



# Handmade Wellbeing Handbook

**Facilitating art and craft workshops for  
older people in care settings**

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**Edith Draxl, Andrea Fischer, Sirpa Kokko,  
Helen Kästik, Mari Salovaara and Janine Stedman**



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In cooperation with the partner institutions



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## Preface



Handmade Wellbeing handbook is based on the experiences gained in an Erasmus+ (KA2 Adult Education) project ‘Handmade Wellbeing – Collaborative learning in craft and welfare interfaces’. It collects the results of the arts and crafts workshops arranged in care settings for older people during the project (1.9.2015 – 31.8.2017) in the partner countries Finland, United Kingdom, Austria and Estonia. The handbook was created collaboratively between the partners and thus brings together their respective special expertise and the new ideas that have been developed collectively. It is meant to serve educators, students and staff in arts, crafts and culture as well as in health and social services on local, national and international levels.

The handbook is arranged in two sections: the first section, ‘Background’, begins by presenting the aims of the Handmade Wellbeing project, and the different partners involved in it, in chapter 1. Chapter 2 introduces some aspects of arts, crafts and wellbeing, on which the project was built. The workshops arranged in each partner country are introduced in detail in chapter 3, to give an idea of the project’s activities.

The second section, ‘Facilitating creative workshops’, begins with chapter 4 which introduces aspects of the pedagogical thinking of the facilitator of the creative activities. Chapter 5 deals with aspects related to working with care settings. Chapter 6 presents different aspects of planning the workshop: special features of working with older people, how to get to know the group you are working with, choosing appropriate techniques, materials and working approaches. Chapter 7 discusses the importance of feedback. The practices relating to good interaction and communications are dealt with in chapter 8. The concluding chapter 9 draws the handbook together.

The Handmade Wellbeing project brought together enthusiastic people who devoted themselves wholeheartedly to the project activities. The European level approach proved to be fruitful for sharing the best practices developed in the partner countries. The partner institutions represented different approaches to creative activities, education and wellbeing topics, which brought in the rich expertise to support achievement of the common goals.

The project was co-funded by the Erasmus+ Programme of the European Union, and it would not have been possible to run it without this support. The Finnish National Agency for Education supported the smooth running of the project. I am grateful to all the care settings, their staff and residents in Finland, UK, Austria and Estonia for their good cooperation during the project. I wish to thank all the learners from each partner organization for their unique ideas and sincere interest in learning and sharing new

things. The support from each partner organization and their administrative staff was highly valuable, and the managers devoted themselves to cooperating and sharing the responsibilities.

It has been a privilege for me to coordinate this project. I hope this handbook will be of use for all interested in the topic and help in the planning and running of inspiring creative workshops for older people.

Helsinki, Finland

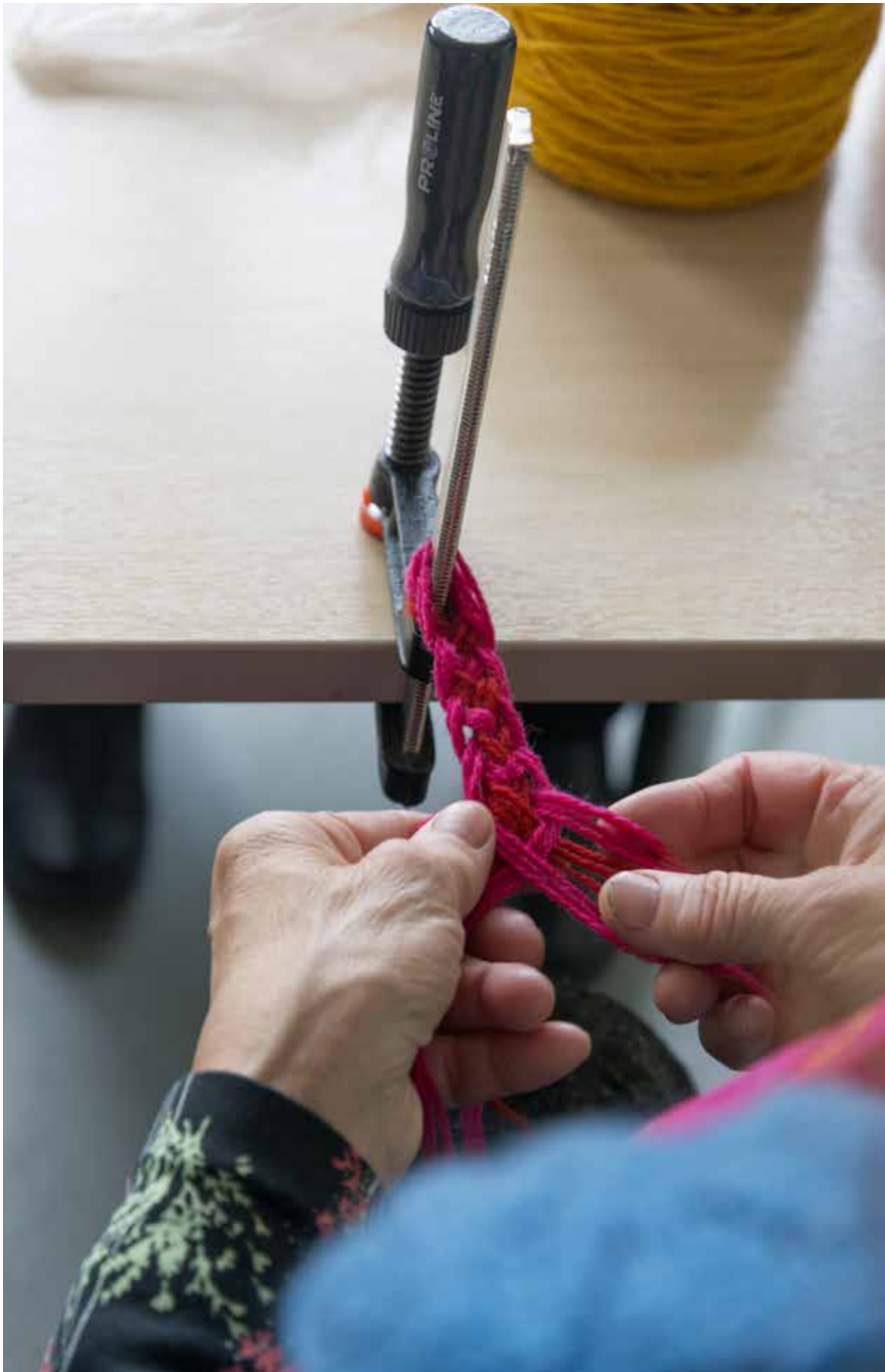
30th June, 2017

Sirpa Kokko

Coordinator, Handmade Wellbeing Erasmus+ project

The background is a solid green color. In the top right corner, there is a semi-circular area filled with a pattern of small yellow dots. Below this, there is a large, light green circle. In the bottom left corner, there is a thin yellow arc that is part of a larger circle.

# I Background



**Figure 1** Plaiting a ribbon in a workshop, Estonia.



# 1. Handmade Wellbeing project



The aim of the [Handmade Wellbeing project](#) was to enhance and expand professional competences of arts and crafts practitioners to conduct craft activities in elderly care contexts. Arts and crafts professionals are increasingly employed in challenging areas of community engagement that are outside their traditional core skills and abilities. They are often employed to work in cooperation with other experts in specialist fields, particularly in wellbeing and health-related services. The need for services, for older people especially, is expected to increase in the future, because people are living longer and the older population is growing fast all around the world. The number of people over 60 years is expected to double by 2050, and in many countries, their proportion of the population will exceed 30% by then (WHO, 2015). In Europe, the median age is already the highest in the world, and the proportion of people over 65 is expected to be 25% by 2050 (WHO Europe, 2017).

Evidently, arts and crafts are creative and empowering activities that would be important to include in the activities of services for older people. However, the artists and art and craft students need more profound understanding about how to apply their know-how in this field. Also, the social and health service professionals need more knowledge of how to provide art and craft activities in elderly care. Collaboration between all the sectors is highly important for arranging meaningful activities for older people.

These aspects have formed the basis of the Handmade Wellbeing project which had the following targets:

- to expand professional competences of arts and crafts specialists, to work in the elderly care sector
- to co-create and research pedagogy for working creatively with older people
- to support the overall wellbeing of older people through creative activities
- to distribute the outcomes, such as working methods for suitable pedagogy and research results.

## 1.1 Project partners

The project was carried out by four European partners: University of Helsinki/Finland; uniT, KUNSTLABOR Graz/Austria; Superact, NGO/UK; Viljandi Culture Academy of University of Tartu/Estonia. The strength of the project was to bring together the expertise of four different institutions from different cultural backgrounds in Europe. All the institutions had previous experience either in arts and crafts education or of working within the social and health sector, or in both these fields.

[The University of Helsinki](#) was the coordinator of the project. [The Faculty of Educational Sciences](#) houses Craft Teacher Education which was participating in the Handmade Wellbeing project. The students of Craft Teacher Education were conducting their teaching practice in an elderly care setting where they developed their pedagogical skills in working with older people. This was a new field for them since, in their teacher education studies, the main focus is on school pedagogy.

The Austrian partner, [KUNSTLABOR Graz](#), is a part of [uniT – Arts Association at the Karl Franzens University, Graz](#). It consists of a multidisciplinary team of artists from various disciplines; psychologists, education experts and scientists. KUNSTLABOR Graz has launched many artistic projects for older people in care homes in cooperation with other stakeholders. uniT offered a tailored educational program to train the artists that participated in Handmade Wellbeing project.

The British partner, [Superact](#), is a not-for-profit Community Interest Company that uses creative engagement and the arts to deliver a wide range of social impact projects. A significant number of Superact's projects are conducted in healthcare settings, where the arts are used to enrich the lives of the people being cared for, both through performance and participatory activities. During the Handmade Wellbeing project, Superact educated more artists to work in elderly care settings.

The Estonian partner, [Viljandi Culture Academy](#), is part of [the University of Tartu](#) and houses the Department of Estonian Native Crafts which participated in this project. Their mission is to promote values that strengthen and renew Estonia's native traditions and identities, reintegrating traditional handicraft techniques with contemporary environments. They promote new working fields, such as the care sector, in which their lecturers and students were practising during the project.

## 1.2 Main project activities

Each partner offered [arts and crafts workshops in elderly care settings](#) in their respective countries, and trained learners to facilitate the workshops. Depending on the type of the organization, the learners were arts and crafts students, teachers or other professionals who wanted to develop professionally. Each partner introduced the project results in [a seminar and an exhibition](#) for stakeholders and learners. Throughout the project, rigorous research was conducted in the activities. The documentations of the workshops form part of the research data.

Each partner also arranged a [training week](#) for other partners. The activities during the training week consisted of special lectures, practical workshops on suitable art and craft techniques, and visits to elderly care settings. Through observations, visits and practical, participatory activities, it was possible to get an understanding of the practices that each of the partners were using and developing in their countries. The reflection sessions that were arranged during each training week made it possible to comment and share views and best practices, and to develop them together.



**Figure 2** Workshop participant and craft student teacher.



**Figure 3**  
Exhibition opening  
in Helsinki University  
Main Library.



**Figure 4** Printing workshop for training week participants and the residents of Eggenberg care home, Graz, Austria.

The participants from all the partner countries worked collaboratively in the reflection sessions to create this handbook for working creatively with older people. This process benefited from the broad expertise that the four different partners brought together. The strength of the University of Helsinki is the in-depth understanding of craft pedagogy, whereas Superact has long experience in various community development projects. uniT KUNSTLABOR is experienced in artistic projects in communities and care homes, while Viljandi Culture Academy is specialized in craft culture and its importance to identity construction. Bringing the varied expertise together was valuable for the participants' learning experiences. The purpose of this handbook is to put together the shared expertise and learning outcomes.



**Figure 5** Working collaboratively on the handbook in reflection session in Graz, Austria.





**Figure 6** Concentration

## 2. Arts, Crafts and Wellbeing

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The aim of the Handmade Wellbeing project activities was to contribute to the wellbeing of older people. According to [World Health Organization definition](#) (WHO, 1948), 'health is a state of complete physical, mental and social wellbeing, and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity'. Having meaningful social relationships, being autonomous, having purpose and meaning in life, engaging in meaningful activities and experiencing positive feelings and achievements are central elements that result in the subjective feeling of wellbeing (Seligman, 2011). Sometimes people are able to better deal with physical shortcomings and pain if they experience a sense of control that contributes to their mental and social wellbeing (Corkhill, Hemmings, Maddock, & Riley, 2014; Pöllänen, 2013; Pöllänen, 2015; Reynolds, 2010; Riley, Corkhill, & Morris, 2013). Apparently, mental wellbeing is closely linked with two things: activities and social relationships.

### 2.1 Nurturing mental life

Many recent studies confirm that making crafts can be deeply meaningful for a maker on a personal and inner level; creative making nurtures mental life. Makers get pleasure from the varied sensuality of making. Using all the senses, for example by seeing the colours and feeling different materials and textures, has an energising effect. Manipulating materials includes physical action such as using fingertips, palms and the whole body. It engages the makers in the process that cheers them up, makes them forget about their worries, boredom and even pain and illness. (Corkhill et al., 2014; Kenning, 2015; Kouhia, 2016; Liddle, Parkinson, & Sibbritt, 2013; Pöllänen, 2015; Reynolds, 2010.) For some, making has been a means to disengage from the passive role of a sick person, to be active and in control of their bodily movements, thoughts and the whole of life (Fisher & Specht, 1999; Pöllänen, 2013; Reynolds, 2010).



**Figure 7** Colours, materials and physical action.

Making is also cognitively challenging: hand-eye coordination is required, as well as concentration, problem solving and design (Liddle et al., 2013). Makers enjoy learning and the sense of achievement and purpose: experimenting creatively with materials, developing new skills, setting new goals and completing projects is rewarding and gives a feeling of validity. The making process supports positive identity construction of older people by giving them the possibility of seeing themselves as constantly developing persons even in later age. (Reynolds, 2010.) Active participation in a craft making group and learning new things provides a way to challenge and counteract ageing stereotypes and ageism (Maidment & Macfarlane, 2011).

