



## Involving Older People Collaborative Research Project

*“The older persons’ experiences of creativity in relation to wellbeing: a collaborative research project”*



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## Executive Summary

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- Although there is evidence that creativity might be linked with older persons' wellbeing, there are few published studies that systematically explore the experiences of people who have recently retired. The few available studies stress the value of engagement of older persons within the first 5 years after retirement (Withnall and Thompson 2003) and their preference for active participation in creative projects dealing with issues that affect their lives (Bennets et al 2005). Some positive outcomes from engaging with the arts include: expression of feelings and thoughts, sensory stimulation and improvement of self-esteem (McMurray 1989).
- This collaborative study aimed to explore the experiences of older persons who had recently retired in relation to engagement in the creative arts and identifying any links between participation in the arts and wellbeing. In order to address this aim an action research methodology was adopted that involved a circular flexible design. A research team based at Queen Margaret University (QMU) and two co-researchers, older persons based in the community, led the study. Qualitative information was generated from 15 co-participants (older persons recently retired based in East Lothian and the wider community) through interviews, participant observations and discussions/reflections. Co-participants were also invited to participate in and reflect upon creative arts workshops that were particularly designed for this project. Collected information was analysed using thematic analysis.
- Key findings from this study were that the feeling of belonging to a community was important. Most co-participants liked a wide choice of arts activities and were often introduced to new ideas by their friends. They sought sustained, in-depth art experiences where they felt challenged and stimulated, rather than short, superficial courses; some like to strive towards a finished product and were critical about their own achievements, while for others, taking part was more important. The stimulation of new forms of creativity was perceived to be beneficial to mental and physical wellbeing, but the activities had to be fun as well.

## Section One – Introduction

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### 1.1 The project

The aim of this project was to explore the experiences of creativity in relation to the wellbeing of older persons who are recently retired. Creativity is defined by Esquivel and Hodes (2003) as a person's ability to produce new original ideas irrespective of the discipline they are working in. Its development is influenced, they believe, by social and cultural factors.

This was a study about older persons' engagement with creativity. Sandel and Johnson (1987:10), writing specifically about creativity and older people, suggest that creativity with this population enhances "the preservation of life, of meaning, and of hope, by seeking the beautiful and playful aspects of the self, and valuing humor, flexibility, and spontaneity in relationships with others" through creative arts. This project is framed around the creative experience of the older person; a person who has experienced change in his or her life due to recent retirement. Such periods of life transition may have a significant impact upon the person. Greaves and Farbus (2006: 135) state that:

"Depression and social isolation affect one in seven people over sixty-five and there is increasing recognition that social isolation adversely affects long-term health. Research indicates that interventions, which promote active social contact, which encourage creativity, and which use mentoring, are more likely to positively affect health and well-being".

The notion that interventions promoting active engagement with others may positively impact upon the person's health status prompted our desire to undertake this piece of research. This project explores the recently retired older persons' experiences of active involvement in creative activities, primarily in the arts such as visual art, music, dance and drama activities undertaken outside of the home at organised day or evening classes. Recognition is also given to the importance of the traditional arts such as weaving, knitting and other crafts undertaken in the home and also to the 'art' found in the natural world; landscapes, gardens and seascapes. The 'art' in all these forms frame our understanding of creativity although we acknowledge that there are many other vehicles for creativity such as science and information technology.

Despite suggestions in the literature that creativity might be linked with the older person's emotional health, we have identified few studies that offer in-depth understanding of the experiences of the older person in relation to artist creativity and its potential for enhancing wellbeing. The Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) funded study from the "Growing Older Programme" by Withnall and Thompson (2003: 5) found that the first ten years after retirement are crucial for the effectiveness of participation in "organised learning activities". The Scottish Arts Council's (2002) nationwide research on lifelong learning of older people through the arts, state that very often, old persons' involvement in the arts is as passive recipients, e.g. listening to music or attending the theatre. However, Bennets et al (2005) suggest that the older person would really prefer to be active co-participants in creative projects dealing with issues which affect their lives. Further evidence is offered by McMurray (1989) that creative experiences enable older people to express ideas and feelings, while giving opportunities for sensory stimulation and improving self-esteem.

