



**More than
we ever
dreamed**



“When you get talking to people you find that everyone has got the same story to tell. There may be a few things that are different but mainly it’s a story about being lonely and getting lost and not being able to find your way back out”

Pauline Hale

Photo: Roswitha Cheshier

In 2013 Entelechy Arts and the Albany established an all-day arts club for isolated older people, Meet Me at the Albany. The project has been developed in partnership with the London Borough of Lewisham. One day a week for fifty weeks a year formerly lonely people work alongside artists and have the opportunity to uncover the artist within themselves.

“The kind of stereotype-smashing thing that sticks two knitting needles up at anyone who dares assume day care for older people is about flower arranging and endless cups of tea.”

Saba Salman, *The Social Issue*

Participants are just as likely to be suspended on silks in a circus workshop, enjoying a performance of jazz, creating sculpture or writing poetry.

The programme has now expanded to include Meet Me at Lewisham Homes, a partnership that has established pop-up arts programmes in the lounges of sheltered housing schemes that are now hosting artists commissioned with support from Arts Council England’s Celebrating Age funding. Meet Me at the Movies is a volunteer run film club and Meet Me on the Move, a monthly programme of trips and adventures to museums, galleries and many other spaces and places in the city and beyond.



Photo: Manuel Vason

Darren Henley

Chief Executive, Arts Council England

Meet Me at the Albany is an inspirational example of how participation in the arts can make a real difference to our personal and social wellbeing. In the following pages, older people describe powerfully the impact and change in their lives that has come about as a result of working creatively alongside artists.

Meet Me shows us that all communities have the potential to become creative places. It also demonstrates the effectiveness of partnership working between two Arts Council England supported organisations and a local authority - Entelechy Arts, the Albany and London Borough of Lewisham. Working together, they have put art and culture at the heart of new ways of supporting isolated older people to reconnect with, and make valued contributions to the life of their communities.

The arts draw on the extraordinary power of human imagination and gives us a chance to answer some of the big questions that we face as a society - not least, what makes life worth living when we are old, lonely and unable to fully care for ourselves. Meet Me at the Albany is a reminder that whether you experience the arts as audience member or participant, they will enhance your life and the lives of those around you.

Danny Ruta

Director of Public Health, London Borough of Lewisham

It's become clear to me what's unique, what's different about Meet Me at the Albany. With the use of arts in health it's either come from a biomedical model and considered as therapy, so you have an art therapist alongside a physiotherapist, or an occupational therapist or it's an educational model and about teaching and you go and deliver a session. This is coming from a completely different model, which is about passion for art. It's holistic; completely holistic. It's not really about health or learning, it's about enriching the quality of a person's life.

As local authorities are forced to make savings across many front line services, including adult social care services such as day centres for older people, the need to find alternative, cost-effective, person centred provision of day care has never been greater. I think the Meet Me programme is one of the most innovative, and potentially one of the most effective complex public health interventions designed to improve and maintain the quality of life for older people. It has the potential to deliver many quality of life outcomes encompassing physical, mental and social life domains. I have seen at first-hand how transformational the programme has been in the lives of older people.

“It’s given me a new zest for life and a new determination that I can do things for myself if I try. I’m a different person, more able, more confident”

Jacquie Channing-Hamon

Fifteen years before Mum died I’d been looking after her and Dad. I’d been alone for so long, really alone. All I saw was the walls. I’d locked myself away mentally, hadn’t had time for a normal life. I’d got to such a dark place. I’d stopped eating; everything. And then I came here and it was buzzing, absolutely buzzing and I felt my feelings lift.

I hadn’t done poetry before. I hadn’t the faintest idea what to do except for silly ditties when I was a school kid. Simon, the poet, would lead off with ‘Love is:’ and there were plenty of promptings from Anita the volunteer and I took it from there. I took the feelings that were aroused in me.

I performed some of my poems to a group at the Royal Festival Hall. When I was reading my poem it was coming to me from the listeners.



Photo: Roswitha Cheshier

They prompted me to react in a more theatrical way I suppose because I was talking from the heart. And as the goodness, the love came through; I was lost in the poem. Each time I’ve read my poems it enlivens me. It has changed me from the person I was, meeting people I would have never met.

I look forward to my Tuesdays like you never know how. I say to the doctors, the hospitals, whoever’s doing the appointments: “I’m sorry I can’t have that date, it’s a Tuesday, my Meet Me at the Albany. I can’t have an appointment on that date.” That’s how much it means.

