

PROGRAMMES TO PROMOTE VISUAL ART ENGAGEMENT WITH OLDER PEOPLE

International Examples

This Information Note provides a brief overview of programmes that promote visual art engagement with older people in London, New York and Vancouver. The list of such programmes is longer than the examples in this Information Note. We have chosen programmes that have an impact evaluation in place to understand how the health of older adults has changed after participating in the art activities. Impacts are encouraging and range from improved quality of life, social connectedness, and a greater sense of community, among others.

We hope that you will enjoy this Information Note and that it may spark imagination for creating similar programmes in Singapore to positively impact older adults' lives through the arts.

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LONDON, UNITED KINGDOM: MUSEUMS ON PRESCRIPTION

Social prescribing is increasingly applied to older populations to address loneliness and improve physical and mental wellbeing.¹ Social prescribing is generally person-centric and customised to individual needs. The mechanism of social prescribing refers to the use of non-medical sources of support or resources in the community such as arts and cultural activities for health benefits. Evidence indicates that social prescribing has the potential to increase social contact, improve self-esteem, increase confidence, and improve the mood of participants, among its positive effects.² One such programme is the UK Museums on Prescription.

The project, Museums on Prescription, was conducted in London and Kent from 2014 to 2017. It was funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council and carried out by researchers at the

University College London (UCL) and Canterbury Christ Church University who studied the processes, practices and impact of the project on health and wellbeing. Using ‘social prescribing model’, socially isolated older adults were invited to participate in a 10-week programme (2-hour group sessions per week).³ They visited museums such as the British Museum, Canterbury Museums and Galleries, Central Saint Martins Museum and Study Collection, Maidstone Museum and Bently Art Gallery, The Postal Museum, Tunbridge Wells Museums Art Gallery, UCL Museums and Collections where they participated in curator talks, behind-the-scene tours, object handling and discussion, and arts activities inspired and organised around the museum collections. Figure 2 shows a guide for comfortable museum visits for older adults.

¹ Husk, K. (2019). Social prescribing: Where is the evidence? *British Journal of General Practice*, 69(678), 6-7.

² Chatterjee, H. J., Camic, P. M., Lockyer, B. and Thomson, L. J. (2017). Non-clinical community interventions: A systematised review of social prescribing schemes. *Arts and Health*, 10(2), 97-123; Jensen, A., Stickley, T., Torrissen, W., & Stigmar, K. (2017). Arts on prescription in

Scandinavia: A review of current practice and future possibilities. *Perspectives in Public Health*, 137(5), 268-274.

³ Veall, D. et al. (2017). *Museums on Prescription: A guide to working with older people*. <https://culturehealthresearch.files.wordpress.com/2017/10/mopguide.pdf>. Accessed on 15 September 2020.



'Museum on Prescription' guide on organising fruitful and comfortable museum visits for older adults (Veall et al., 2017)

Veall et al. (2017, p. 7) emphasise the importance of planning the museum visit – 'from front of house being the first point of contact for participants to curators sharing objects from the collections'. This is to raise awareness and ensure that the museum staff know who the participants are and what needs they may have. Veall et al. (2017) further recommend,

- The museum programmes to last between 6 to 10 weeks, and each session to last between 90 and 120 minutes;
- Keeping to a routine and organise the programme every week on the same day;

- Arranging a taster session to explain what activities will be offered before older adults commit to participate in the programme;
- Older adults should be able to bring along a friend, carer or relative, if that makes them more at ease.

Museums on Prescription programmes ensured a good balance between new knowledge, experiences, creative activities and social time.⁴ Some of the things that participants valued included,

- Short 20-min talks from curators;
- Object handling that prompted discussions;
- Behind the scenes tours of store rooms;
- Creating collection-inspired art with a skilled facilitator, among others.