## 2.2 Making connections

For many makers, making by hand and being creative also means building connections to the wider social, cultural and physical world (Corkhill et al., 2014; Kenning, 2015; Kouhia, 2016; Liddle, Parkinson, & Sibbritt, 2013; Pöllänen, 2015; Reynolds, 2010). The physical environment is related to creativity as both a source of inspiration and an object of action. Creative making may strengthen the connection with the physical environment by requiring a person observe it more clearly for finding inspiration. The makers also influence the environment through their art and craft work. They may realize that they don't need to adjust to the way things are, but they can promote changes. In this way, art and craft processes often empower the makers. (Reynolds, 2010.)



**Figure 8** Shared interests encourage social participation.

Engagement in arts and crafts also encourages social participation through shared interests and making things together (Kouhia, 2016; Liddle et al., 2013). Being involved with purposeful and meaningful activities is also about being an active member of a society. Relationships that are based on equality and reciprocity are especially valuable in this sense. Recognition and appreciation from others, such as family members, has a positive effect and

strengthens the feeling of being a capable and valuable member of society. (Reynolds, 2010.) It is not only older people who benefit from this kind of cooperation; transgenerational cooperation means sharing knowledge and experience, which consolidates the whole community.





**Figure 9** Making crafts sustains and enhances hand function.

## 2.3 Benefits of creative activities for older people

All in all, activities that offer mental and physical stimulation and enable connection with the wider world, help to preserve identity as an enabled person in control over one's own life (Reynolds, 2010). These are vitally important aspects of empowerment in older age. Positive health outcomes emerge when older people are engaged in activities where they experience a sense of control and mastery (Rodin, 1986); taking part in arts and crafts activities is about controlling your thoughts and body to manipulate the environment.

Creative activities can also support physical health of older people. Ageing causes inevitable decline in brain and hand function (Carmeli, Coleman, & Patish, 2003). Hand function determines largely how well a person copes with activities of daily life, since many tasks require manual dexterity and muscle force. These can be trained and sustained with special exercises (Carmeli et al., 2003), but also, making things by hand enhances and sustains hand function.

Brain health, too, can be sustained through challenging the brain regularly with activities and new experiences. When used, the brain creates new synapses, which enhance brain reserve. (Verghese et al., 2003.) The representation of hands and fingers on the somatosensory cortex of the brain is large; they are important in tactile discrimination due to their large degree of nerve innervation. These areas of the brain are activated whenever hands are used. Moreover, the areas of the brain representing different areas of

body are enlarged as a result of use, which means brain connections react to experience. (Kandel et al., 2013a.) This neuroplasticity remains even in old age and is enhanced by enriched environments. The benefits increase when activity is sustained for a longer period of time. (Kandel et al., 2013b; Woodruff-Pak, D. S., & Hanson, C., 1995.) Naturally, making crafts includes other senses, such as visual, which results in those particular areas of brain being activated as well.

Having purposeful activities after retirement is important for wellbeing and may help in retaining sense and meaning in everyday life. Also, some people who have taken up creative hobbies only after retirement, without lifelong interest, have found them satisfying. (Reynolds, 2010.) Thus, it is worth encouraging participation of the persons who at first state they are not 'craft persons' or creative. However, it is important to respect individual autonomy and let people decide in which activities they want to participate.

## **2.4 The importance of suitable pedagogy**

During the Handmade Wellbeing project, the aim was to gather practical knowledge of suitable pedagogy for older people in care settings. There is a need for rigorous academic research on this more and more timely topic. Throughout this project, research was conducted and the research results will be published in the coming years. However, initial results are already utilised in this handbook.

As was shown earlier, older people benefit from creative activities in many ways. However, it depends largely on the facilitator what the activities are like and how beneficial they actually are for the participants. The role of the facilitator is significant, especially for persons who need care and are not able to attend cultural and creative activities by themselves, but for whom these services are provided in care settings instead.

Creative activities in care settings are often provided in collaboration with arts, crafts and healthcare professionals. Yet mainly, the education of arts and crafts professionals doesn't prepare them to work in care environments, and on the other hand, the care professionals don't necessarily have arts and crafts skills or pedagogical knowledge.

High-quality arts and crafts pedagogy adds to the quality of activities and their potential to enhance wellbeing. A good facilitator needs to master the topic of the workshop, have an understanding of the learners, and know instructional methods. Adapting the content and instructional approaches suitable for participants, is especially important. (Shulman, 1987.) Making arts and crafts and guiding these activities can be approached from different, partly overlapping perspectives, for example as skill-learning, product-making, design and problem-solving or as self-expression. Notwithstanding the approach, the facilitator has to have experience of different arts and craft techniques, knowledge of how to guide participants' ideation, design and making, as well as how best to instruct different target groups. (Pöllänen, 2009; 2011.)



**Figure 10** High-quality pedagogy adds to the quality of creative activities.



**Figure 11** Badge workshop, Estonia

### 3. Workshops in partner countries

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During the project, each partner offered arts and crafts workshops in elderly care settings in their respective countries, and examples of them are introduced in this chapter. There are more detailed descriptions on the [project website](#). For reasons of research ethics, the name of the Finnish care setting is not mentioned: the workshop participants and the staff were guaranteed anonymity. This does not apply to the care settings in the other partner countries which requested that their names be shown.

#### 3.1 Finland

The workshops in Finland were arranged in a comprehensive service centre which offers many different services at the same place for older people and for people with multiple disorders, as well as unemployed people who need social or care services, or both. The services include, for example, an assessment and rehabilitation centre, day care for older people living at home, and both long-term and short-term housing services.

The workshop facilitators in Finland were 14 master-level craft student teachers performing one of their three teaching practices. Only two of them had some prior experience of working with older people, but all of them had experience of teaching crafts in other contexts.

Altogether, the students arranged six different craft projects which all included several workshops. The projects were arranged in three cycles, in spring 2016, autumn 2016 and spring 2017. All the projects were designed and facilitated collaboratively by a pair of students or a group of three of them.

##### **A collaborative wall hanging of old CDs**

This project was conducted with the customers of day care for older people with memory issues. There were two different groups working on this same project. The participants covered old CDs by weaving yarn on them. The idea was to make a collaborative wall hanging for the day care centre by combining the CDs. Every participant could work on as many CDs as they wanted. The composition was designed collaboratively, and the student teachers helped to attach them together.



**Figure 12** Collaborative wall hanging of old CDs



**Figure 13** Felted collaborative wall hanging

### **A felted collaborative wall hanging**

This project was about wet felting a collaborative wall hanging in the residential department. The idea was to make a wall hanging for the department, to be hanged over a table at which the residents often paint and have other creative activities. The topic was provided by the department staff, who wished for a cheerful and colourful, eye-catching piece of art.

The participants felted as many small, individual pieces as they wanted, and finally the pieces were combined into a big wall hanging. The composition was designed collaboratively, and the student teachers attached the pieces together. During the last session, the artwork was hung in its place and all the contributors received diplomas made by the student teachers.

### **Dyeing yarn with Kool-Aid**

There is a possibility for retired and unemployed people living at home to make crafts independently in the service centre in a special craft-making space. A three hour long dyeing workshop was held in this place. Altogether six women, who visit the service centre regularly, participated.

The idea was to have an informal and casual workshop about dyeing yarn with Kool-Aid soft drink powder. The student teachers brought Kool-Aid and the participants brought their own yarns for dyeing. First there was a short instruction for using Kool-Aid in dyeing. After this, everyone could dye their yarns with the colours they liked. They were encouraged to experiment and try different things, for example dip-dyeing.



**Figure 14** Dyeing yarn with Kool-Aid

### **A collaborative felt flower bouquet**

This project took place in day care. The idea was to needle felt individual pieces that would be assembled into a bigger, collaborative work that would stay at the department. The theme of nature was chosen because it was thought to be familiar to all.



**Figure 15** Collaborative felt flower bouquet

In each workshop, nature memories were provoked by looking at pictures, listening to music and discussing together. The participants needle felted flowers using their nature memories as inspiration. In the final session, all the flowers were combined into a bouquet of flowers and put into a vase. Both vases were placed in the living room of this day care.



**Figure 16** 3D textile collages

### **Needle felted scarves and 3D textile collages**

This project took place in a weekly craft-making group, guided by the activity coordinators. The participants of the group were residents from different departments with an interest in craft-making.

The theme of this project was colour. The idea was to decorate individual scarves by needle felting and embroidery, and to make textile collages. Colourful postcards and the feelings they evoke were used as inspiration for working. The finished scarves and collages are displayed in an exhibition hall of the care setting.



**Figure 17** Needle felted scarves



**Figure 18**  
Forest memories on fabric

### Forest memories on fabric

This project was conducted in the day care for older people with memory issues. The theme was forest. The idea was to make individual collages on fabric, first by printing and painting the fabric and then adding details with different techniques, for example textile collage, hand embroidery and needle felting.

In each workshop, forest atmosphere was created through bringing in multisensory triggers to provoke memories related to forest, such as ‘mystery scent jars’ for smelling, filled with berries or spruce twigs, and ‘haptic bags’ for touching, filled with moss and branches. Forest memories, experiences, fairy-tales and discussions were used as inspiration.

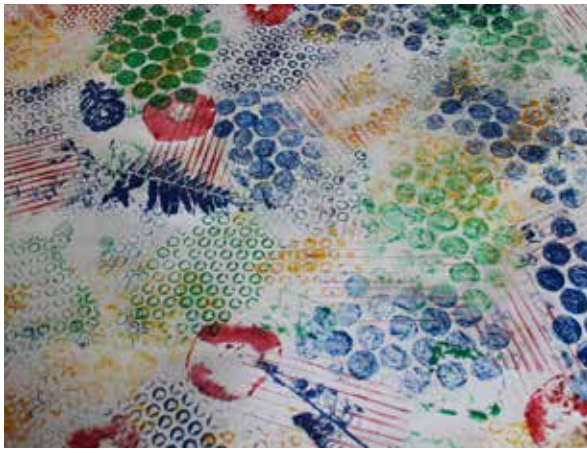
## 3.2 UK

Art workshops in UK were run in six care settings, including residential and day care settings. Some of the settings were specialized in dementia care and end-of-life provision. Workshops were conducted also in a setting that is classed as ‘Extra Care’ where the residents are more able in terms of physical and mental needs. They rent private flats and ‘buy in’ the extra care as and when they need it. All the activities are also open to the community, which is different from most UK care settings.

Learner artists to facilitate workshops were recruited from local colleges as well as privately, to get a good age range and a mix of skills and experience to take into care settings. A group of ten professional artists were recruited, with the following skills: ceramics, pottery, textile arts, collage, printmaking, drawing, painting, photography, film-making, recycling, visual art, three-dimensional design, knitting, crocheting sewing and drawing.

Some of the artists had run their own adult education art workshops and a few were commercial artists. They all had limited information about running art workshops for people living with dementia or physical conditions. A few of them had personal experience of caring for older relatives.





**Figure 19** Printing

### Printing at Greenhill and Castle Ham Lodge Residential Home

Participants were seated around a large table and a long white paper sheet was stretched across the surface so that all the participants could take part. A selection of printing blocks and other resources for printing, such as bubble wrap and real leaves, were available. Residents were encouraged to choose their own colours and try out the printing blocks on the sheet.



**Figure 20** 3D textile collage

### 3D Textile Collage at Chelston Park, Greenhill Residential and Castle Ham Lodge

For 3D textile collages one needs white polystyrene blocks, reinforced on the edges by silver tape and a variety of small, colourful fabric pieces. The idea was to use pencils and knitting needles to push the fabric pieces into the block so that an individual design could be built up. The participants started with small blocks but quickly progressed onto large block sizes. Butterfly shapes were produced and an exhibit was created by one of the homes for our exhibition.



**Figure 21** Pottery dishes

### Pottery dishes at Greenhill and Castle Ham Lodge

Pottery was made of air-dry clay which the participants were encouraged to roll out. The participants could choose the shape they wanted to imprint on their individual pots from a selection of fresh, green leaves. The residents were guided through cutting out the shape of their pot and moulding it into a dish form. Some participants were familiar with clay work but had not done this for a very long time. This activity worked well both for participants who needed a lot of physical support, but also for those in better health, who were able to produce fine details in the product.



**Figure 22** Block printed origami fabric box

### **Block printed origami fabric box workshop at Castle Ham Lodge**

The residents produced small boxes which they could take away. They were given a choice of yellow or blue fabric squares and a palette of colour inks so that they could make their own block designs on the fabric. Using the printing blocks was first practised on paper to try out a variety of shapes and colours. When the ink had dried, the residents were shown how to fold their individually designed printed fabric to make small boxes. Some had done some origami before and others needed support to learn this new skill.



**Figure 23** Cork boat

### **Cork boat workshop at Castle Ham Lodge**

The artist brought in samples of previously constructed cork and driftwood boats for residents to have a look at. The residents were presented with an instruction sheet to follow, so that they could work at their own pace.

One participant chose to make a galleon ship from a big piece of tree bark, and a few extra boats. Another participant adapted an idea from her own textile experience of making a bigger boat and creating the sail

from fabric. Some residents made boats with one sail and others chose two. The designs were all individual. At the end of the workshop the group had a boat race in kitchen sink to find out if cork or driftwood boats were faster, or if one or two sails worked better. This was a great moment for reminiscence about boat racing, a popular UK hobby. The residents took their instruction sheets away so that they could make boats at home for grandchildren.