## 1.2 Researchers, co-researchers and co-participants

The project was envisioned by a group of creative arts specialists from Queen Margaret University, representing the fields of dance and art. The researchers had experience of working in the arts therapies and in community arts education.

An important aspect of the study was that it was co-participatory, in line with RBS COPA's mission statement, which promotes the notion of partnership between the older person and the researcher. In this study, the researchers and the older persons came together to collaborate equally. As part of the project, two older people from outside the target region, who had recently retired from their main employment, and had become involved in community arts, were invited to advise on the research design and implementation, to ensure that the project was scrutinised from outside the region. They acted as co-researchers.

Co-participants from the target town, a small coastal town in East Lothian, were invited to take part in all aspects of the project, from small group interviews, to a day of arts workshops, and a group reflection session.



### 1.3 Project aims and research questions

The aim of the project was to understand the recently retired older person's experience of artistic creativity and how this impacted upon the person's social and psychological wellbeing. As such two tangible research questions were asked:

1. What are the experiences of recently retired older person regarding creativity?
2. Can participation in creative activities enhance the older person's wellbeing?

### 1.4 Methodology

In order to address these research questions we adopted a methodological approach aligned to *action research*. Dick (2007: 4) believes that the purpose of action research is to "bring about change in some community ...", and to "increase understanding" of researcher or participant or both. Together our aim was to discover if our joint participation in the research effects change in the feeling of wellbeing in the older persons, through the creative experience.

In line with the principles of action research, we recognised that the research design would evolve during the course of the project, and that a flexible approach was required that included three cycles of planning, acting and observing/reflecting:

Cycle 1 involved planning, carrying out and reflecting upon the first group interview.

Cycle 2 involved revising initial plan in light of findings from cycle 1 and undertaking a second interview with co-participants.

Cycle 3 involved taking into account findings from cycle 1 and 2 and running creative arts workshops that involved art, dance, music and drama activities. Members of the research panel were invited to be participant observers to record the events of the day. At the end of the workshop day co-participants reflected on their experiences of creativity and how this could inform their future proactive approach to wellbeing.

## 1.5 Project time-frame

The time-frame for the project was one year from September 2007 to September 2008. Table 1 outlines the final project timetable that was followed. Co-ordination and administration of the project took place at Queen Margaret University, Edinburgh, where the researchers were based. Meetings were held in the local community with the co-researchers because access was easier.

<b>Table 1 - Project Timetable</b>	
<b>2007</b>	
Sep	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consultation with research panel and existing contacts. Press release in local papers. Poster advertisement in local public buildings</li> </ul>
Oct	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Telephone contact made with interested parties. Information sheets and consent forms sent to potential co-participants.</li> </ul>
Nov	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• First group interview.</li> </ul>
Dec	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Transcription of interviews, ongoing analysis and consultation.</li> </ul>
<b>2008</b>	
Jan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Preparation for arts workshops</li> </ul>
Feb	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Preparation for arts workshops</li> </ul>
March	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Second group interview</li> <li>• Arts workshops day</li> <li>• Post-workshop discussion group with co-participants and facilitators</li> </ul>
Apr	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Transcribing workshop interviews</li> </ul>
May	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Co-researchers asked to comment on transcripts</li> </ul>
Jun	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Full analysis of interviews, participant observations of workshops and group discussion.</li> </ul>
Jul	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Write up report</li> </ul>
Aug/Sept	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Write up report and dissemination of research to co-participants and wider community</li> </ul>

## 1.6 Structure of the report

This report will cover the following areas in some depth: the literature review, the methodology followed by the main findings of the study. The report concludes with some recommendations that can be taken forward for future research.

