

Guest editorial

Amanda Waring

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Creativity, the arts and older people

I am delighted to be the guest editor of this journal issue, as my passion is creativity and it's ability to inspire and unite, melt boundaries and prejudice, providing outlets for free expression and the inclusion of all. As a campaigner and inspirational speaker on older people's rights and dignified and compassionate care, I use all my creative skills as an actress, writer, filmmaker and singer to engage the audience and to get my messages across.

When my mother, the actress Dame Dorothy Tutin, died of leukaemia at the age of 70 I was haunted by the lack of dignified care both she and many other older people endured in hospitals. My solution was to take a creative leap of faith and sell my flat to fund my first short film in memory of her. My powerful film "What Do you See?" gives voice to an older woman who makes her plea for the carers to "look closer see me?". The film's impact has been huge because I believe that a personal story can say so much more than white paper or legislation can, for when people's emotions are engaged through creative expression then change will happen so much quicker. That's why it is so vital that we use creative ways to give a voice back to our elders, to allow them to be seen and heard, included and valued.

I have had so many experiences of the power of music to transform and uplift those elders who are receiving care. I often go into carehomes with my shamanic drum to honour the elders for all that they have been, all that they are and all that they will be. I play the drum softly around them and then give them the opportunity to play the drum back to me. To see the delight and the passion in dementia patients to be able to express themselves through the rhythms they chose, to know through music they have the power to be heard, is both humbling and inspiring. I encourage all carers to use music as medicine, for my singing sessions with residents helps them manage pain, improve breathing and blood flow and helps with depression. Community singing enables a sense of camaraderie and most importantly a feeling of belonging.

When I speak at conferences on health and social care, much to the audiences surprise I will often have them singing and clapping with me – even at the most serious of conferences – for the act of singing together, as well as being joyous, helps dissolve the barriers of "them and us", so that we can sit in our shared humanity rather than hide behind the professional roles we hold. This allows for greater engagement and empathy in our work with older people.

Which would you prefer – to exist or to live? Reclaiming and nourishing creative joy gives your life more shine! Colour, spontaneity, variety and catching opportunities of expression through art, music, poetry and movement engages the spirit, allowing for greater connection and social interaction. Creative activity in later life provides pathways into the world of people locked away or withdrawn into their own reality. All dementia carers should be encouraged to work with the senses in a therapeutic and creative way for creative pursuits reduces restlessness and agitation and provides opportunities for both verbal and non-verbal communication. Even when memory is diminishing the ability for the imagination to be expressed is still there. After an art session one gentleman living with Alzheimers said, "I do not know what is going on, but it seems Alzheimers stops where creativity begins".

As a writer I know that journaling and poetic expression provides many benefits for the older adult by provoking insight, encouraging life reviews and the resolution of unresolved conflicts. I am delighted to hear of the many intergenerational writing projects between young and old which stimulates reminiscence and also the handing down of values and the sharing of life experiences. Creative intergenerational opportunities where there may be an exchange of skills and a greater involvement in the wider world can help an elder's self belief and restore a sense of

meaning and purpose. Creativity can help us celebrate our elders in a unique and fulfilling way and remind us that we have much to learn and share, asking ourselves how well do WE live before we die? What legacy do we wish to leave behind? How would we like to be remembered and honoured?

I know that you will enjoy the articles in this issue of *Working with Older People*. I believe that everyone has a creative capacity that can help them grow and develop. We need to nurture creativity in older people allowing them to flourish which in turn encourages communities and society as a whole to grow.

I always share my poem at the end of any training session I give to encourage all careworkers to continue to find ways to connect with those in their care, for I believe that everyone one can be reached through loving creative acts:

If you plant a seed
and it takes root elsewhere,
don't turn your back
the seed is still there.
It's sowing that matters
The courage to try
Nerves may be shattered
But the seed cannot die.

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