**Figure 24** Ceramic bird box

### Ceramic bird boxes at Castle Ham Lodge

This was a specific art activity that had been requested by residents at an early meeting with the project manager. The artist brought a completed bird box for the residents to see. She handed out pro forma pieces of card, cut so that clay could be rolled out to make slab sections for the round bird house. This was followed by decorating the clay sections. Many different print blocks, leaves, grasses and other textural items were used to make the clay surface look interesting. The bird box was then assembled and the residents were

shown how to put together slab pottery using pinching, scratching and slip. The artist took the assembled bird boxes home with her to fire in the kiln. There was a follow-up session with another project artist, in which the bird boxes were painted.

### Countryside fabric wall-hanging at Court House Residential, Cullompton, Devon

This was a project that had already been started by the home's activities coordinator, but it had stalled as she needed support and artistic guidance. The participants were presented with a large hessian rectangle and some pieces of felt. The theme had been chosen by the home's residents and was for a large textile wall hanging which would be displayed in the home. The wall hanging would be a living piece of art that would change in accordance with the seasons. The tree would be a permanent feature and the leaves, animals etc. would be detachable.

The project ran for a total of five weeks. In the first session the artist introduced a starch resist technique to make the detachable spring and summer leaves for the central tree. The artist brought in her own handmade leaf printing shapes. As the weeks progressed the residents started to make individual animals of their choice such as birds, squirrels, fox and a badger.



**Figure 25** Countryside fabric wall hanging

### Clay hands wall-hanging at Camelot House, Cullompton, Devon

The agreed theme was for residents to create a clay wall-hanging for their home by making individual, clay tiles that would be linked together. The residents started with drawing around their own hands. Over a period of four weeks they were encouraged to roll out the clay and print shapes and words to individualize their own hands. This led on to painting and the addition of fabrics. The wall hanging is now on display at Camelot House.



**Figure 26**  
Clay hands wall hanging

### Reminiscence collage at Popham Court, Wellington, Somerset

Reminiscence was a key part of this project. At the first session, the artist brought in a wide selection of cut-out images depicting past lives. The residents chose images to stick onto their cards. As the creativity, conversations and reminiscences flowed in the room, the cards took on the life story of each resident. Session by session, as stories about people, places, jobs and hobbies emerged, a wider selection of images was brought in and fabrics such as lace were incorporated into the design.



**Figure 27**  
Reminiscence collage

### 3.3 Austria

KUNSTLABOR Graz trained at least ten artists representing different fields were trained to facilitate the workshops. They worked with different teams in three different care settings.

Eggenberg Care Home houses 162 people. All of them need support, but in different ways: some are living with dementia and some have other health issues, for example with mobility. Eggenberg Care Home offers a large room for group activities. St. Peter Residential Care Home is a retirement and care facility of Caritas Graz. Most of the 142 residents there are dependent on care. Kumberg assisted living home 'Haus der Freunde' offers assisted living for 24 people. The residents are all still very mobile and have virtually no care needs.

#### **Curtains and lampshades made of strips of fabric in Eggenberg Care Home**

This group consisted of residents who were interested in participating. They were used to working together in groups that were normally supervised by an occupational therapist.

The idea was to tie a curtain made of strips of fabric onto a metal rod. The strips were cut from pieces of old fabric. Colour range was limited to three colours so that the participants could match them together as they wished. The reason for limiting the choice of colours was to ensure there would be an aesthetic composition throughout. After several work sessions, two curtains were produced.

Next, the technique was repeated but with a different material. This time big, white garbage bags were cut into strips and tied to large round wooden hoops to form lampshades. The hoops were fixed to the ceiling of the group room in such a way that three to four people could work on one hoop. Finally, another idea followed, about projecting photos onto them.



**Figure 28** Fabric strip curtains



**Figure 29** Fabric strip lampshades



**Figure 30** Knitting

The participants put forward suggestions as to how they wanted to design the lamps: maybe a bit smaller, in certain colours, using patterned fabric or with silk flowers in between, etc. After finding out that many of the participants had knitted in the past, we also brought wool and knitting needles. That prompted one lady to finger-knit one long strand per week, which she did on her own during the week.



**Figure 31** Textile printing of tablecloth

### Textile printing a tablecloth for a large table in Eggenberg Care Home

We attached squares (25 x 25 cm) of white cotton cloth to stiff cardboard using broad adhesive tape so that each square had its own frame. There were three colours and differently sized blocks with a variety of designs (letters, numbers and simple geometrical shapes) to choose from.

After learning the technique, the participants began to experiment in groups of four, sitting around the table and stamping patterns, names and short texts onto their squares using different shapes and colours. They inspired each other while working and recognized their own patterns on the tablecloth they had made together.

After learning the technique, the participants began to experiment in groups of four, sitting around the table and stamping patterns, names and short texts onto their squares using different shapes and colours. They inspired each other while working and recognized their own patterns on the tablecloth they had made together.



**Figure 32** Working with clay individually

### Working with clay in St. Peter Residential Care Home

This project was for a selected group of interested residents. There was a core group of three men, but always visitors present as well. At first, the participants modelled clay individually. One participant produced a giraffe, a hippopotamus, a tortoise; he loved animal programmes on TV and modelled his animals depending on what programme he had just viewed.

Another participant became so keen on pottery that he even asked us for more information on courses available to the public.

Third participant developed a method which allowed him to model things without touching the clay with bare hands. He used a modelling tool or a wire loop as an elongated arm. Colleagues helped him to roll out slabs from which he cut out smaller slabs of clay (approx. 10 x 10 cm), into which he then carved drawings and texts using a modelling tool. Despite limited fine motor skills and the weakness of hands and fingers, he developed a functional working method that suited him well, without much intervention at all.

The next step was to work collaboratively. With eyes closed we worked, one after the other, on a huge lump of clay weighing about 7 kg, from which we formed an 'IT'.

After this, the 'being' was coated with four layers of paper scraps and glue and then left to dry. A week later, we all took turns in coating it with latex. After the drying period was over, we meticulously extricated the clay, which had not yet dried, and separated the two layers of paper and latex, presenting the object in the exhibition as a final highlight.



**Figure 33** Working with clay collaboratively



**Figure 34** Making pictures by knitting and other techniques (here weaving)

### **Making pictures by knitting and other techniques in Kumberg assisted living home**

There were 10 members in this group. Empty wooden frames of about 50 x 70 cm were prepared using various materials such as wool, lace, ribbons and string. This allowed the most varied techniques to be used: knotting, knitting and crochet. These techniques reminded the participants of the activities they had practised earlier in their lives, but also resulted in different and new outcomes.



### **Making a sculpture of plastic cups in Kumberg assisted living home**

This was much more of an experiment. White plastic cups – 800 of them – were to be put together by the participants into a collaboratively created sculpture. Both the material and the task itself were extremely challenging.

Working on the sculpture was connected to a question: what would I like to leave behind me as a memory? Interesting discussion on the topic was initiated with a quotation from ‘The Little Prince’ by the French author Antoine de Saint-Exupéry. The ideas from the discussion were expressed in the artwork. The reflections were written on small notes which were placed in the cups that formed the sculpture.

**Figure 35** Sculpture of plastic cups

## **3.4 Estonia**

Workshops in Estonia were carried out in two types of adult care institutions: older adult day activity centres and care homes. Viljandi and Tartu day activity centres offer a variety of activities designed to promote wellbeing through social and health-related services such as cooking, dancing (especially folk dances), physical exercises, chess and draughts, table-tennis, handicrafts and textile weaving. People of the age between 50 and 90 are engaged in activities.

Viiratsi care home provides services to 68 clients, some of whom are bed-bound and some are diagnosed with dementia. The care home provides regular activities for the residents: there are newspaper readings, exercises, chair dance sessions and lectures. In Nõo care home, there were 47 residents. The residents include people diagnosed with dementia and memory disorders. Some residents enjoy doing things in groups: they decorate cards, produce paper-flowers for celebrations, model clay figures and paint on glass.



Workshop leaders in Estonia were teachers and students of the department of Native Crafts at University of Tartu's Viljandi Culture Academy. They had diverse backgrounds: all had completed short-term training sessions during the project, but their previous experiences of delivering workshops and/or working with older people differed largely.

### Textile printing

Three different printing options were introduced in our workshops: using special stamps and woodblocks, leaf printing and monotype. Fabric printing is easily adaptable to participants of various ability and preparation. In the first workshop, the participants were provided with doilies and table napkins that they could decorate. To succeeding workshops, many participants brought their own items: home textile, home sewn fabric bags, T-shirts and other pieces of clothing. They experimented with different materials and textures, and re-decorated their old garments. Fabric printing allows participants to be creative: combine background colours, mix tones, work with different shapes and compositions.



**Figure 36** Textile printing

### Plaited ribbons

In another workshop, plaited heart ribbons were made as keyrings. Two yarns of different colours were plaited until the heart ribbon was long enough. Ribbons were finished and individualized with a tassel, using extra yarns, textile ribbons etc. After the experience, this technique is suggested for more capable groups.



**Figure 37** Plaited ribbons



**Figure 38** Badges. See also figure 11.

## Badges

In this workshop, the participants chose pictures they wanted to display on a badge. The picture can be drawn or cut out from a photo or magazine, etc. Also, any kind of fabric can be used. By using reflecting fabric it is possible to make reflectors. To finish the badge, it needs to be pressed in a special machine.

The technique is suitable for everyone – anyone can draw or write something on the badge.



**Figure 39** Metalwork

## Metal work

The goal was to learn to make some basic, sheet metal (brass or copper) jewellery such as earrings, pendant or brooch. The workshop covered the following phases: planning; cutting out your design; texturing the piece and using punches and stamps to create beautiful, unique decorations; completing holes and/or adding fasteners; polishing and finishing the piece. Metalwork requires goldsmith tools and special equipment. Metal workshops were only delivered in day activity centres with people in good health, as these techniques require strength.



**Figure 40** Finished piece of metalwork

The background is a solid green color. In the top right corner, there is a pattern of small yellow dots on a green background, which is partially covered by a semi-transparent light green circle. In the bottom left corner, there is a thin yellow arc of a circle.

## II Facilitating creative workshops



**Figure 41** Age is just one aspect of who we are.

## 4. Pedagogical thinking



During the Handmade Wellbeing project, the importance of high-quality pedagogy for older people was addressed. The underlying thinking was to appreciate the lifelong learning of people even at an older age. Based on the practical experiences of facilitating and observing the workshops in elderly care settings, the purpose was to look for the core elements of this kind of pedagogy. The aspects presented in this part of the Handbook arose during the collaborative reflection sessions. We have included citations to show the reflections of different parties: the workshop facilitators, workshop participants and activities coordinators. By workshop facilitator we refer to artists and craft student teachers, as well as art and craft professionals, who were offering workshops in the Handmade Wellbeing project. The citations of workshop participants refer to the older people in the care settings. Activities coordinator refers to a staff member of the care setting.

### 4.1 Awareness of the perceptions of older people

Reflecting one's own perception of older people is important. This perception has a profound influence on the working process, from setting the targets, choosing the methods, communicating and giving feedback. Our perceptions are based on our first-hand life experiences, but also determined by second-hand information we hear from others and see in media. Some personal experiences are negative and this can create a sense of anxiety about working with older people. However, many older people are seen as role models for upcoming generations. Personal experience is always limited and it is good to challenge the preconceptions based on them.

The important thing to remember is that older people are not a homogeneous group but individuals, just like everyone else. We are all getting older and should not be defined by our age or medical conditions. They are just one aspect of who we are. For example, the widely used term 'living with dementia' implies a shared condition, whereas in reality everyone has their own unique dementia journey, as well as life experience in general.

The people in care settings have a lot of life experience, some of it shared, generational experiences, and some unique. One might meet people who have changed the world in their lifetimes. Personalities, skill levels and abilities vary from person to person. An understanding of cultural and religious differences is also important, because people living in care settings come from increasingly diverse backgrounds.

It may sometimes appear that older people are treated as children or less capable persons. However, they are grown up people and individuals who can make their own decisions. Furthermore, their life experience and knowledge is still growing. They establish new



**Figure 42** Life-long learning

friendships and trusted relationships within care home environments. They look forward to outings, visits from relatives and enjoyable sessions such as art workshops. They are also able to learn, make new things and experiment, though some (even themselves!) believe that older people are no longer capable. It is important to concentrate on older people's resources instead of deficits.

In conclusion, it is helpful to be aware of your own thoughts and prejudices about the ageing process and older people, before starting to work with them. You will meet a diverse group of older people which enriches everyone's creative experience in the workshop.

● *Ageing and being old is a process and as with many other things, the way we perceive this process is relative. In our times it does not seem to be desirable to be old. Everything we do is geared at keeping us young, pretty and fit. Age confronts us with mortality, physical and mental limitations, with the past, memories, the loss of autonomy, death and loneliness. But age is also a resource. It opens up access to knowledge about lived-in worlds, biographies, wisdom and rich experience and naturally to personalities and people. Ageing is also a state of mind. You are as old as you feel. Activity is vital and contributes to keeping our skills and joy of life. Even in old age we can encounter the world with curiosity and openness – and this instantly makes you years younger! This is what I have learned in the Handmade Wellbeing project.*

- WORKSHOP FACILITATOR

## 4.2 Awareness of the context and the role of the facilitator

It is essential for the facilitators to analyse their perceptions of the context, their own role in it and the relation between themselves and the people they work with. When working in care settings, it is good to keep in mind that the residents live there and the facilitator has been invited into their home. This is different from other kinds of instructional situations that the facilitator might be used to, for example in educational institutions. There is no curriculum nor official learning goal to follow, and the results are not formally evaluated. Participation is totally voluntary. It is a question of what residents would like to do in their home, and how they wish to be treated in there.

However, when a person is there to instruct the older people, it is fair to acknowledge that a kind of hierarchical situation exists, which might include a perception that the facilitator has a higher position. On the other hand, the hierarchy is not so self-evident, especially if the facilitator is very young. The facilitator may find it difficult to think of their role or 'instructing' older people, who may be three times their age.

To minimize the hierarchy, mutual respect is essential in communication. Although the facilitator may have more know-how on the topic of the workshop, the older people bring with them their knowledge and understanding. You may meet older people who are actually at a higher intellectual or skill level than you, real experts on your topic.