## Section Two - Literature Review

---

### 2.1 Introduction

For most economists retirement begins when the person reaches state pension age. In the UK this occurs between the ages of 60 and 65 years. However, Banks and Smith (2006) acknowledge that defining retirement is complex because different populations may attribute different meanings to the notion of retirement. Moreover, on an individual basis different socioeconomic and personal factors may influence when the person decides to retire. Taking these factors into consideration the writers offer three broad criteria or events that help us understand the term retirement:

- “A complete and permanent withdrawal from full employment
- Receipt of income from a private or state pension
- A state of mind; the individual perceives him/herself to be retired”

(Banks and Smith:2006:7)

Bank and Smith (2006) suggest that the three key events listed above may not happen simultaneously for the person. Some people may have retired from their primary job and be working post-retirement in a different field. Other people may consider themselves retired without claiming state pension, but drawing on an occupational pension. Whatever the situation the writers note that the person’s decision to retire or stop his/her main life occupation happens quickly without much pre-planning. This point is echoed in an article in Time Magazine (2007) entitled “Struggling with Retirement”. Couples often avoid discussing what will happen during retirement perhaps because of a belief that they share the same lifestyle goals. This can lead to a mismatch of expectations and tensions within the relationship.

### 2.2 Retirement issues

The Better Health Channel (online, 2008) advising older Australians on the emotional issues connected with retirement suggests that at first the newly retired person can feel like s/he is on a holiday. This ‘honeymoon’ period is a time when the person can catch up on sleep, see friends and generally enjoy a more relaxed pace of life. However, over time this ‘honeymoon’ period may wear off as the person realises that s/he will not return to the work and home routines that once framed much of his/her adult working life. Days may seem longer without

work to attend to and colleagues are no longer there to keep the person motivated when s/he is having a 'bad' day. Instead the older person is propelled into a new and often foreign existence, one that does not feel as meaningful or rewarding as the person had initially anticipated. Some newly retired older people find it difficult to move on from this life transition while others seek to build new experiences by taking part in creative activities such as the arts.

The person's decision to take part in the arts raises some interesting questions about the nature of creativity and what constitutes our aesthetic understanding of the arts

### 2.3 Creativity

Best (1982) and Gardner (1999) agree that the skills required for creativity to flourish in individuals are shaped by their social and cultural environments. They regard a truly creative product as one which is novel but eventually becomes accepted as mainstream in society. This social acceptance is a value judgement made by other people in the culture frame. In creating something original, the creator had pushed the boundaries of knowledge in a particular field. Gardner (1999) and Beghetto and Kaufman (2007) distinguish between different types of creativity; those which cause a wide spread shift of artistic perception such as a particular school of art, the social comment of a play, or the invention of microchip technology which has become part of modern western life, and the more personal creative achievements which are highly significant to the individual such as painting a picture or communicating of personal feeling or designing a workshop tool for a particular purpose. Neither type of creativity is superior to the other; they all enhance our lives by helping us to construct personal knowledge and understanding of our situation as social beings.

Bourdieu (2005) suggests that even though we cannot totally escape the parameters of our cultural framework, these are modified by our past experiences as we move through life. As we encounter different social environments, we internalise their mores and habits, which, in turn, modify our understanding of the world and increase our propensity for creative output. It should follow then that as we get older, we should have greater resources for indulging our own creativity.

### 2.4 Arts and aesthetics

Closely connected to the idea of creativity is the domain of the arts either as art-making process and/or as arts appreciation. Although it is common to perceive creativity as

something broader than the arts, the two remain closely linked. However, the definition of 'art' is widely debated. Langer's definition of a piece of art as having "significant form" (1953: 24) still has currency in describing something which has a purpose set aside from any day-to-day function such as a ballet, a symphony or a painting. In contrast, it is common to refer to creativity as something that can also be traced in areas outside the arts (e.g. in sciences) and/or being closely connected with everyday life (e.g. in gardening, cooking and other leisure pursuits). With the notion of creativity being wider than the arts, it is possible that people engaged in artistic activities can mobilise their creative capacity and this in turn can have an effect on other parts of their lives. People can become creative in the way they perceive themselves, run their daily lives and/relate to others.

Best (1985) adds that art must have a subject - a meaning which the creator wishes to convey. Thus art becomes a medium of communication – a two-way process between creator and spectator. How can one be sure that the correct meaning is construed by the spectator? The answer must lie in the cultural framework. Carr (1999) raises the point that artistic appreciation cannot be wholly objective. Each spectator views art from her / his own cultural perspective which will affect their understanding of it.

