declines and different parts of mind and body are affected. Changes can be bewildering over weeks, months or years for the participant and facilitators must adjust the work gradually to support. There is a real lack of performance opportunity and peer-sharing in Lewisham so MTA has had to look outside the borough until it materialises locally.

What are you planning/hoping to change in the future?

Increase in programme; building profile for greater access; creating new and exciting platforms to showcase work; Creating more peer sharing is being developed with new partnerships.

What is special about participative work with older people?

Judy Gordon: Having had a very special relationship with one group of older people for 7 years, I continually enjoy the surprises of long lives lived. Each work is experienced-based and these personal stories create moving, humorous and often magical journeys involving

movement, dance, music, song and projected images. Those groups that aren't performance-based bring a happiness for that one or two hours where friendship is really treasured in an understanding of how fleeting life is. Those who are alone find reliable, social support in classes run whatever the circumstances. Those who are experienced and more active, find the group and work stimulating, different and challenging. Working with these students is refreshing, funny, and rewarding as, being older, they have such an appreciation for their tutors. For many of the participants involved, the programmes offered by MTA, are more than just a regular dance and/or theatre activity and have proved to be the agent of change and personal growth and has offered hope and opportunity that participants have not been able to find elsewhere.

Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance

Learning and Participation (Music and Dance)

Mission of the organisation

Trinity Laban's aim is to advance the art forms of music and dance and develop the artistic leaders of the future. To achieve this aim, we bring artists together in order to train, perform, collaborate and research in inspiring creative, intellectual and physical spaces. Performance and artistic practice are at the heart of all our activities.

- We seek out and embrace new means of artistic education and expression: we are experimental, creatively ambitious and forward-thinking.
- As a leading and progressive arts educator, we identify, support and develop talented and innovative performers and practitioners wherever they may be found and throughout their creative lives.
- We deploy our expertise and resources to enrich the cultural life of our local, national and international communities.

Artform(s) Music and Dance

Who are the organisation's main clients?

Trinity Laban has over 1,000 higher education students across our Music and Dance Faculties. In addition, each year over 16,000 people of all ages, from pre-school to those in their nineties, get involved with live music and dance activities as part of Trinity Laban's Learning and Participation programmes. Many of these people are from our local boroughs of Greenwich and Lewisham.

When was the organisation founded?

Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance was formed in 2005 through the merger of Trinity College of Music and Laban.

What proportion of your work is targeted at older people/participants?

The Learning and Participation (Music and Dance) programme offers a wide range of regular and project based education and community activity, of which our older peoples work is currently approximately 5%

When did you start working with older people/participants?

Retired Not Tired is a regular programme of work aimed at over-60's which started in 2011. Before then Trinity Laban delivered one-off music activities and projects for older people, largely on the Isle of Dogs.

How is your work for older people/participants funded?

The Retired Not Tired programme is currently funded by Lewisham Council. (Do L and P Music have any additional funding for their programme??)

What is the format of your participative work for older people? E.g. project duration, session lengths and structure, number of participants, profile of participants

Currently Retired Not Tired comprises of four core groups who meet weekly for between 1-2 hours:

- **All Singing All Dancing** is a joint music and dance group based in Central Catford with 15-20 members. Group members are from the local area and are an active, independent cohort with wide age ranges. The aims of the class are to enable older people to develop their music and dance skills, to provide opportunities for creative participation, actively encourage older people to input into the direction of creative activities, and to encourage health and wellbeing through participation in music and dance.
- **Dance for Health** - a more active group combining creative dance with Pilates based at the Laban Building, Deptford with 25-30 members. This group has a health focus and combines dance and Pilates techniques. Sessions are run weekly during term time. Participants tend to be more independent, physically able older people.
- **Arts Befriending Club** – social arts groups partnering up with Ageing Well Lewisham based in Sydenham. The group primarily had a social focus and provides opportunities for older people to socialize around arts based activities. The Club combines a range of arts based activity including singing/music, theatre, arts appreciation, fine art and poetry. Attendance fluctuates as many of the Club are frail or have care responsibilities.
- **Bellingham Young at Heart** – a social and creative group based in Bellingham Green. The music group with Bellingham Young at Heart Group was established in early 2012 to follow on from an initial pilot project undertaken by Entelechy Arts in 2011. The group is primarily a social one, with the musical content worked around social elements like bingo and a raffle. Membership of the Club comprises local older people, including many who are frail and are supported to attend the Group by the organisers and using transport provided

Trinity Laban aims to develop project based work in this area and has just finished a cross-arts project 8 week partnership project with Age Exchange.

Why is the participative work designed the way it is? i.e. what have you learnt about what works and what doesn't work in delivering participative work for different groups of older people?

Retired Not Tired is still quite new and we are constantly evaluating, learning, shifting and exploring new ways of delivering in response to the participants we work with. Trinity Laban has recently employed a Research Fellow to undertake an evaluation of our programme, consider research questions and to help shape the future direction of the work.

We believe in acknowledging the participant as an artist who makes a creative contribution and view the classes as a collaborative opportunity to explore music and dance together, allowing participants to take ownership of the group and help shape its direction

The artists and practitioners who lead the sessions regard remaining open, creatively respond to situations as they arise, adaptive to participant's varying physicality and abilities and always being ready to "play", experiment and change direction are key features of the work.

Some practical aspects of the classes (such as suitable locations, start times, duration of sessions etc) were designed in consultation with local older people – through forums such as the Positive Aging Council.

What are the main problems of working with older people/participants?

So far Trinity Laban has found no unexpected issues in setting up and developing our work with older people. We have been fortunate in having considerable support from local agencies, our artists and practitioners and the participants themselves.

What are you planning/hoping to change in the future?

We recognise that some of our participants want to develop their skills further than the existing pace and content of classes allows. We are currently looking at developing progression routes for nurturing participants/emerging older artists who are ready to move beyond the regular classes in to more experimental or performance based opportunities.

We would also like to further exploit the wealth of provision being based at Trinity Laban affords us; more music and dance collaborations, opportunities for participants to see shows and recitals, intergenerational projects working with our Youth and Children's Programmes, working with our BA and Post -Graduate students and looking at preventative health measures with our Dance Health department.

Trinity Laban is interested to develop a research strand for its work with older people and develop closer partnerships with other OPAN organisations and potentially other Higher Education Institutions.

What is special about participative work with older people?

Older people have a wealth of experience to draw upon and contribute to creative activity in music and dance.