● *When reflecting on my position during the workshops, I saw myself as an experienced artist: my aim was to teach some possible techniques, but I gave the older participants all the artistic freedom. I positioned myself and the group as equals – the only difference is that I have more experiences in that particular technique.*

- WORKSHOP FACILITATOR

In a non-hierarchical approach, mutual respect is strengthened by showing interest to the persons you are working with. This is about getting to know them, their backgrounds, ideas and thoughts. In addition to direct questions, older people may be encouraged to tell stories about their lives and experiences. Also, they probably are interested in you as a person. Although you might want to keep a professional role, do not be afraid to share some aspects of your personal life and your ideas.

In a relaxed atmosphere, it is easier to introduce new ideas, for example new art and craft forms, and to try them together. In addition, it is good to have an open mind to the know-how that the participants have, and to explore these together with the group. This way the facilitator can also learn from the participants, and show respect to their existing skills and knowledge.



**Figure 43** Facilitators know their techniques, but it's good to be open and learn from participants too.

At worst, poor communication may lead to situations where the participants feel insecure and frustrated. If this happens, it is always possible to change the plans. Older people have also their different problems and their activity level may vary a lot during one day, and from day to day. Be reflective to their response and make the final decisions about the activities at the situation. Good planning includes the possibility for changes.

In care settings and homes, mutual respect also applies to the other members of staff. Value their experience in the field, and be open to learning from them. Interesting and fruitful activities may evolve through cooperation in which expertise and many views are shared. This all requires good communication between the stakeholders.

Finally, it is important that you as a facilitator enjoy the process as well. In the beginning, some facilitators think that everything needs to be done 'correctly', but as time goes by, they realize that they should be more tolerant towards their own shortcomings. These so-called mistakes lead to new ideas. There is no such thing as right or wrong; there is only another way. This challenges the facilitator to look at him/herself as a facilitator. But after all, facilitating a workshop is about communicating and cooperating with people, for whom you wish the best. The wellbeing of the facilitator is as important as the wellbeing of the older people you work with. At best, collaborative activities supports the wellbeing of all.



### 4.3 Setting targets for meaningful activities

Planning activities includes setting the targets, and it is worthwhile to ask from time to time: Why do I do this? Why is it important to have these activities? What are the desired consequences of the whole project or individual workshop – new skills, useful products, art exhibition? And how to achieve these targets?

To answer these questions, one has to reflect on personal experiences and learn from other projects and research. Reflection helps to focus better, improve the efficacy, and enable relevant changes in practice. The facilitator needs to develop his/her own pedagogical approach to guide other people's creative processes. In this chapter we discuss some targets that were central in Handmade Wellbeing workshops.

Supporting physical activities and challenging the mind are perhaps the most obvious targets, when making something creative with the hands. As was discussed earlier, engaging in art and craft activities stimulates and activates hands, the whole body, and also revitalizes the mind. Creative activities offer the possibility of playing, experimenting, having fun and connecting more deeply with one's own wishes and feelings. Creative activities include learning new things as well as rediscovering things we already know or doing them in a new way. New experiences gained in creative work can also be unsettling, but at the same time they often invigorate. Often, the process of creating and being together has much greater value than learning useful skills or making finished products.



**Figure 44** Making crafts stimulate hands and mind.



**Figure 45** Learning useful and feasible techniques for future use.

For some participants, the main target is to learn a useful and feasible technique that they could continue with later without further instruction. It is perhaps harder for older people to acquire totally new techniques, but many have already developed manual skills during their lives. Movements attached to activities that have been automatized by the hands are retrievable, and also practising new techniques may become automatized when repeated.

Engagement in life and learning that age is not a limitation is an important target. Ageing and being old sometimes causes people to perceive more strongly their deficits than their resources. 'I can't do that', is something the facilitators frequently hear. Working with techniques like simplification, enlargement and appropriate aids, though, helps people to accomplish certain tasks again. This encourages them to shape their own lives and helps them to perceive themselves as

talented, capable and valuable. 'No, I can't do that, but perhaps I can do something else', is what we primarily want to let people experience in our work.

Even though the process is often more important than the product, a completed item is also an important target. Some participants might expect to finish an artefact that they can start using. It is a tangible, visual proof of learning something new that symbolizes self-esteem and empowerment. The created products restore identity and make people proud of their achievements. In Handmade Wellbeing workshops, older people were often honestly amazed by their own capabilities. Presenting the products to the public, or at least to their families, relatives and friends, boosts self-confidence and joie de vivre, and makes older people visible again.



**Figure 46** The finished pieces embody the making and learning.



**Figure 47** Making things together is fun! The group can achieve more than an individual.

### EXAMPLE

A workshop participant sitting in a wheelchair could not roll out his clay to form a slab. However, a second participant helped him because he was able to stand and therefore, to use his strength more effectively. The first participant said thank you and there was a round of applause for that.

In another workshop, we heard the following: 'I can't tie anything together' ... 'But you can hold the rod and your neighbour will do the tying.'

Doing things together in a group invigorates people and is an important target. Workshops bring people together to discover things for themselves and to share ideas with others without pressure to compete or fear of failure. Participation is a way of sharing ideas with others, establishing contacts, being stimulated and stimulating others, and also for helping one another. Although older people in care settings may not be accustomed to working in a group, positive experiences in a safe atmosphere help them to relate to each other. Participants learn that the group can achieve more than an individual. Workshops also provide a chance to learn from each other across the ages.

Rediscovering playfulness is one target, since playful activity reduces pressure and allows people to do something new without the pressure of being perfect. The need to play is profoundly human, and playing is important for creativity. Groups are ideal for doing spontaneous things together and experiencing solidarity and companionship.

The targets for each workshop depend on the group; to set appropriate targets it is good to know something about the group in advance. The targets may be different for older people living at home in good health and for those living in care settings. Each facilitator and group has to determine for themselves the targets of the workshop activities.

Last but not least, remember to be flexible with your expectations, not expecting to achieve too many targets at once. Things do not always work out as you planned them. It is a good strategy to provide the participants with some ideas but to let them come up with their own solution, supporting each other, learning from each other, and inspiring each other.

## REFLECTION TASKS

- The terminology and words used to describe old age are interesting in themselves. Compare terms: old age, declining years, dotage, senility, third age, fourth age, senior citizens... How about old, older, elderly or elders? Which words do you use to describe older people and old age? Why?
- Two well-known proverbs reflect opposing attitudes to the abilities of older people. Which one do you stand for? Why?  
'You cannot teach an old dog new tricks.'  
'There's many a good tune played on an old fiddle.'
- Make a list of the older people you know or have known in your own life. These may be older relatives from childhood or people you care about and support now. How would you describe them? What are their characteristics? What kinds of things and activities do they like?
- What will you be like in old age? What do you wish to do then? How do you wish to be treated?
- Think about contacting and working with older people: What kind of previous experiences do you have? How about expectations? Which questions, fears and topics crop up? How do you deal with your limitations, prejudices and concerns?
- Reflect also after your workshops: How was it to work with these people, and what were they like? Did your perception change?
- Think about your own role: How do you see yourself: as an artist/artisan, a teacher, a facilitator? How equal are you with the participants? Is there hierarchy? Reflect also afterwards, how happy you were with your role. If not, how can you change it?
- Think about why you do this: why is it important? What is in it for the participants, facilitator, and society? What influence do creative activities and making by hand have on wellbeing, according to your experience?
- Reflect on the principles that drive your own artistic, pedagogical or craft work. How can you utilize this in creative work in care settings?



**Figure 48** Agree with the care setting, who pays for and brings the materials.

## 5. Working with care institutions



Projects and activities can't be fully designed to be appropriate to all. You may have tentative ideas and a framework for a project, but to choose proper targets and methods, you always need to consider who you are going to work with. You need to familiarize yourself a bit with the individuals, the group and the venue, so try to find an opportunity to visit the care setting and the group beforehand to finalize your project plans.

If you wish to provide creative activities for older people, there are a few options of the places to work in: basically, there are services for older people who live at home, and for those who live in a care setting. In any case, the facilitator will probably work in collaboration with a care setting and social and health care professionals.

Care settings may differ from other environments you are used to working in. In some, there are constant changes since the residents are arriving and departing and their health needs are changing during their stay. Each care setting has its own unique culture and set of dynamics, and these affect your work. It is important to learn to communicate with different work cultures, because successful workshops in care homes require the staff to be engaged.

The whole care environment, and being in there, is probably very exciting at first if you are a newcomer. It may also be a real culture shock, depending on your previous working experience. Visiting different departments and just spending a little time in the care settings helps in realising, what the environment and life are like in there. This in turn helps to understand the people you are working with and perhaps also what role the activities play in the daily life of the care setting.

### 5.1 The living circumstances of older people

A lot of older people live on their own and sometimes may have challenges coping with everyday life or maintaining their social contacts. They may need assistance in their daily life, and also meaningful activities.

Daily activity centres and adult education institutes are for people who live at home and are still in good health. Daily activity centres offer courses, workshops and other activities on an hourly basis (the system may vary between countries). Visitors can take part in multiple activities. Many older people also attend adult education institutes, which sometimes offer courses especially aimed at seniors. These places are an important place of work for artists, craft professionals and workshop leaders.

Senior day care is for people who live at home but need more care. People spend the day in an institution that offers them a structured day. This ensures that they get help whenever they need it, that they eat and do not become isolated. The centres offer joint activities. It makes sense for artists and workshop leaders to work in these structures too. People are still in relatively good health, and a wide range of activities are possible. Some impaired vision and hearing may have to be taken into account, however.

Some day care structures are especially intended for people with dementia. Many of them have practically no physical limitations, and their need for care is due to short-term memory issues; for example, a lost sense of time and place. In some cases they cannot recognize people, or suffer from speech disorders. This offers a wide range of activities for artists, craft professionals and workshop leaders working in environments, and using activities beyond language.

Assisted living for seniors enables self-determined, independent living in a barrier-free apartment. It is a combination of senior-friendly living situation and specific care services. The aim is to allow people to stay in this situation for as long as possible. There are services designed to activate residents and also joint activities. Workshops and projects are very welcome here too.

Care homes are for people who cannot live on their own any more. The physical, mental and emotional condition of the residents usually varies greatly. Care homes offer a good place to have creative projects.

## **5.2 Cooperation with the care setting**

When you wish to cooperate with a care setting, the first formal contact might be with the activities coordinator. Sometimes you need to contact the manager, who may not be involved in practical arrangements later on, but often the primary decision on letting you in rests with them. You can ask if you can come over to present your ideas to the staff, or ask the manager to find out which departments would be interested, and then contact them directly. It is good to make sure if it is okay to communicate directly with the staff involved, or does the manager wish to be informed from time to time?

After finding out which departments to contact, speak to the head of that department. Usually you are introduced to the members of the staff you will be working with. At this point, remember to ask if the head of department wishes to be informed along the way, or should you just communicate directly with the staff members you are actually working with.



## Engaging the staff

Involving the staff from the beginning is crucial for the success of your workshop. This inclusive approach breaks the 'us and them' barriers. If the staff members are enthusiastic and motivated, you will find communication and arranging things easier and fun, and they will motivate the residents too. Engage with them and take full advantage of their experience and knowledge.



**Figure 49** Engage with the staff, they are your co-workers in care settings.

- *In addition to getting to know our group, having information and tips from the staff was very important. Planning the project was very challenging at first, with so many questions about what are the participants able to do.*
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- WORKSHOP FACILITATOR

It is good to acknowledge that nursing staff everywhere are under pressure and busy. Some homes operate without an activities team and this role may be designated to carers who are already fully occupied. Having an artist around asking things and needing special arrangements may feel like extra work for them. They may also feel unsure of their role in a creative session with you, the professional artist or craftsman.

Let the staff know you are interested in their work and appreciate their knowledge. The care staff knows the residents well; utilize this in planning the workshops and try to engage them in the co-development of the workshop. Have a meeting with them before you go on finalizing your workshop plans. Ask them if there are some special needs, impairments, or wishes and skills that you should and could take into account.

● *I am especially pleased that this resident has joined us today as she usually stays for hours in her bed. It was good to see her out of her room taking part in making something and socializing.*

- ACTIVITIES COORDINATOR

Negotiate your workshop ideas with the staff: explain the techniques you would like to use and the outcome of the activities. Explain the targets you are aiming at in this workshop and ask for their opinions. They may have some ideas about what to make, from practical items needed in the department, like tablecloths, to decoration for some empty wall-space. But remember, you don't have to take on every suggestion.

Invite the staff to participate in the workshop and discuss their role and how they may support you, in advance. There has to be always staff members present in the workshop, so that the facilitator can focus properly on the delivery of the session and in case something unpredictable happens. Remember that you are not a nurse: for example, some participants need help requiring special techniques that you cannot know. If for some reason you are left alone, even on a temporary basis, make sure that you know where the care worker and emergency bells are, in case of emergency.

On the day of delivering the workshop, the care staff can provide important information about participants' current health and mood. Find a few minutes before the start of the session to explain your plans that day and invite them to support you. For example, you might ask them to sit with some of the participants and make sure that they are managing a more challenging technique. Also it might be fun for the care staff to participate in the making, if possible. After the workshop, remember to thank them and ask for their feedback.



**Figure 50** There should always be staff present in the workshop. Besides, they might enjoy participating in the making!

### **Finding time, space and materials**

The staff knows how the ordinary day in the care setting is run. When planning the timetables for workshops, it is important to take into account the meal times etc. Usually the residents are more active at one time of the day than the other. Also agree with the staff, how many workshops there will be, and how long they last. The staff can give suggestions about the duration of the workshops, which is linked to the timetables and to the condition of the participants. Some can work easily for two whole hours, while for others 30 minutes is the maximum.