Eisner (2002: 81) makes the distinction between a "work of *art*" and a "*work* of art", recognising that there is valid artistic experience in both the product and the process. In agreement with Best (1985), he believes that the product has to be able to move the viewer in some way by making a statement, but he also recognises the "artistry" (2002:81) which goes into creating the product – the technical skills, but also the imagination which triggers the idea and inspires the artist to manipulate the medium with sensitivity. These are the attributes which Gardner (2006) recognises as the artistic application of functional skills. For example, he explains how spoken language has a utilitarian function, yet can be deployed artistically in the form of poetry to communicate something beyond that function – a mental image, perhaps, or an emotion.

Adding the concept of aesthetics in this debate gives it another dimension. Best (1985) states that

(t)he aesthetic is generally assumed to be the genus of which the artistic is a species ...But the relationship between (them) is usually left unclear – so much so that the two terms are often used synonymously ...'aesthetic' can legitimately be applied not only to works of art but also to natural phenomena such as sunsets ... whereas 'artistic' is limited to artefacts of performances intentionally created by man for aesthetic pleasure or contemplation. (Best:1985: 53)

However, he qualifies this later (2004) by pointing out that the term, 'aesthetics' is not a blanket term describing a basic ingredient of all works of art. Instead, he differentiates between the aesthetic properties of, for example, a play or a ballet. Both can be described as aesthetically pleasing or displeasing, but for different reasons, and natural phenomena also have their own aesthetic merits: there is not a common underlying aesthetic – no 'one-size-fits-all' application of the term. This distinction proved to be pertinent in our project.

## 2.5 Wellbeing

The World Health Organisation (WHO) defines 'health' as

... a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.

WHO (31/07/08)

This all-inclusive model is what other sources define as 'wellbeing', i.e. not just *social* wellbeing, but a complete, all-round paradigm of the optimal human state.

The various extant models of wellbeing confirm that it is a complex phenomenon, in which physical health, personal identity and self esteem are just a few characteristics. From Nussbaum's (2000) list of criteria of wellbeing, the following are relevant to our context:

- (3) Bodily health;
  - (4) Senses, imagination and thought: being able to use the senses, to image and to think;
  - (5) Emotions ...
  - (7) Affiliation: being able to engage in various forms of social interaction ...
  - (9) Play: being able to laugh, to play and enjoy recreational activities;
  - (10) Control over one's ... environment (and to make choices).
- (Nussbaum, 2000: 78-80)

By striving to attain a positive balance of each of these, it seems that we can restore a sense of balance in our chaotic Western lifestyles. In their study based in Dundee, Harris and Hastings (2004: 29) found that "(s)elf-esteem, confidence, motivation ... mental attitude and relationships"(2004: 29) were all deemed to be contributory factors to the state of wellbeing. They recognise factors which could adversely affect wellbeing if present in a negative balance, e.g. work pressures, diet, education, stress, Government, guidance, confusion, sleep and culture. Some of these factors, e.g. cultural change and government, are outwith our control (other than as voters), while others can be manipulated into a

positive balance, e.g. lifestyle changes concerning work, diet and sleep, provided one is able to take a step back, look at the whole picture and see what has gone wrong.

Positive emotions are a vital factor in establishing wellbeing according to Keaney and Oskala (2007), who found that engagement in the arts, whether active or passive, were a source of enjoyment and relaxation. Seligman et al (2005) agree, writing not so much about the hedonistic pursuit of happiness, but more to do with the physical benefits, such as restoring good health more quickly. They also note that

(p)ositive emotions also lead to a greater ability to think creatively and efficiently. (2005: 277)

The achievement of the optimal (as opposed to maximum) experience of “flow” (Csikszentmihalyi 2002) is one, which various authors acknowledge as being the source of the ‘feel-good’ factor (Delle Fave and Massimini 2005; Marks and Shah 2005). The common factor in their usage of the term is one of total absorption in an activity that offers sufficient stimulation and challenge to motivate and inspire the individual towards greater achievement and creativity of thought and deed. It also has to be something sustainable, not a ‘one-off’ burst of activity. Seligman et al (2005) make the distinction between sheer hedonism – the pursuit of pleasure for its own sake – and “eudaimonism”(2005: 379), being the fulfilment of one’s true nature, through prolonged engagement. Delle Fave and Massimini (2005) support this idea that sustained involvement enhances creativity.