Quantitative research using the UCL Museums Wellbeing Measure to measure the change in psychological wellbeing showed significant increase in psychological wellbeing in older adults after participating in the programme.⁵ Qualitative research using weekly diaries and in-depth interviews showed several

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.*

positive impacts on older adults' wellbeing after participating in this programme: increased sense of belonging and improved quality of life; renewed interest in learning and acquisition of new skills; increased social and creative activity; and healthier lifestyle changes, among others.⁶

NEW YORK CITY, USA: SU-CASA

The SU-CASA programme began in 2016, an expansion programme of the Seniors Partnering with Artists Citywide (SPARC).⁷ The aim is to positively impact the wellbeing of older adults through arts-based activities.⁸ The programme is a collaboration among the NYC Council, Department of Cultural Affairs (DCA), Department for the Aging (DFTA), and five local arts councils. SU-CASA brings artists and arts organisations to senior centres across the whole city. It is the largest public participatory arts

programme for older adults in the United States. In 2019, SU-CASA supported 244 artist residencies at 224 senior centres across 51 City Council districts.⁹

Artists engage older adults in an art project or a series of cultural programmes over 40 or 60 hours, which is complemented with a public programme component such as exhibitions, readings, performances, open houses or other cultural interactions open to the community. Art forms include painting, graffiti art, botanical illustration, weaving, costume design, theatre, singing, drumming, belly dance, poetry, photography, and others.¹⁰ During the COVID-19 pandemic, SU-CASA art programmes continue at a distance as artists conduct teaching online or via telephone.¹¹

SU-CASA programme is based on five key principles:¹²

⁶ Veall et al. (2017); Thomson, L. J., Lockyer, B., Camic, P. M., & Chatterjee, H. J. (2018). Effects of a museum-based social prescription intervention on quantitative measures of psychological wellbeing in older adults. *Perspectives in Public Health*, 138(1), 28-38.

⁷ NYC Department of Cultural Affairs (n.d.). *Creative Aging*. <https://www1.nyc.gov/site/dcla/programs/creative-aging.page>. Accessed on 24 June 2020.

⁸ Queens Council on the Arts (n.d.). *SU-CASA: Arts Program for Seniors*.

<https://www.queenscouncilarts.org/sucasa>. Accessed on 17 September 2020.

⁹ Kaufman, J., & Finkelstein, R. (2020). *Creative Aging in NYC*. New York: Brookdale Center for Healthy Aging.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ Lower Manhattan Cultural Council (2020). *SU-CASA Online Classes*. <https://lmcc.net/resources/artist-residencies/su-casa/>. Accessed on 21 September 2020.

¹² Kaufman, J., & Finkelstein, R. (2020).

- 1) 'Instructors are professional teaching artists;
- 2) Instruction is sequential, each lesson builds on the one before;
- 3) Classes build towards a culminating event (e.g. a performance or exhibition);
- 4) Teaching artists encourage creativity and experimentation; and
- 5) The class promotes social engagement.'

The focus group study conducted in 2019¹³ revealed that SU-CASA arts classes positively influenced older adults' sense of community, improved their social connectedness as well as physical and emotional wellbeing. The art classes positively impacted participants' sense of selves as they felt that the classes gave them an opportunity to reinvent themselves and defy ageism.



'Artist-in-Residence Anthonia Akinbola's SU-CASA Final Event with some of her students at Holliswood Neighborhood Senior Center in Jamaica, Queens, on June 17, 2019. Participating Elders produced scarves and bags using the Batik printing method.' (Source: Flickr Queens Council on the Arts)

NEW YORK CITY, USA: PUBLIC LIBRARIES

The three NYC public libraries – New York Public Library, Brooklyn Public Library, and Queens Public Library – are strong providers of participatory arts programmes (in all arts disciplines) for older adults. Public libraries are trusted public institutions that are age-neutral and thus, more attractive to older adults than senior centres.¹⁴ These public libraries partner with professional teaching artists to design and deliver free programmes for older adults in 'participatory, sequential, socially interactive art-making'.¹⁵ Older adults

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ Lifetime Arts (n.d.). *The Public Libraries Initiative*.
<https://www.lifetimearts.org/services/libraries/>.
Accessed on 18 September 2020.