The staff is important also in helping you to find a suitable space for your workshop. Few care homes have dedicated activities rooms, and the workshop may be placed for example in the dining room with other people constantly passing by. For some residents, the only option may be to work in the department where they live, while sometimes it is possible also to work outdoors. Think about what equipment is needed in your workshop and in the room: good light, electricity, water, some technology? Sometimes a change of plans is needed according to what is available in a particular room that is available. Try to get an opportunity to see the room in advance.

- *It's going well. There is participation, animation in faces, a nice quiet environment and plenty of space for residents to come and go. Good to have incoming light from the large windows.*
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- WORKSHOP FACILITATOR



**Figure 51** Be prepared to bring your own tools and materials, especially if something special is needed. Ostra vius

Negotiate and agree with the care setting about how you get the materials for the workshop. Be prepared to find funding for materials and bring them with you. However, find out if there is something already in the care setting you could use, and if they can invest a little in some materials.

### **Finding participants**

Negotiate with the staff how to find participants in your workshop and agree with them, how many participants there can be altogether. This depends on the condition of the residents, the room, your chosen technique and the number of facilitators. If the number of participants needs to be limited, it must be decided how they are chosen and by whom. There may be as many as five to seven participants for one facilitator and one care worker, if they are in quite good health and you can guide them to work in groups. However, if the participants need a lot of help, there may be only one to three participants for one facilitator and a care worker.

Participation should always be voluntary. The staff may have ideas of the residents who might be interested or able to participate, but the residents should decide on this themselves. Sometimes a carer will see an activity going on in a room and might bring a resident there even if that person has not expressed a preference. Always find out from the residents if they want to take part in an activity.

● *I am really pleased that one of the residents stayed with us for the whole workshop,*  
 ● *which surprised me as she normally walks around the home non-stop. She must have*  
 ● *been stimulated and interested enough to stay with us and this was her choice.*  
 ● - ACTIVITIES COORDINATOR

It also happens that activities are advertised only for those who already engage in some arts and crafts activities or have done so earlier. However, everyone should have the opportunity to participate, so try to present your idea for the whole department, or leave advertisements and ask the staff to advertise too. You can, for example, make an invitation flyer. Also try to find out if other activities are running at the same time as yours to make sure your workshop is not competing with some highly popular activity. Sometimes the activities coordinator may even have a group for you ready. For example, in Finland one set of workshops was arranged for a craft-making group with six participants from different departments. The group was regularly run by the activities coordinator and it gathered once a week in the craft-making space. This provided the student craft teachers a good basis for introducing new craft activities.



**Figure 52** An advertisement for clay hands workshop, made by the artist, Mary Kembery

## Legal aspects

You may wish to take photos or film during your workshop, either for your own portfolio or to have an exhibition afterwards. For this, you need to obtain written permission from the participants and staff members. For some participants, the permission needs to be signed by a relative or other trustee. Confirm this from the staff. However, no matter who signs the paper, you should always ask the participants if it's okay to photograph them. If they decline, a relative can't give permission for them. Confirm all needs and legal aspects with the staff. Usually the residents have signed a photography permission form for the care setting's purposes, you can ask to see it as a model for your own paper.

### CHECKLIST

- **First, contact the activities coordinator or the manager**
  - Make sure who the contact person is, for later arrangements.
  - Find out from the activities coordinator if they have groups or departments in mind for your workshop.
- **Involve the staff from the beginning**
  - Have a meeting with the staff before the workshops and engage them in co-developing the activities.
  - Show respect for their knowledge and ask them if there are some special needs or wishes for the activities.
  - Invite the staff to participate in the workshops and discuss their role in advance.
- **Define clear agreements with the partner care setting about:**
  - number of participants and groups
  - duration of the workshops and their frequency
  - all timetables
  - who will put the group together and do the advertising
  - in which room or space the workshop will take place and what equipment is available
  - who brings and pays for the workshop materials
  - the support from the staff
  - whether taking photos is allowed and how to get permissions for that.
- **Make sure there is always a staff member present in your workshop!**





**Figure 53** Finding and preparing workshop materials is an important part of planning.



## 6. Planning the workshop

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Many things need to be considered when the topic, material and working methods of the workshop are planned. In this chapter, some of these aspects are discussed, based on the Handmade Wellbeing project experiences.

### 6.1 Special features of working with older people

Working with older people includes taking into consideration some physical and mental changes that occur due to ageing. Some of these conditions require planning and equipment to support older people in their creativity. Many care home residents are for example living with painful physical conditions such as arthritis and stiff joints which makes it harder for them to use their fine motor skills. Many are wheelchair users and will need extra space so that they are comfortable. Some have sight and hearing issues, and the effects of medication can make people tired.

There is a wide range of resources and aids available to assist people so that they can take part in creative activities, for example special scissors that are easier and lighter to pick up and use. Sometimes the care setting will have its own resources but the facilitator may need to think about making adaptations to their own equipment, for example adding finger grips to paintbrushes. It is good to be prepared with a variety of equipment for different needs. Someone may not be able to grasp a paintbrush, but they may be able to use for example a large foam roller to make a mark.



**Figure 54** Utilise different aids, for example magnifiers, to assist people to participate in activities.

It is also important to allow different modes of participation. If a resident is too tired or unwell to take part, give them the option to stay and watch. The resident may feel well enough to join in later. Just being part of the group may also be important.

● *I realized that knowing a little information about the participants at the start of the session, regarding their abilities and interests, is helpful to the artist. For example, knowing which people have asked to watch rather than take part.*

– WORKSHOP FACILITATOR

## Dementia

Facilitators working in care settings are most likely going to be supporting people living with dementia. It is a common reason for people to end up living in care settings, and was the most common issue the facilitators faced during the Handmade Wellbeing project too. For facilitators, an understanding of dementia is essential because it can have a very profound influence on the way a person acts and communicates. Without any knowledge at all, communicating with a person with dementia can be confusing and even intimidating. For example, a person may seem angry although in fact she/he is not; memory disorder prevents her/him from expressing her/himself properly and keeping up with discussion in social situations, which makes them frustrated.

● *I would call it a culture shock, because the whole environment and situation was so new and strange. At first you couldn't see people, you just saw behaviour and the disease symptoms. When you got used to it, and realized that this is normal behaviour for this person, only then did you start to pay attention to what kind of personalities they are like. It is challenging, we only see them for this short period of time and don't know any background. This was also the hardest part of working with them, trying to figure out what the person is like, and what is just the dementia symptom.*

- WORKSHOP FACILITATOR

Dementia is not a natural part of ageing. It is caused by diseases of the brain, such as Alzheimer's, Vascular and Lewy Bodies, to name but a few. The dementia journey is unique and is constantly changing. There are different stages in dementia, ranging from early to advanced. Some people are living with a mixture of dementia conditions and symptoms, and many are also living with the effects of physical illnesses. (Alzheimer's Society, 2017.)

There are many symptoms associated with dementia. People living with dementia can for example experience difficulties with their short-term memory, concentration, planning things and executing daily tasks. (Alzheimer's Society, 2017.) In art sessions they may not remember the artwork they have created in previous sessions, or may have difficulties in making choices. However, most people living with dementia have better long-term memories and may very clearly recall events and creativity from their younger years.

Also the abilities, moods and engagement of workshop participants can change. They may have difficulties in expressing themselves with words, or controlling their emotions. (Alzheimer's Society, 2017.) In one session a participant might be cheerful and fully engaged, whereas a week later they may be unresponsive and unwilling to take part at all. If mood swings occur, it does not mean that this is not working for them at all. Sometimes people living with dementia just want to sit quietly next to someone engaging in a creative activity. This can be calming and soothing for someone who is simply not in the mood to engage at that moment.

- *It helps to keep an eye on the group dynamics, especially when supporting people with dementia, as moods can change suddenly. Be aware and respectful of what else is happening in the home and stick to deadlines for lunch, etc.*
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- WORKSHOP FACILITATOR

If you are a newcomer and don't have experience of dementia, even a short, general briefing from the staff helps. There are also organizations that offer good, free dementia awareness sessions and guidance as well as web resources (for example [The Alzheimer's Society in UK](#) or [The Alzheimer Society of Finland](#)). If there is something about the dementia that is puzzling you, reflect on this with the staff and find solutions with them. There should also always be staff present in the workshops in case of unexpected situations. They have the knowledge, training and responsibility to handle difficult situations in care settings; your responsibility is to guide the workshop activities.

Do remember though, that a person is more than their diagnosis and dementia or any other condition alone does not define anyone. There is still an individual underneath, whom you should get to know to best communicate and work with them. So, even if there are some generalities that apply to some conditions, don't get caught up in them. At first you will probably pay attention to behaviour and possible symptoms of illnesses more, but later on when people become familiar, it is easier to see different personalities and the people underneath behaviour.

## 6.2 Getting to know the group

The better you know the group you work with, the easier it becomes to communicate with them. As a result, you all will become more confident in experimenting with different things. Invest time and effort in this. However, bear in mind that if you are only working with a group for a very short time, you can't get to know them very deeply. Try to find out something in advance and be focused when working with them.



**Figure 55** You will meet wonderful people in your workshops, invest time in getting to know them!

Before the workshops, aim to make a few visits to the place you are going to be working in. Some care settings might be accustomed to activities facilitators simply coming and going at set times, so they may ask reasons for your visit. It will give you the opportunity to meet up with the staff and residents beforehand, show some examples of your workshop ideas and involve them in planning the activities, to learn a few names and ask some questions to establish skill levels. There is no need for an in-depth knowledge of individual medical conditions, just a general awareness that is appropriate to the activity and/or for health and safety reasons. It is usually helpful to know if any of the residents have hearing and visual impairments, issues with mobility or hands, or dementia.

Your contact is perhaps an activities coordinator or the head nurse of the department you work in, but also have conversations with other staff members, if possible. They all know the residents very well. The facilitator also might meet family members from time

to time, who give them a different insight into a person's life. If possible, relatives should be invited to join the art activity as this makes it an inclusive and personal experience.

The very first workshop sets the tone for subsequent sessions and is a great point to start finding out about the residents. As soon as they start to arrive in the room, the facilitator should give a warm welcome and make introductions. Names are important. A good idea is to write out a discreet seating plan, adding names as participants arrive. Most people are happy to be called by their first names, although there are exceptions and these must be respected.

A good way to find out about people is to ask open questions, encouraging people to talk about themselves, their lives and preferences. Listen actively to their wishes at all stages. Have a notebook to jot down requests and ideas for the following sessions. The current generation living in care homes are generally modest by nature, playing down their skills and achievements. Many have been brought up not to ask for things and they find this difficult, as they may appear impolite. Conversation is a great way of drawing out what people would really like to do and this overcomes the politeness barrier.

Some participants, especially those living with dementia, may find it hard to use words and sentences to express their meaning. Observing body language is a good way of finding out what participants are enjoying and what they dislike. Faces and eyes are very expressive and can be great indicators of choice and preference.

After a few sessions, the facilitator will have a better awareness of the skills and abilities of the regular attendees. A good relationship based on earned trust will be establishing itself, and the facilitator might be able to start encouraging people to step out of their comfort zones, to try new paths of creativity and stretch themselves. Alternatively, some people will choose to remain within their comfort zones and this is fine too.



**Figure 56** Be attentive while working and you will learn many things about your participants.

Sometimes, when residents have suffered a period of illness they may change in physical appearance and suffer a reduction in physical and mental functioning. This can feel like getting to know someone all over again as ability levels and preferences have changed. Perhaps one of the toughest realities of working in care settings is that a participant who has become a regular is going to die. This can happen quite quickly without warning. The facilitator needs to be prepared for the emotional impact of this. It also impacts on staff members and can change the group dynamics. The nature of care settings means that the group will probably change to some extent from session to session. People will not always be well enough to attend art sessions and they may only be able to attend intermittently, making continuity difficult at times. Also, new residents are arriving all the time and may wish to try out the workshop.

In conclusion, getting to know the participants is an ongoing process, and knowledge of the group and individuals is refined every time you meet and work with them. It can be helpful to have a little prior knowledge, especially in the early sessions, and a good two way communication between the facilitator and the staff. However, the facilitators need to be attentive to noting their own impressions and background information during the sessions too. This will ensure that future workshops are more meaningful and relevant for the people who attend them.

● *I think what is most important in the work with very old people is both the time you spend with them and the encounters themselves. This is why I always aim to enter into an exchange. This is all about social togetherness and also about getting to know each other. A space can be created where togetherness can be an enriching experience, and where working and experimenting with materials can be experienced as a meaningful occupation. Being creative together, designing and making something together can trigger something for the people involved. The ways in which old people take up this offer may differ from person to person – and is always dependent on the lives they have led and their experiences. Emotions, feelings and new options are evoked. Moving comes into play here, communication, cooperation and the possibility of being actively involved in designing something and enjoying a sense of achievement, discovering new perspectives or – and probably most importantly – simply having fun!*

- WORKSHOP FACILITATOR

## 6.3 Choosing appropriate art and craft techniques and materials

Choosing appropriate art and craft techniques and materials is an essential part of the professional competence of the facilitator. It might feel comfortable to choose a technique you feel secure about. Some older people master handicrafts very well and they might have high expectations of your skilfulness. Be prepared to demonstrate your level of expertise and answer their questions. In case you don't know something that is asked for, it is better to acknowledge that and also honour the expertise of the participants.

Knowing your technique well also helps in responding flexibly to different circumstances and adjusting the technique to the needs of the participants with various abilities in different contexts.

### EXAMPLE

In creating monotype (in textile printing), the most common way is to apply paint to glass, draw desired images and then press the painted surface against the fabric. However, glass is relatively heavy and fragile material. The artist decided to replace glass with vapour barrier paper, which proved to be lighter and thus safer alternative. Experimenting further, she discovered other good usage options for vapour barrier paper: unlike glass, you can easily cut it into any desirable shape and increase its creative potential.



**Figure 57** Adapting monotype textile printing to be suitable in care settings by using vapour barrier paper instead of glass.