Helliwell and Putnam (2005) regard optimism and self-esteem as major factors contributing to wellbeing. Physical health also is important, and that can be enhanced by social factors such as wealth and the accumulation of “social capital” (2005: 436) which they define as an amalgam of social networks, values and trust. Physical health appears to be a pivotal point in their study, especially where older persons are concerned: it is axiomatic that good physical health allows greater life satisfaction.

A sense of belonging to a community was also deemed important from the point of view of security rather than “social connectedness” (Harris and Hastings 2004: 30). The emphasis in their study was on the concept of geographical community rather than one created by common interest, e.g. an arts community, sports community etc., which could draw on people from a wider area and unite them through a common interest. Helliwell and Putnam (2005) agree that community involvement enhances wellbeing but qualify it with the observation that there must be room within the community for the individual to flourish; the



'self' must not be compromised as that would have a negative impact on self-esteem, which we have already established (above) is a necessary factor for positive wellbeing. The idea of the subjective self being an agent in creating the optimal social experience is a fundamental to the position of Bourdieu (2005) whose concept of 'habitus' describes the positioning of the individual amid the social forces which impinge on him / herself – a 'buffer zone' of social customs and values which (s)he can negotiate to some extent to establish her / his identity, against the background of the 'field' which sets the cultural precepts for the wider community.

## 2.6 Creativity, older people and wellbeing

The relationship between the arts enjoyed by older people and their effect on their sense of wellbeing has attracted interest from researchers on a global scale. Nassaden (2007) reports on the benefits of line dancing perceived by retired women in South Africa, who found it to be not only physically beneficial but socially stimulating and cognitively challenging – the former because they made good friends among the group membership, who were emotionally supportive when necessary (e.g. at times of bereavement), and the latter because of the variety and complexity of the steps. They believed that these attributes would help to ward off Alzheimer's disease and mental health problems, while the physical nature of the dance kept them fit and, they felt, reduced their chances of getting osteoporosis. They also reported that it improved their feelings of confidence and self-esteem, encouraging them to be "more daring and independent." (Nassaden 2007: 12) Similarly, Nimrod (2007) found that retired people who made the effort to expand their participation in recreational activities after retirement experienced greater life satisfaction than those whose involvements either stayed at the same level, or decreased.

Closer to home, the Scottish Arts Council's "Research into Lifelong Learning, the Arts and Older People" (2001) endorses Helix Arts' findings about the benefits of the arts, citing the various organisations which took part, e.g. The Lemon Tree in Aberdeen which ran a drama group, and a team from Westminster Healthcare and Stirling University which included dementia patients. The latter found that the drama activity stimulated vocabulary and encouraged the participants to laugh. Overall, in these projects, older people were seen as a valuable resource rather than a problem in society.

The level of *creativity* as opposed to artistic involvement is not clear in these two studies (above), but a creative writing project run by Age Concern Newcastle (2005, 2006) aimed to

“nurture and develop well-being through creativity” (Helix Arts 2006: 1) and found that participants who had not tried it before, and who engaged actively with this new skill, considered that their self-confidence and self-esteem had improved, giving them an enhanced sense of wellbeing. It would seem, then, that the creative act itself gave them an enhanced sense of wellbeing.

## Section Three - Methodology

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### 3.1 Introduction

This was a collaborative study involving fifteen co-participants and two co-researchers along with a team of researchers from Queen Margaret University. It was designed to offer the co-participants the opportunity to reflect on their prior encounters with creativity through arts as well as having the lived experience, which in turn enabled them to explore and share their feelings of being creative. We adopted an Action Research framework, the purposes of which are described by Dick (2007: 4) as to “bring about change in some community ... (and to) increase understanding” of researcher or participant or both. The approach is endorsed by O’Brien (1998) as a means of co-participants using self-reflection to learn through an experience and possibly alter their practice as a result.