Since coming to Meet Me at the Albany it’s given me a new zest for life and a new determination that I can do things for myself if I try. I’m a different person, more able, more confident. I can speak to people now. I often wonder what next is going to happen that I’ve never experienced before in my life or even thought I’d experience in my life. We’ve still got something to give.

“I told my doctor ‘I’ve joined the choir’ and she said ‘That’s the best thing you could have done for your health’”

Joan Nightingale

I heard about the club from the mobile librarian. At first I thought: No I’ve done all that sort of thing, arts and crafts and knitting and things for elderly people and I dismissed it. But I popped in, felt something special and I’ve never looked back.

I told my doctor: “I’ve joined the choir” and she said “That’s the best thing you could have done for your health”.

Every week we start the group with exercises, breathing and stretches, just like opera singers. I found it helped me with my chest and my lungs.

I discovered I’ve got a voice; I didn’t know I had one!

Some of the art is slightly ‘Tate Modern’! It’s unusual what some of the people make, weird and wonderful things. I think the art helps you emotionally. It stimulates the brain. When you come to a place like Meet Me your brain is stimulated.

I love the fact that Meet Me is so inclusive. Whatever your face or faith or ability everyone is so inclusive and welcoming. In the choir the members who have dementia are alert, listening and full of song. There’s warmth. People get on with each other, they have sympathetic ears. Everyone is able to talk to each other about issues we have in our lives, things that are on our minds.

We live in a very fast world, a plastic world. If we’re not careful we are just attached to our mobile phones. People don’t socialise. And then people forget other people that might have needs. So many older people are shut away. But there’s a human being in everybody. We just need time to see it.



“It’s a pity it’s only once a week,
it would be nice if it was a bit
longer”

Maureen Catchpole



Photo: Roswitha Chesher

When I was 14 my mother was working in the café of the Horniman Museum serving teas. Rosa Dawson ran the children’s room at the museum and asked my mother if I would be interested in helping her at the weekends. She introduced me to a marionette company. They had some marvellous marionettes and a stage where they used to do plays. I got involved and joined the Marionette Society. I used to go up to this hotel once a month and we used to show off what we had made. I made quite an impression.

They wanted me to go and work the marionettes in their theatre when they went on a tour of Europe. But my Mum and Dad said “No” I couldn’t go because they were only gypsies. I would have loved to have travelled with them. They were marvellous marionettes. I’ve never seen anything like it before or since. So that finished that and I went to work in Guy’s Hospital as a Dental Technician’s Assistant.

Four years ago, my doctor told me about Meet Me because I was so depressed and run down. I hadn’t been out to any clubs or anything ever. After my husband died that was it. The first day I came I can even remember I drew a parrot. And everybody was all keen on it and then I drew another bird and then I drew a horse’s head. Every time I came I did something different which I really enjoyed.

The artist Malcolm suggested I worked with clay and because I’d made marionettes all those years ago it bought it all back.

I was up the park and I saw this swan and I thought it would be nice to make one. It was sticking the feathers on that were the worst. It was hours and hours to stick them on individually and I had to get them in exactly the right position otherwise they’d look odd. I had to cut them and make sure they are on the right side and not the wrong side otherwise I wouldn’t get the shine on them. It took a little while to work it all out. His neck is twisted because he’s pulling himself out of the water. He’s just about to take off.

It’s lovely when I see the finished product. It gives me great satisfaction. But then it’s sad because I don’t like to finish them.

Coming to Meet Me has made a big difference to my life. I can’t believe what a difference it’s made. Sitting at home people say: “I’m bored, I’ve got nothing to do”; but if they came to a place like this they wouldn’t have time to think. It’s a pity it’s only once a week. It would be nice if it was two days a week and a bit longer.

“Coming to Meet Me has given me the confidence to take back control of my destiny”

Huw
Williams



Photo: Roswitha Cheshier

The first time I walked in the door it was fantastic. The way to describe it was a very warm feeling. I felt totally relaxed from the ‘get go’. I’ve done circus skills, poetry, composing I suppose is the word. I’ve submitted poems to the Lewisham talking newspaper and wrote a poem for BlindAid.