It is important to think thoroughly which materials and tools to use. Giving the possibility of choice is an important aspect to consider. An abundance of materials from which to choose is important for the individual work of the participants. However, bear in mind that some conditions, for example dementia, may cause difficulties in making choices so be prepared to give support in design.



**Figure 58** The opportunity to choose is important. However, some participants found it difficult to choose from this many different colours.

Often materials, tools and techniques carry with them associations about lived experiences. These could be utilized on purpose to make the participants memorize the familiar activities. Utilize the benefits of familiar materials that people are used to. The materials can be explored using many senses by feeling the texture, smelling them and listening to the sound they make. Consider not choosing the traditional or most common usages of certain materials and tools. For example, there is a strong tradition of gender-based techniques which it could be encouraged to question. Materials or techniques are neither male nor female. These are classifications that are learned by social experience. A free artistic approach to the material enables to detect certain patterns of thought and counteract them. As a consequence, older people may enjoy the experience when they notice that they have fun with material that they imagined to be ‘male or female material’.



Maybe you can develop new techniques and ways to use well-known materials with the participants. Something unexpected and new might be a good solution to provoke playfulness, fantasy, learning and experimentation. Different generations can have differing opinions of materials and their usage, and some experiments may cause confusion in the beginning. For example, an experimental project about making a sculpture of plastic cups was not very well received.

**Figure 59** Using plastic cups as material for sculpture caused confusion with participants.



The material was seen as bulky and the participants wondered why the cups were not used for drinking, also, the smell of the glue was felt unpleasant. The idea of the project was very distant for the participants, and they did not perceive the results as being their own work. If you are using new and unfamiliar materials, introduce them and explain the rationale for working with them.

Working with older and sometimes very frail people challenges us to introduce techniques that it would be possible for them to cope with. Otherwise the purpose of empowerment might not be achieved and, on the contrary, the participants might feel less capable. One possibility is to adjust the scale of the work, for example making things bigger or less detailed. Items which are too small or too big might be difficult to handle for older people. But again, consider the aspect of familiarity: if a person has lifelong experience with handling yarn, replacing it with more coarse materials, such as rope or fabric strips, might be too strange. A good solution is to give a choice of different materials and encourage experimenting with them. Do not underestimate older people: often they possess highly developed skills and are also capable of learning new things.



**Figure 60** Adjusting scales: making rya knots with fabric strips instead of traditional thin yarns



**Figure 61** Knitting with big needles and thick yarns

### EXAMPLE

We and the day care centre staff were a bit worried beforehand about needle felting because the needles are very sharp, and none of the participants had previous experience of needle felting technique. Nevertheless, it is important not to pamper. Therefore, when we started I talked about my own experiences as a warning. In the end we were all positively surprised: There were zero accidents.



**Figure 62** Material from different sources: recycled wool blankets, polystyrene from garbage skip and fabric scraps

Interesting and creative solutions for working are possible, even when the economic resources are limited. Using recycled materials is one way of seeing old techniques in a new way. The material can be gathered from several different sources: the facilitator may bring something, there may be something in the care setting, and sometimes the staff is willing to bring some materials too. There are many possibilities for co-operation with local organizations and also recycling centres.

Facilitators are often expected to bring their own tools and materials. If some larger and more common equipment is needed, contact the care setting in advance to make sure that they have something (e.g. iron and ironing board). Make a list of tools and think through how to organize them in the workshop space.

Also remember to be reflective about your choices. Sometimes you might (unconsciously) limit the techniques and working methods because of the diagnoses, thinking that something might not work with this or that disease, for example dementia. While this may apply in some cases, it is also possible that different things work with different individuals and groups. Try to remain open minded and try different techniques and approaches with any group. You are working with people, not the diagnosis. Experimenting with new things is also a good opportunity for you to broaden your knowledge and step out of your comfort zone!

● *At first it felt very important to have a general picture about these conditions and what to consider when working and communicating with them. Based on my experience, I would nevertheless say that the most important thing is to know the group and the individuals, and work with them, not the disease; that you don't exclude things in advance, just because you think it wouldn't work with this disease. It might work with these individuals.*

- WORKSHOP FACILITATOR



**Figure 63**  
Experiment with  
new materials  
and techniques!

## 6.4 Working approaches and methods

Choosing suitable approaches and methods is closely related to targets and how to achieve them with a particular group of participants, with available time and materials.

Individual work means that the participants make artefacts for themselves. Older people are probably used to this approach. They have made garments for themselves and their family or knitted dozens of woolly socks as Christmas presents. Individual work is a good option if the project is very short and the participants don't know each other very well. Getting to know each other in group work takes time and effort, and individual work is easier in that sense. Sometimes people also wish to do something of their own, without compromising.

● *In the first textile printing workshop, I provided participants with unhemmed tablecloths, but I encouraged everyone to bring to next session their own personal items. It was amazing how creatively people responded – in the follow-up workshops I saw people decorating T-shirts, gift-bags, shoulder bags and one lady even experimented with how textile printing works on a knitted cardigan!*

- WORKSHOP FACILITATOR

However, individual work doesn't mean working alone or isolated; it can take place in a group in workshops. Also, it is possible to work together at some point of the process, for example when ideating and designing the works. People can sit in small groups which enables communication and exchanging ideas. For example, in one project postcards presenting landscapes, artwork etc. were used for ideation and design. Each participant picked a postcard with atmosphere and colours that appealed to them, and then used it for inspiration when choosing the colours, designing shapes and arrangement. When everyone had chosen their postcard, they showed it to the others and said something about it: what they like about the image in the card and what it reminds them of. Also while working, the participants looked at each other's work, commented and encouraged. Each work was individual, but the connection of the group was fostered through common tasks.

When planning the individual work, take into account the available time and the abilities of the participants. If there is very little time, the technique can't be very challenging. For example, it takes a long time to knit something, even if the makers are capable and skilled, whereas fabric printing can be very quick.



**Figure 64** Making individual items in a group is fun and offers a chance to share ideas.

Collaborative work means that the participants are making something together. This can be a practical item, for example a set of tablecloths or curtains for their care setting, or a decorative or artistic piece, like a wall hanging. This is a nice way of contributing to a bigger piece in which everyone recognizes their part in the whole.



**Figure 65** Individual flower pieces...



**Figure 66** ...were combined into a collaborative flower bouquet.

Collaborative work can happen in different ways. The participants can first make their own pieces which are then combined into a bigger work. There may be a tentative idea beforehand about what the outcome would be or how it may look, or the participants may just go with the flow and design while making. Another way is that everyone works on the same piece at the same time. When finished, the piece can remain as it came out, in which case it is important to discuss and agree upon what will happen to it later and where it will be used or displayed. Alternatively, it can be divided into smaller pieces so that everyone gets a piece of the group's work for themselves.

- *Where is this going to be hanging when it's finished? It will make a big difference to our home. It belongs to us.*
- 
- 
- 

- WORKSHOP PARTICIPANT

Working together on the same piece may require a little more planning, but it is a nice way of building the feeling of belonging, community and trust. If communication and interaction is one of the main targets, consider this type of collaborative way of working. However, collaborative work is not always comfortable and easy because there are different perceptions involved. It may even irritate at first if the participants are not familiar with this approach. For example, it may feel uncomfortable to modify the work of another person or accept that someone modifies your work, which is typical in this approach. Reflect the experiences with the participants afterwards.



**Figure 67** Working on the same piece of clay and reflecting the experience

It is important to cooperate with the participants and decide on the activities collaboratively with them. This gives them control over what is happening, and the opportunity to express their interests. The facilitator's task is to give an impulse and introduce the possibilities of working with different techniques and materials. The aim is to give the participants space to experiment in the creative process on their own and as a group. For collaborative work to succeed, there is a need to create an atmosphere of trust and safety. It is possible to use this approach as a starting point to get to know each other, but perhaps it is best for groups who already know each other a little.

Collaborative work may involve the facilitator's participation, but also the participation of the staff. This provides a chance for them to connect in a new way with residents. When possible, also think of ways of engaging different generations and other social groups. For example, cooperation with the care setting and kindergarten, school or youth centre is possible. Bringing together different groups can make the atmosphere very inspiring.

## **Approaches to facilitate creative processes**

When facilitating a creative process, it is essential to create a comfortable and safe atmosphere. Creativity means using your personality and revealing yourself to the others. It is important to come across the inhibiting feelings of insecurity and fear. To create an atmosphere that supports creativity means also getting to know the participants, by showing interest in their personalities and lives.

A common way of getting to know the group is to have circle discussions where everyone has the opportunity to participate and talk about themselves, their memories, ideas and feelings. This is important also for inspiration: sharing thoughts about the theme together encourages communication and trust but also promotes inspiration, design and working. Particularly if you are making something collaborative, it is important to have time to warm up before actual making process.

### **EXAMPLE**

**In needle felting project the theme was nature. At the beginning of each workshop, we talked about the theme, showed pictures and encouraged participants to share their stories and memories of this theme. For example, in one task we had different kinds of nature-themed pictures, some presenting forests, sea, flower fields etc. Everyone chose a picture to which they felt they most related. Then, sitting in circle, everyone told the others why they chose a particular picture and what it reminded them of. Those personal stories about the chosen theme (nature) led us into the working process.**

The facilitator makes many decisions about how to introduce the techniques and materials available for the activities. Think in advance how you are going to demonstrate the key aspects necessary for the work to succeed, and how you are going to arrange the working space so that it supports the activities. Often it is good to start by demonstrating the technique for the whole group, and after that give individual support as well as encourage the participants to support each other. Keep in mind that people have very different learning strategies, and some benefit from the help of visual and written material in addition to speech. Try to keep explanations short, simple and easily understandable.



**Figure 68** Demonstrate the technique for the whole group.

When presenting a technique, try to evoke inspiration and encourage the sharing of ideas about what might be accomplished this way. It is good to provide some inspirational examples of possible solutions and products, but think carefully how many and what kind of ready-made examples you bring with you. Although the examples inspire and provoke fantasy, they might also inhibit imagination and lead to copying. Sometimes the participants worry that their aesthetical preferences seem too simple or uneducated compared to the facilitator's examples. Encourage the participants to experiment with their own, different approaches from yours.

Consider if you wish to use (information) technology in your workshop, and how you would do that. You can make use of technology, for example, to show inspirational pictures and instructional videos. Some older people are up to speed using modern technology, and others would welcome the opportunity to learn new skills, but not all. As in everything, respect differentiation in terms of abilities and interests. Everyone does not have to do the same things in the same ways.



## Stimulating reminiscence for inspiration

Working with older people often touches upon the aspect of personal histories, because looking back to the past may become increasingly important when we age. Dealing with the boundaries of one's life brings up the question of how to read and understand one's biography. A biography is not something you simply own. It develops through stories and accounts given about your life.

Many things we do to engage with old people are connected to their earlier memories and lead to long conversations about their lives. This requires a sensitive approach. Many of them lived through war and the hard times afterwards. Facilitators must be able to bear with and give space to the sad memories and difficulties but it is also important to go further, to look for positive memories that are inherent in every personal history. Creative work offers the opportunity to strengthen people to take an affirmative and conciliatory look back on their lives.

Remember also, that making crafts or art itself can be associated with both achievements and failures. Doing handicraft together might bring back memories of how an old woman was never able to please her mother or teacher, no matter how hard she tried; or memories of frugal life, that she always had to sew her own clothing even though she hardly ever had the time to do it; that she could never afford anything nice. On the other hand, making crafts can bring back all the joy of life in her youth with her friends; memories of gossiping and laughter.



**Figure 69** Reminiscence session materials for personal choices.

Biography may be particularly important for people with dementia. What happens in the moment may be immediately forgotten, but memories of the past will remain for a very long time. Often, it is good to make use of these memories when helping people to discover inspiration for their work. Working with art and craft makes communication beyond language possible. Familiar actions provide confidence, and objects and processes that bring up positive memories keep people grounded and reduce fear. In such moments, they are able to enter into contact with others. Anything that helps to make positive parts of lives visible, improves quality of life.

● *This reminds me of my dressmaking days. I still like to get it right but I am slower now*  
● *and need to rest. I remember most of it though.*  
●

- WORKSHOP PARTICIPANT

Ensure that the artwork is as personal as possible, reflecting personal choices of design and colour. Inviting someone to name their artwork with their own signature or a unique pattern helps a person with dementia to recognize it in the next session. Care home staff can help the facilitator to have an understanding of the life histories of the participants to help the facilitator to prepare and bring along resources that are appropriate and meaningful to each individual.



**Figure 70** Is violet your favourite colour?

A good variety of resources and materials that stimulate the brain and memory is recommended for art workshops, especially when the five senses are taken into account. Aim to set up a beautiful visual display of the materials: incorporate colours and textures and bring in living items such as flowers and leaves. Consider, how different colours work together, and let participants choose the colours they would like to combine. Incorporate music into the session but make sure it is okay for everyone. All of these ideas are really good for stimulating the five senses and memories.



**Figure 71** Utilise natural materials from outside, such as leaves and flowers.

### EXAMPLE

In 3D textile collage workshops the residents had chosen the theme of garden flowers. To enhance the session, the artist brought in to each session a selection of flowers and images of favourite spring and summer blooms. She also brought in pots of dried lavender and herbs to pass around to stimulate memories. This worked really well and led to many gardening conversations.

## Encouraging to experiment

Things that are taken for granted by artist facilitators – confusion and irritation as a vital part of the creative process – may be difficult for some participants to understand, although many older people show enthusiasm when they are invited to create something new. Often however, new kinds of experiments are received sceptically – especially when it comes to working with unconventional materials and connecting new products with old handicraft techniques.

Creative participation requires acceptance. If someone is afraid of failure, they do not work in a participative manner. It might sometimes be difficult to encourage people to try something new and ‘strange’, if they were always taught to act according to what was needed and do only useful things. Many think that only children play. Creative processes should encourage people not to discard their ideas and solutions right from the start. When doing something new, there is no such thing as making a mistake. However, being playful, silly and creative requires a great deal of trust in yourself, the group and the facilitator.