The groups we worked with were not already existing in the community, so our aim was not to effect change in an established setting, but by sharing the experience, the co-participants could have chosen to join other arts groups, or even establish their own new ventures. We, as researchers, fulfilled various roles, e.g. planners, facilitators, observers and reporters.

### 3.2 Sampling

Snowball sampling was used in line with Withnall and Thompson’s (2003) findings, that “the *final* decision to attend a course or class is often the result of word-of-mouth recommendation or being taken along by a friend” (p.5). The co-participants were sought from a town in East Lothian. We used existing contacts in the area as a starting point, to identify potential co-participants. This coincided with posters placed in local venues and an article in the two local newspaper, “The East Lothian Courier” and “East Lothian News”. We invited fifteen co-participants to work with us on the project (Appendix A)

### 3.3 Research design

Having identified the area of older persons' experience which we wanted to explore, (i.e. creativity through arts), we devised a strategy which was flexible enough to be adapted in light of any suggestions put forward by co-researchers and co-participants. There were three main phases in the research: discussions with two focus groups and a day of arts workshops. The model followed a cyclical pattern adapted from one used by O'Brien (1998), involving the stages of 1) planning, 2) acting, 3) observing and reflecting. Each stage informed the plan for the subsequent phases of the project (see figure 2) and incorporated a number of different methods of data collection including interviews (discussion groups), participant observations, informal discussions and reflections (using a graffiti wall and other means).

### 3.4 Interviews

The setting for the interviews was a church hall in the centre of town just outside Edinburgh. The venue was chosen for its easy access for the mainly local co-participants.

The two focus group interviews were held in a small side room off the main church hall. As co-participants arrived they were introduced to each other and offered a cup of tea. They were then given a brief outline of the structure of the session by the researchers. For the two focus groups co-participants and researchers sat round a table on which was placed a microphone and some question prompt sheets. Co-participants were encouraged to speak as freely as they wished about the topic.

### 3.5 Participant observations

During the focus group interviews the researchers acted as both participants and observers. They acted as prompts and guides and as observers in the sense that they noted down the sequence of who was speaking and any general observations about the group process. During the workshops the co-researchers and facilitators undertook participant observations. They recorded their thoughts and feelings about the day (see findings chapter). Co-participants were also encouraged to be participant observers. Using multiple methods of collecting the data encouraged them to take on different roles within the project. For example, during the music and dance workshops participants worked both separately and together in respective art forms. The dance group watched as the music group began by

improvising the rhythm. Once the rhythm was established the dance group joined in and they began to improvise a dance. The music group watched this and adapted their music. In this way co-participants were mediating between being participants and observers.

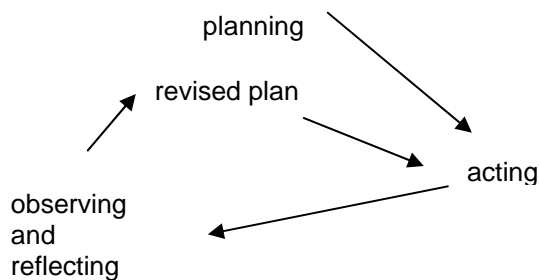
### 3.6 Informal discussions and reflections

Throughout the project participants and researchers were engaged in both informal discussions and reflections. For example, at lunchtime during the workshops co-participants chatted informally to researchers, co-researchers and other co-participants about their experience. These informal discussions were important for helping the co-participants to process their thoughts about the topic. Similarly their reflections provided much of the basis for the thematic analysis.

### 3.7 The cyclical research procedure

The methods outlined above were incorporated into the three cycles (planning, acting and observing and reflecting) of O'Brien's (1998) cyclical research procedure (Figure 2). These are discussed in detail below.