I’m a Celt by birth. This is helping me get in touch with my roots. It’s the inner storyteller that is coming out, the way that I’ve been helped with my poetry. I’ve found out that I can paint with words. The choir are now singing my words: the poem I wrote about the feeling that I get when I used to go canoeing; the feeling that I have of spiritual and mental wellbeing after a day on the water. The poem completely captures how I feel afterwards: tired but mentally and spiritually refreshed after spending a day on the water surrounded by nature.

Simon the poet has pointed me in directions that I wouldn’t have thought of going – if you look at what I did from the beginning to what I’m doing now I’m starting to come into ways of developing more humorous poetry; putting my life into words.

Coming to Meet Me has given me the confidence to take back control of my destiny, of my future. Before coming to Meet Me I was very morose and depressed. Now my social worker is supporting me to move from the care home where I live into sheltered accommodation. I’ve made so many friends at Meet Me.

They said to me: “Once you’ve got your freedom we’re going down the pub!” – I can’t wait, I’m really thirsty!



Fred Keeley + Ted Dalby

Photo: Roswitha Cheshier

Ted

It all started with me going around watching other people's choirs and they were so perfect I thought: "Why don't we do it down Meet Me?" That's why when I came down here - I'm badgering them all the time and then, all of a sudden, we've got Rachel our choir director. But then I'm wondering if we are going to be able to do it because all the choirs that I'd seen before were young people. Would we make it?

But we did. We've had so much practice and had such good results I feel proud of myself. I feel so proud knowing it's me that started it all going. I'm so happy about it.

We've been singing in different places. We sing in the Albany Theatre in the Tea Dances. We went over the library and we sung there and then we went up to the Royal Festival Hall. The crowds loved us. We're on the go all the time, every week. Every time we do it we're getting better and better.

Fred

I feel like an angel when I'm singing.

Ted

It's gratifying. You feel you're part of something.

Fred

I hum the songs when I'm at home indoors. I sang them in the bath the other day. I don't know what the bloke next door thought. I think he enjoyed it. Hearing me singing in the bath through the wall!



Photo: Malcolm Buchanan Dick

Aymond Powell

I make sculptures. I make pig, goat, sheep, giraffe and donkey. I make them out of wire and clay. I just form it. I form the shape out of a wire and smooth it with clay. I make lions, elephant, just my imagination. I feel them out with my hands and just do. Your finger is just like your brain. Your brain tell you to do these things and your finger do it. And I make baskets all out of wire. I make jars. I make flower baskets, all out of wire.



Photo: Roswitha Cheshier



François Matarasso

Writer and Researcher in Community & Participatory Art

Adult. Social. Care.

What is 'adult social care'? For hard-pressed local authorities, faced with rising demand and falling resources, it comes down to assessments, individual needs and safeguards. For relatives living at a distance with jobs and families, it can mean worry and confusion. For politicians, as we saw in the last election, it can be dynamite.

Our longer, healthier lives should be a cause for celebration but we act as if they were liabilities. Age has its problems, certainly, but so does youth. Life is not easy. Old age may slow us down and impose all sorts of limitations but that can help us find what we really care about.

Meet Me at the Albany shows what adult social care can be. Adult – because these are independent people organising and deciding for themselves, individually and collectively, how to work towards their own needs, goals and purposes. Social – because people are together, spending time, making friends, pooling knowledge, energy, ideas and skills, finding their place within the group. Care – because courage and responsibility can lead to showing and sharing feelings, looking out for others, after and between the Tuesday meetings, and relationships based on the deep human experiences of giving and receiving.

What people say about coming to Meet Me at the Albany can be very moving. The images capture, as such pictures do, the laughter and the fun, but it is the stories that matter, especially in what they have to say of the life before. Loneliness, depression, anxiety, sadness: these should not be what awaits us when we need help in old age. And yet this is a much more frequent experience than the discovery, joy and daring that Meet Me members talk about. It is right to celebrate these elders' achievements with them, but until there are spaces like Meet Me at the Albany in every neighbourhood of every borough, there will be people sitting at home, waiting for the care worker who is their only human contact from one day to the next.

Meet Me at the Albany is important not because it involves elders in artistic activities. It is important because of how that creative involvement happens. Its value lies in an empowering, emancipatory process – and that is just as important at eighty as at eighteen. More important, actually, if it enables you, at last, to be yourself, fully with others. Health and other benefits, all the positive change people speak about here, flow from an understanding that we all need genuine adult social care. And that we can all give it to one another.

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