¹⁵ NYC-ARTS (n.d.). *Lifetime Arts*.
<https://www.nyc-arts.org/organizations/2555/lifetime-arts>.
Accessed on 21 September 2020.

participate in visual, performing and literary arts with a culmination in a public exhibition or event at the libraries.

For example, the Brooklyn Public Library offers,

'8- to 10-week artist-led workshops that follow a sequential learning model and include a culminating event. Designed for adults 50 and older at all levels of experience, classes include theater and improvisation, singing and dance, painting and watercolor, ceramics, photography, nonfiction writing, and storytelling. In 2018, the library system served almost 700 older adults across 35 programs'.¹⁶

Classes are conducted in Spanish, Chinese, Creole, Polish, Russian, Hebrew, and Japanese. The library also serves those who are homebound, who receive art supplies by mail and participate in classes via phone or videoconferencing.¹⁷

Participants reported an increase in their skills and creating new friendships (social connections). Some said that the classes improved their creative expression and confidence in creating art.¹⁸



Older adults partaking in a Creative Aging visual arts education programme at Brooklyn Public Library. (Image source: Brooklyn Public Library webpage)

VANCOUVER, CANADA: THE ARTS AND HEALTH PROJECT: HEALTHY AGING THROUGH THE ARTS

The Arts and Health Project began in 2005 in Vancouver, Canada, where the Canadian Forum on Arts and Health was held to discuss the health benefits of the arts for older population. Following the forum, the Vancouver Park Board and Vancouver Coastal Health partnered with five organisations to provide professionally-led arts programme to vulnerable older adults and to study how on-going involvement in community-based creative arts could: 1) improve health and wellbeing of older adults; and 2) enhance the community

¹⁶ Kaufman & Finkelstein (2020, p. 5).

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

perception of older adults as active and valuable members of their community.

Healthy Aging Through the Arts has two project models:

- a one-year project that runs in three 10-week sessions from Autumn to early Summer, with one Lead Artist; and
- a three-year project (a ‘deep-dive’ model) that runs for 30 weeks a year over three years with Lead Artist and Artist Intern.¹⁹

The Healthy Aging Through the Arts programme organises local community and larger project exhibitions and performances of works created by the participating older adults. One of such showcases is a yearly event, *Arts and Health Exhibition and Gala Showcase*, where older adults exhibit their works or perform.²⁰ Showcasing older adults’ work can contribute to the community’s better understanding and acceptance of older adults as well as to older adults’

feeling of contribution to the community. Showcasing is an important part of a community-engaged project.²¹



“I feel appreciated when people give me compliments. I love art galleries and others’ paintings ... and to have our paintings exhibited is quite a thrill and accomplishment for me.”

-Senior Participant (Image and quote source: Naylor & Fraser, 2016, p. 18).

Data for the first three years of the project showed an improvement in older adults’ self-reported health, a reduction of chronic pain, and an increased sense of community.²²

¹⁹ Arts and Health (2020). *Projects*. <http://artsandhealth.ca/projects/>. Accessed on 21 September 2020.

²⁰ Phinney et al. (2016). *The arts, health and seniors project*. http://artsandhealth.ca/app/uploads/2016/09/ahs_fullreport_v5.pdf. Accessed on 21 September 2020.

²¹ Naylor, M., & Fraser, P. (2016). *Community-Engaged Arts Practice with Seniors: A Startup Guide, Based on The Arts & Health Project: Healthy Aging Through the Arts*. <http://artsandhealth.ca/app/uploads/2016/09/Community-Engaged-Arts-Practice-with-Seniors-Startup-Guide.pdf>. Accessed on 16 September 2020.

²² *Ibid.*

FURTHER READINGS

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