Figure 2: The cyclical research procedure



#### 3.7.1 Cycle 1 - Planning

We, the researchers, have a vested interest in community arts from an academic point of view, so we felt that it would be useful to recruit two co-researchers who belonged to the same age bracket as the intended co-participants, and who had experience of creativity through art without academic involvement. One was a semi-retired peripatetic music teacher who enjoyed various art forms, and the other had discovered a love of painting after she had retired. We envisaged their input as monitors of the process, able to be objective about the research process while empathising with the co-participants.

The research intended to be limited in the first instance to residents in and around a town in East Lothian, and the first group was identified largely by responses to an article in a local newspaper and posters in the town. The number was augmented by snowballing (Withnall and Thompson 2003), i.e. news of the project was passed on by word of mouth, so that the final cohort included members from further afield, providing a diversity of experience which enriched the discussions. Ultimately we had sufficient co-participants to hold the first discussion group, which was held in November 2007 but unfortunately neither of our co-researchers were able to attend. However, due to the problems attached to finding a date that suited everyone, we decided to go ahead anyway. Although we had hoped for good representation of both genders, we had only one male who had been persuaded to come along by a female participant.

### 3.7.2 Cycle 1 – Acting: first discussion group

Information packs and permission slips were sent out to the co-participants so that they could indicate their willingness or otherwise, to have their voices recorded. None refused, so, for the duration of the discussions, two digital recorders (one as back-up in case the other failed) were placed in the middle of the table, round which the co-participants were seated. A schedule of questions was also on the table, to prompt and steer the flow of conversation if it flagged or digressed too much. The conversation was initiated by one of us, the researchers present, and once underway, it was free-flowing, with little intervention required by the researchers, lasting for about forty-five minutes.

### 3.7.3 Cycle 1 - Observing and reflecting

To aid transcription and acting independently, we noted the seating positions of each participant and ascribed a number to them. We then jotted down the number of each speaker, ensuring confidentiality while maintaining an accurate record of the group dynamics. When transcribed, that pattern became visible and gave us valuable information about each member's involvement in the discussion. We observed that while some co-participants seemed to be quite diffident, most were happy to share their experiences and two in particular were very forthcoming.

This first group comprised seven people with varying degrees of post-retirement arts experience, including traditional and other forms of music, painting in various media

including silk-painting, and types of needlework e.g. embroidery and knitting. Some of them already knew each other while one knew no-one else in the group prior to that occasion. Not only was the range of activities broad, but also the depth of participation.

At the end of the session, we asked the co-participants what they thought of the experience, and what sort of creative arts workshops they might like to try on the day designated for them. On the basis of their comments we were able to examine our procedure to see if changes were necessary. We knew it would have been useful to have had at least one of our co-researchers present to bridge the gap between our perceptions and those of the co-participants, because it had been very difficult to capture the subtleties of interaction while recording the order of participation in the discussion. We undertook to rectify that at the second meeting.

#### 3.7.4 Cycle 2 - Revised plan

We judged that apart from the absence of co-researchers, the framework for the first discussion group had been successful, so no major changes were made for the next group although we came to it with greater insight into how the flow of conversation might evolve, and this time, one of our co-researchers would be present.

#### 3.7.5 Cycle 2 – Acting: second discussion group

Our second discussion group was held in March 2008 in the same place, with co-participants coming forward again through snowballing and posters. Again we were unable to achieve a gender balance, this time having only females. The same procedure was followed for recording the discussion as for the first group, and the same schedule of questions was held in reserve in case it was required. The co-researcher who was present played a dual role by taking part in the discussion as well as forming an overall impression of the proceedings, which she could feed back to us later.

#### 3.7.6 Cycle 2 - Observing and reflecting

Perhaps because the group was bigger on this occasion or perhaps because there was greater disparity of experience among the members, there was more researcher intervention, steering the conversation to keep it on course. Certainly, they came from a more widespread background geographically which accounted for the variety of arts class

experiences. Two had been professional colleagues and two others were friends socially, but overall this group felt less cohesive than the previous one. The co-participants shared their thoughts freely about their very varied arts experiences though there was less feeling of interactive discussion. Despite that, some of them voiced the feeling that the setting had given them the opportunity to reflect on their art-making in a way which they had not done before.