**Figure 72** Start with more familiar approaches to establish a relationship with the participants and to encourage them to experiment later.

Creative solutions and good communication are needed to encourage participants out of their safe corner. Try starting the workshops with something that the participants are familiar with, since this is the phase where you establish a trusted relationship with the participants. When the participants become familiar with working together and with you, they can be encouraged to try new things, techniques and finding their own solutions. Sometimes it's good to let the participants take charge of the workshop themselves and let them teach each other, demonstrating their acquired skills and knowledge. This

can be supported during the making, for example by asking them to tell the others about their work and to demonstrate their solutions.

The facilitator's role is to motivate the participants in their work by using different materials, techniques and methods. This may lead the participants to move away from familiar activity to new types of shared making. The facilitator is constantly observing the participation and giving support when needed. Sometimes the participants need some light intervention to encourage them to continue, such as suggestions about how to develop ideas further. At best, they discover freedom in thinking and acting, which is not about repeating what is already known, but developing something new, individually or as a team.

Material outcomes are essential in order to make the process visible and for the participants to see their development. Products and results may be presented for the whole group and also wider audience in a way that suits the participants. It is important that everyone becomes visible, has the possibility of contributing and feels they are part of the process.

### Level of assistance

If the participants are in good health, they probably don't need much help in making. Instead, encouragement and moral support is often needed. Many participants easily underestimate themselves, their capability and skills, saying they are too old and not capable anymore. For example, dementia can cause this kind of lack of confidence. Encourage the participants to at least try, once they get started it usually becomes easier.



**Figure 73** Making crafts often require hands-on demonstration and sometimes assistance.

Some may be in weaker condition, and thus need more help with the making. The goal is that everyone could make something themselves, but in some cases the facilitator makes things for the participants. Try to find the balance between letting them to do the work themselves and doing (part of) the work for them, which can also be rewarding because there is still the feeling of being involved. Try to figure out if a person really can't make something themselves or if they just need a bit of support. In short: encourage, but help to overcome obstacles when necessary.

### EXAMPLE

In wet felting workshops in Finland, some of the participants were not always able to do the wet felting by themselves, because it requires some hand force and dexterity. In some workshops they participated only by choosing the colours and composition for their work, while the student teacher or a nurse did the actual felting. However, in some workshops these participants were able to participate more in felting too. They recognized all their own pieces from the final collaborative work, even the ones they only chose colours for. According to nurses they seemed relaxed in the workshop, and participation was meaningful for them.

## CHECKLIST FOR PLANNING ACTIVITIES

- Get familiar with the most common issues related to ageing and how to deal with them in creative workshops:
  - for example sensory impairments, difficulties in moving, stiff joints, loss of force
  - dementia; information is available for example in national Alzheimer's societies
  - resources and aids: are they available in the care setting?
  - ergonomics.
- Get to know the workshop participants:
  - Aim to meet them prior the workshops and talk to the staff as well.
  - Learn names from the beginning; write a seating plan for example.
  - Ask open questions and engage the participants in conversation to say something about themselves, their wishes and preferences.
  - Be equal and tell them something about yourself too.
  - Getting to know the participants is an ongoing process; be prepared also for changes in their condition.
- Art and craft techniques and materials:
  - Make a list of everything that is needed in the workshop, and how much. Is it possible to share some tools and materials? Are they easy to handle? Do some tools need supervision? Is there something else you need to bring with you (e.g. kitchen paper to clean hands, or something to cover the tables with)?
  - Make sure there are enough materials to allow individual choices.
  - Agree with the care setting, who brings and pays for materials and tools; seek material from different sources.
  - Develop new ways to use familiar materials and techniques instead of going for the most common and traditional ways.
  - Consider the limitations of the participants, for example adjust scales (thicker yarns, bigger tools) to make sure the participants are able to handle materials and tools.
  - But do not get caught up in your own expectations about the abilities of the participants and do not underestimate them; experiment!
- Facilitation approaches and methods:
  - Invest time in warm-up and getting to know each other in the group, to create a safe atmosphere for learning and experimenting.
  - Introduce the techniques briefly and clearly; use visual materials in addition to speech, to support different learning strategies.
  - Provide examples and evoke inspiration; do not present models to follow.
  - Make use of participants' experiences and reminiscences in evoking inspiration.
  - Engage all the five senses by using images, music and sound, scents and different tactile materials for inspiration.
  - Consider the level of assistance; encourage participation and independent working, but assist and support with challenging spots.

## REFLECTION TASKS

- **Reflect after a workshop: Which materials and techniques engaged participants in the working process? Were there differences between individuals? What do people associate with certain materials and techniques? What kind of feelings and emotions did they evoke? What was successful or unsuccessful? Why?**
- **Gather feedback about the choice of materials, techniques and your work as a facilitator from the participants and staff.**
- **Think critically about your working approaches. Did you manage to achieve the targets?**
- **How could you adapt a different way of working? If the participants made individual items, how could the technique be applied in collaborative work, and vice versa? How about using the same materials with different tools, or using the same tools with different materials?**



**Figure 74** Feedback sessions make the work visible to others.



## 7. Feedback

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Feedback for all parties involved in the creative process gives validation and opportunities to develop, and is essential for learning to take place. Receiving and giving feedback occurs on multiple levels. It may refer to the facilitator of the workshop giving feedback to participants and the staff, but also the other way around, the facilitator receiving feedback from the participants, the staff, possibly the relatives of the participants, other community members, colleagues, and so on.

It is common to think that feedback is only given at the end of the working period, but it needs to be intertwined in all the phases: before, during and afterwards. For example, positive feedback to the participants in a workshop encourages them to continue working. On the other hand, you as a facilitator probably wish to receive feedback from the participants during the project, to be able to develop your guidance. It is important to learn how to take advantage of the feedback, but also to learn that not all feedback is either relevant or possible to consider.



**Figure 75** Encouraging feedback during the working: smiling!

## Feedback to and from the participants

The first feedback you receive from participants is probably when you see how many of them have arrived into your workshop. Maybe this is the feedback you get about how well you succeed in advertising the workshop. Also, you get feedback from the attitude and appearance of the participants during the first session. However, best not to take it too personally if people are not thrilled at the very beginning. It may not mean that they are not interested, but for example their health problems, such as dementia, can cause lack of motivation. Also, it is only natural for them to be a bit cautious about new things and people.

During the activities, try to give constant feedback to participants about their working. Especially for those who easily lose the track, it is important to get encouragement. There are many forms of feedback to consider. Verbal feedback should be given in a positive manner. Find positive things in each participant's work, and give precise feedback. For example: 'You have designed really powerful colours.' This feels more genuine than just saying they are doing nicely. Also, show your interest in their working process by asking questions: 'How did you come up with this colour combination? What does it remind you of?' etc.

Some participants may be worried about whether they are doing things 'the right way'. They may be critical towards their work and say that they cannot do it. Encourage them by pointing out positive things in their working. Remind them that when making something new for the first time, it cannot and should not be 'perfect'. Give praise for trying; it always requires courage to try something new. Remind them that there is no right nor wrong way of doing, and each participant has their own, personal way. However, sometimes there is a need to correct some aspect of working to reach a satisfactory result. When advising to correct something, do it positively. For example, instead of saying 'don't...', try replacing it with 'you could try...'

• *The morning goes quickly when I'm doing this. Can you come back tomorrow?*



- WORKSHOP PARTICIPANT

Keep in mind also the importance of non-verbal feedback such as nodding, smiling, using your body language and touching, if appropriate. This can make the verbal feedback more clear. Observe also the participants' non-verbal communication and get feedback from it. Do they look engaged, confused, happy? It is not always easy to express feelings and experiences in words, and for some older people, talking may have become difficult.



**Figure 76** Observe the participants to receive feedback for yourself: do they look concentrated, or perhaps confused?

When the working period has finished, sum up the experiences of the process. This can be done after each workshop and at the end of a longer process of several workshops which may have lasted for some weeks. After each workshop, you can arrange a short feedback session, for example by arranging discussion in a circle so that the participants can see each other. During this, everyone can introduce their work, talk about their working that day, and give and receive feedback from others as well as you. If the group is very big (over ten persons), you can try to split it into smaller groups where they give peer feedback, and as the facilitator you move between the groups. Tell the participants that the feedback is valuable for you and you are also learning from listening to their experiences.

Sometimes it is good to gauge the feeling and energy in the room at the beginning and at the end of the session. Has the mood changed? For instance, you can prepare Post-it notes with a choice of a smiley face, a straight face, and a sad face. Each person might pick one to indicate how they are feeling that day. You may give everyone opportunity to explain their choice, but be careful not to pressure them into doing so. At the end of the session you can repeat the same. You receive valuable feedback: do you have more smiley faces at the end of the session?



**Figure 77** Feedback sessions allow giving and receiving feedback.



**Figure 78** Exhibition is one form of making the work visible to others and receiving feedback.

When a longer project is finished, acknowledge everyone's efforts and make the work of each participant visible to the others. This allows them to get positive feedback from each other and validates their work. You can arrange a small closing party and/or an exhibition at the end. The exhibition may be presented in the participant's department of the care setting. However, it is worth also considering arranging it outside this department, to make it visible to the other residents, staff and relatives. When possible, an exhibition could be arranged outside the care setting as well, for example in a library. When showing the art and craft work, consider the possibility of putting the names of the makers in the products. Also, documenting the process by taking photos and showing them to the relatives and others makes the working process visible. When it comes to taking the photos, make sure you have permission to take them.

### **Feedback to and from the care home staff**

Feedback from the staff is important during all the phases. They have experience of working with this target group and these individuals. In the planning phase, they may give you valuable tips and information about what has been done before, how it worked out, what they consider worth trying and what kinds of things should be avoided. Ask for their feedback about your plans so that you can improve them.

- *I have tried art activities on my own with no support and found it very difficult. This*
- *type of activity is important in a dementia care home because you can really focus on the*
- *the residents who have the interest, skills and abilities to do this level of work.*
- 
- 

- ACTIVITIES COORDINATOR

However, sometimes the staff may have worked for a long time using the same methods and they may have fixed views about how the workshop should be arranged. You may have new ideas which you would like to try but they might oppose them. In this situation, there is a risk of getting into a conflict, or of becoming too compliant and following their advice, and thus restricting your own ideas about working. The best solution would be to listen to the given advice but also discuss your ideas to find your own way of working. If you get started with a rather simple topic and a way of working that is familiar to the participants, you also allow yourself time to get to know them so that you have better grounds for estimating whether your own new ideas would be suitable for these people.

● *I was initially concerned about the idea of a printing activity as I tried it myself once*  
● *and the residents found it too much like school. The artist's session worked better because*  
● *her handmade leaf printing blocks were appropriate for adults.*  
●

- ACTIVITIES COORDINATOR

You may also end up in the situation that the staff is too busy to give you any feedback or advice at all. It is worth trying to get at least some feedback, advice or information about the participating older people from them; however, you can also find some other sources to support your plans. For example, literature, handbooks and websites are good sources of information. You can also try to get in touch with some other professionals or students who have been working with older people. Also, if the staff allows, you can observe workshops and other activities in the care setting before starting your own workshop, and thus get information about the working habits and special needs of the participating older people.

## CHECKLIST

- Give encouraging feedback to participants, both during the process and at the end, to support their motivation:
  - Find positive things in each work, and say them aloud.
  - Use body language: smile, nod etc.
  - Remind that there are no mistakes, or right and wrong ways of doing things; just different ways and learning.
- Have joint feedback discussions at the end of each workshop, and the whole project, to give an opportunity for peer feedback and support, and to receive feedback for yourself.
- Observe the participants during the workshops, including facial expressions and body language, to receive feedback for yourself.
- At the end of the project, a party or an exhibition – in the care setting or elsewhere – is a nice way to acknowledge the work done.
- Ask for feedback and opinions from the participants and staff throughout the process.
- Remember that not all feedback is relevant.

## REFLECTION TASKS

- The facilitator might encounter a confusing situation when a participant is not satisfied with his work. Even if you disagree, your participant deserves to have an opportunity to speak his/her mind and contemplate it. How could you turn this dissatisfaction into a positive learning experience?
- Think in advance of some ways to negotiate with the staff about your workshop idea.





**Figure 79** Equal, good communication is the key to successful workshop.



## 8. Interaction and communication

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To work with people – whether old or young – is all about interaction and communication. The best communication strategy is to be authentic (express your true feelings) and to be respectful towards the others. An understanding and awareness of cultural and religious differences is important in this. People living in care settings come from an increasingly diverse background. An awareness of this is important in terms of personal space, eye contact and traditions of greetings. Most older people like to be asked about their traditions and beliefs and this can add to the creativity of an art workshop. Facilitators can encourage participants to share their cultural creativity, provided it is done with sensitivity and respect.

### Introducing yourself and the group

As a workshop facilitator, you can do a lot to assure a smooth and comfortable interaction between the group members. An engaging workshop environment starts from a well-prepared introduction. Think about how you introduce yourself and the institution you represent. Some phrases carry strong connotations and might position you and the group in a way that you did not intend to do. For example, if you are working in a school or university, you might want to avoid using words ‘teacher’ or ‘lecturer’ to avoid a teacher-student mind-set.

Be attentive to how you approach older adults. Addressing the older person as Mr, Mrs, or Ms shows respect, but going by first name might create a more informal and casual atmosphere. This choice depends on the cultural conventions as well. Make sure that everyone is comfortable with your choice.



It is also important to think how you invite the older people to introduce themselves and to get acquainted with each other. Try different kind of introductions – engage the participants in name games, or prepare name badges they can wear during the workshop session.

**Figure 80** Invest time in making the atmosphere open for interaction.

Another good way of remembering each other's names is to give everyone something to personalize, for example a folder to label and decorate. Be patient and give your group enough time for a round of introductions, if they need it. Keep it informal – some participants might feel uncomfortable drawing attention to themselves. There are ways of making people feel welcome without a formal register or around-the-room introduction. For example, one might say: 'Mary, how nice to see you today.' Do introductions each time, because the group can change, and there might be people living with dementia or memory issues.

### **Communication style and age-related factors**

While acting authentically, be ready to slightly adapt your normal communication style. This means becoming aware of the natural age-related issues. You should consider your voice level and tone: when getting older, many people have trouble of hearing and need the words to be clear and well-articulated. If the participant has hearing problems, he/she might be able to read the words from your lips – turning face to face when talking to them might improve communication. Be prepared to repeat yourself – declining memory is another age-related factor. Being aware of people's health issues helps to adopt an individual communication style and individualize your group members.

People with dementia may find it difficult to smile, show their feelings or express their preferences. This is why the facilitator is advised to focus on body language when monitoring the responses of residents. This can be quite revealing. The simple action of a resident reaching for something across the table shows preference. Sometimes people answer with hand gestures, and slight movements in the eyes are expressive and meaningful.

Different generations also use different language and vocabulary. Some concepts and words that you use might not be familiar to the participants and vice versa. You cannot always control what influence your tone or words have on a person from a different generation, but don't worry about this too much: this might also provoke fun conversations. There may be generational differences in body language and speaking pace too. Remember to pause between your sentences and ask one question at a time. Keep your sentences brief and simple, make it easy to follow your text.

When working with older people, you should give them enough time to think and give a response. Time is relative, and something that might be considered a long pause in other contexts, becomes a normal tempo in adult care settings. Nevertheless, remember that not all old people are slow; personal styles also remain in old age.



**Figure 81** Encourage communication between the workshop participants.

To keep everyone motivated, use positive and encouraging expressions. Smiling creates a friendly environment in which to communicate. If something needs to be changed, avoid using the word ‘no’ and rather suggest a more appropriate action in a positive way. This is especially important for people with memory disorders. The facilitator should always communicate with empathy and understanding. Humour and fun are great ingredients in art sessions. Also, remember that your body language reveals more about your feelings than your words – sending out mixed messages does not create a positive or relaxing workshop environment.

Treat older people as adults. Sometimes older people are talked down to (so-called baby talk), or not fully acknowledged. Think about the difference of talking *to* someone or *with* someone! Ensure you attend to the older person as an individual and respect his/her unique skills, talents, and character. Treat people – regardless of their abilities or condition – in an equal manner. Create personal contact and look people in the eyes. Consider the way you touch them – or maybe you prefer not to? Make sure what is okay with them and follow their wishes. Be mindful of cultural differences – if some communicative techniques do not function, respect the person’s preferred strategies. If needed, ask and accept help from local staff.

During workshop sessions, enable the participants to have casual interaction. Encourage them to speak and communicate with each other. As a starting point, you may ask questions. Stay respectful: let people speak if they want to exchange experiences, but make sure that your questions do not leave an impression of interviewing or interrogation. Some safe topics to start conversation with include: daily news, food, childhood, recent events someone has attended, gardens, holidays and, of course, arts and crafts. When starting the work, you can all share thoughts together on a chosen technique or theme. This encourages communication, but also helps and promotes inspiration, design, trust and bonding – which is especially nice if making something collaboratively.

Managing difficult subjects may be intimidating. If someone wishes to talk about death, worries, or health issues, let him/her do that. If it makes you feel uneasy, you might gently lead them to more positive topics. Remember that your role is facilitator and you cannot be a therapist. It is okay to say if any subject is confusing for you.

#### EXAMPLE

**Be prepared for someone to become upset or agitated during your session. At one care setting one of the residents who attended regularly became upset at the start of the workshop because she couldn't get comfortable at the table. With the support of the activities coordinator the artist offered various options, change of place and seating, but it was to no avail. In the end the resident asked to leave and although we were sorry to see her go, her angry behaviour was upsetting the rest of the group members. The same resident returned the following week with no memory of the incident.**

Sometimes it may happen that communication does not thrive. You do not have to be afraid of silence. Handicraft is often solitary in nature and people may find it unnecessary to talk when carried away with making by hand. Some participants may even be distracted by conversation, and sounds make it hard to concentrate. In these cases, you can arrange a small reflection session at the end of the workshop.

## CHECKLIST

- Invest time in making introductions to create a welcoming atmosphere. Introduce yourself and invite the participants and staff to introduce themselves.
  - Try different ways to do this, for example name games.
  - Using first names creates a non-formal atmosphere, however make sure it is okay for everyone.
- Make sure everyone can see and hear you when you speak.
- Pay attention to the words you use and the tempo of your speech, and repeat if necessary.
  - Do not overdo this though; treat older people like adults, do not talk down to them.
- Be positive and encouraging: smile, look people in the eyes and touch, if appropriate.
  - However, be respectful of cultural differences.
- Encourage communication between participants for example by asking them to share thoughts of the topic, techniques and other things.
- Do not be afraid of confusing situations. Ask the staff for help if needed.

## REFLECTION TASKS

- Think in advance, how you usually communicate with older people. How about with people of your own age, or younger? Are there differences? If so, why? Are the differences desirable?
- Think of a situation where you have had difficulties with communicating with someone, young or old. What was the reason? How did you solve this situation? Try to adapt successful solutions to your workshops.



**Figure 82** Carried away with making

## 9. Conclusions



The Handmade Wellbeing project focused on developing the pedagogy for arranging creative activities for older people in care settings. Often the pedagogical aspect is forgotten or taken for granted in these contexts. In the Handmade Wellbeing project, the learner-artists and students were practising how to arrange art and craft workshops for older people, and they received supervision for this. They reflected on their experiences and chosen methods, both in their respective institutions and during the training weeks arranged in other partner countries. When putting the handbook together, they brought in a European-level understanding of the suitable pedagogy for this context. The international perspective makes this project different from many other projects in the field that often operate on a national level.

In this project, the importance of a reflective approach to professional development of the facilitator, and to improvement of the quality of pedagogy, proved to be highly important. It is important to reflect on the choices made before conducting a workshop, and it is important to reflect on the workshop activities after them, to improve the approach later.

The focus of this project was on older people in the care settings with several infirmities, especially dementia. This is a special focus group representing older people who require care but also need meaningful activities for a good life. Collaborative working with the older people, who are all individuals with the best understanding of their needs, was emphasized throughout the project.

The multi-professional cooperation between the colleagues and the care staff was perceived as a crucial aspect of arranging high-quality, creative activities. It is a good idea to collaborate professionally and give a workshop together with a pair or a team of facilitators and staff members. Working with a colleague gives the opportunity to reflect on the choices, the experiences and give mutual feedback.

During this project, the learner artists, students and educators working together formed a collegial network. However, in reality many artists work alone. In the future, it is necessary to put more emphasis on creating artist networks to make the coordination, funding and development of arts and crafts in health and wellbeing services more efficient and professional. Also the cooperation with care settings needs to be developed and enhanced. The emphasis should change from providing activities for care settings to planning the activities with them.

This is the first version of a practice-based handbook putting together the experiences gained in one project. Obviously, more experiments and research are required to develop the handbook further. The research carried out in this project will produce more information in the near future, and there are other research and practice-based projects going on in the field. Also, the handbook will be developed further with the help of the feedback from the professionals working in the field. However, the strength of this handbook is in bringing together the grass-root level experiences that are shared internationally.

The purpose of the creative activities in the workshops was to support the overall wellbeing of older people. There were many signs about a positive impact on those involved with the project. For example, a noticeable uplifting of mood in people living with dementia following the workshops, and better sleep were reported by the staff. Some of the residents have never had the opportunity to explore their creativity before, and this was a new journey for them, highlighting the value of lifelong learning. For people who struggle on a daily basis to express themselves in words, art is an important outlet for their feelings and emotions. However, rigorous research in this aspect would have required an approach that was not possible to arrange within the project. We are especially happy to have been able to support the staff in the care settings to run the workshops with new approaches, developed together during the project.

Finally, this handbook has been produced in a certain context and in a certain time. The future generations who come into care, for example baby boomers, are from a very different generation and they will have different experiences and needs when they are old. The ideas presented here will not be entirely applicable forever.



## Epilogue

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### Experiment! Even if you are old

There is the belief that older people only look to their past, but this is not the truth. You can also find some who love to experience new things, to try something unusual.

There was this small group consisting of three men that we had been working with for several weeks, moulding clay on a regular basis. The participants had their own ideas and knew what shape they wanted to create from the material. While they were together, they would all concentrate on what they were doing, everyone focussing on their piece. There was little contact between the participants. They would hardly talk and there was not much they would do together, apart from doing each other small favours and saying a few polite words about everyone else's piece.

Having noticed what was happening, we decided to try out a small experiment: we suggested that the three gentlemen to agree to mould a sculpture together. After they agreed, they were given a large chunk of clay that was placed in the centre of the table. They were then instructed to take it in turns to work the chunk with their eyes closed, while the others were watching. After some initial, careful moulding, the workflow gradually



**Figure 83** From individual ideas and making...

gained momentum. It was nice to watch them focussing on the shared sculpture that was forming in front of us. At first, there was this silence and concentration that was almost meditative. The shape changed with every movement of the hands doing the moulding. They would then comment on the resulting formations and deformations, discovering and naming animals, faces, and plants by means of free association. I was under the impression that the small group was starting to liven up.

The end product was surprising and everyone was happy with it. After this first group experience had proven successful, we decided to dare one step further. We suggested covering the sculpture with latex, a strange material that definitely evoked sexual innuendoes. Despite the unpleasant smell, all three men completely focused on their work when they met again. They were joking and chatting, while the sculpture went through a small metamorphosis. What left me astonished during that working session was the way one of the participants – someone who had been very introverted, anxious and shy up to that point – behaved. I can still see him, wrapped in his apron, suddenly getting up to ask everyone if we wanted a drink and leaving to get drinks for the whole group. To me, it seemed like this timid man had suddenly awoken, it was as if he had been empowered to overcome his self-doubts, as if the work we were doing together had given him the confidence to come out of his shell and feel like he was part of this small community.

That day, I was rejoicing on the way home. For the first time, I felt like I had been immersed in a shared artistic process, feeling the energy that can be released during such a process not just resonating with myself, but also resonating with the participants. The strangeness of the material had allowed us to let go of all expectations and go with the joy that comes from doing something together.

The following working session brought a new challenge for the participants: they were asked to wrap our sculpture in papier mâché. Again, there was this immersion in a group activity, and, once again, the sculpture transformed in front of us without losing its shape. The brown shape covered in latex turned into a paper object with a rough surface, seemingly different from before. The way it looked would change with every piece of newspaper we stuck on it, until the sculpture was entirely covered.

Now it was time let our piece dry out and then paint it in the following session, before scraping the clay from inside to get two hollow shapes – one made from paper and the other from latex. However, we first needed to decide which colour we wanted our sculpture to be. It didn't take long for a decision to be made; everyone agreed on white.

● *I found this group activity fascinating and was moved, not only by the trust the*  
● *participants demonstrated, but also by their curiosity and by how much they enjoyed the*  
● *creative activity.*  
●

- WORKSHOP FACILITATOR



**Figure 84** ...to a new kind of shared artistic process

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Edith Draxl is the artistic director of uniT. She is a theatre director and dramaturg, as well as a psychologist. She has been working in adult education and as a lecturer at the University of Teacher Education, Styria for several years. She has vast experience in the field of European and international cooperation and in leading projects which link health and social care with the arts. She is currently working as an advisor to the cultural department of the Styrian government and to the national adult education department. The quality of her numerous intersectional projects using an artistic angle in work with elderly people has been widely recognized. She was announced as an ‘Ambassador for Elderly People’ by the Austrian Ministry for Social Affairs.

### **Andrea Fischer**

Andrea Fischer is a professional costume and fashion designer. She worked at well-known German and Austrian theatres and for the festivals ‘Wiener Festwochen’ and ‘Steirischer Herbst’ for several years. Since 2007 Andrea has been working as a member of the uniT KUNSTLABOR team in intersectional artistic projects with older people. She has received special training in adult education to work at the interface of arts and health and social care.

### **Sirpa Kokko**

Project Manager & Coordinator, University Lecturer, PhD, Adjunct Professor Sirpa Kokko works as a University Lecturer at the University of Helsinki. Her main duties are teacher training in craft teacher education: lecturing in craft education to student teachers, supervising teacher training, supervising PhD students as well as Bachelor and Master’s theses. She has long experience of craft education at different levels of education; primary, secondary, class teacher and craft teacher education. In addition to working experience in Development cooperation, she has been involved in teacher and research cooperation with several European art and craft universities. She has conducted research on various topics of arts and crafts and craft education; gender, cultural heritage and current developments of craft education.

### **Helen Kästik**

Helen Kästik coordinates international projects in the Department of Estonian Native Crafts at UT VCA. As a PhD student in folklore studies at the University of Tartu, her research interests include traditional music revival movement, heritage process and knowledge transmission.

## **Mari Salovaara**

Researcher, Doctoral Student, MA, Craft Teacher Mari started her doctoral studies in 2016 and she is collecting data for her doctoral dissertation in the *Handmade Wellbeing* project. The subject of her study is related to the project's objective; how to adapt arts and crafts pedagogy to different, informal learning settings. In addition to research, her main duty in this project was to arrange the craft workshops in care settings in cooperation with student teachers and staff. Mari has been involved in textile art projects and she has teaching experience in both comprehensive school and adult education, as well as workshops in different settings.

## **Janine Stedman**

Janine Stedman is a Project Manager for Superact. She has worked in the UK education and social services sectors for over thirty years. In her former lead activities role in a Somerset care home, Janine worked on the premise that emotional and physical well-being were inextricably linked. This led her to rethink the activities programme, encouraging all staff to get involved. Family members were invited in and a dynamic Friends Group was created. Janine now works independently in the South West, running sessions in care settings and memory clinics, training staff and supporting families living with dementia. She is a member of the Exeter Dementia Action Alliance.