On reflection, we felt that this group gave us richness of breadth rather than depth of discussion, covering topics relating to issues of aesthetics in nature as well as in arts. This offered us very valuable insight into their appreciation of aesthetics as a source of personal fulfilment separate from that derived from creativity through art.

Again, we concluded this group discussion by asking what sort of activities the co-participants might be interested in trying in the day of art workshops which was the third stage of our research project.

### 3.7.7 Cycle 3 - Planning

The third phase of the plan was the day of creative arts workshops, from which the co-participants could choose two out of four activities – in the morning, they could choose between drama and visual art; in the afternoon, the choice was music or dance, all with the emphasis on the co-participants' creative engagement (Appendix C). We sent out information packs with return sheets on which the co-participants could indicate their preference. We also asked them to indicate whether they were willing to have their photographs taken. Our plan was to have some photographic evidence of the day's proceedings if possible, and to comply with the ethical code, we would leave disposable cameras in the workshop rooms so that the co-participants themselves could take the photos. For identification purposes, we prepared white labels for those opting in to wear, while those who did not wish to be photographed would have no label.

During breaks, they would be invited to write comments and put them in a box anonymously. Prior to the workshops, selected remarks made by the co-participants during the discussion groups in cycle 1 and 2 had been typed up and pasted on a large sheet of paper under the headings of "Art form", "Social" and "Psychological" (Table 2) which was pinned up on the wall to stimulate flow of thought and subsequent discussion at the end of the day.



**Table 2 – Stimulus Sheet for Workshop Day**

ART FORM	SOCIAL	PSYCHOLOGICAL
<p>There wasn't time before retirement to take part in the arts.</p>	<p>People pass on their knowledge to each other in the sewing group.</p>	<p>It's better out than in! Need to be motivated to find out.</p>
<p>People have the opportunity to express themselves through the arts.</p>	<p>When you start taking part in something, it is easier for other opportunities to come.</p>	<p>As long as you are happy with it, it doesn't matter what people think.</p>
<p>I enjoy arts that involve doing.</p>	<p>People find out about art classes through word of mouth.</p>	<p>Health-wise, if you didn't do all these things, where would you be?</p>
<p>Creativity is important for everyone. I like to have something to show for my effort.</p>	<p>Spinning groups chatter.</p>	<p>I felt nervous about participating.</p>
<p>If you play a game, there is no end product so that isn't creative.</p>	<p>It's hard to get started on your own. Groups encourage and help each other.</p>	<p>It doesn't have to be relaxing, it can be challenging.</p>
<p>It is not just visual. It is your senses as well.</p>	<p>Painters are not talkers whereas potters yap, yap, yap!</p>	<p>It takes you out of yourself. You forget about other things because you are kind of concentrating on it.</p>
<p>Very often what I produce goes in the bucket.</p>	<p>We do need contact with other people. We need to be honest about that!</p>	<p>It can help the battle with depression.</p>
<p>It is interesting for me to consider how much your background influences your interests. For example if your family were creative or not.</p>	<p>Mixing with people in an art club lets you mix with a different group of people.</p>	<p>It can be relaxing – helps you forget your problems.</p>
<p>It's non-judgemental – it's in the eye of the beholder.</p>		<p>After retirement if I hadn't stayed active I would have been in a straightjacket.</p>
<p>Today you can afford taking part as long as the cost is reasonable.</p>		<p>You have to leave your mark.</p>
<p>I have just dabbled in things, pottered around and really enjoyed that.</p>		<p>You always feel better about yourself if you have created something.</p>
<p>It's all very personal. Somebody might enjoy looking at Picasso and Andy Warhol exhibitions while somebody else might think they are horrendous.</p>		
<p>I can't think of doing something as abstract as in the Gallery of Modern</p>		

Art because it isn't my thing.		
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By providing these statements on a response sheet, our intention was to offer sufficient stimuli for co-participants to agree, disagree and/or add further comments not covered in these three lists.

### 3.7.8 Cycle 3 – Acting: creative arts workshops

As the facilities included a large hall, a smaller, more intimate space which we had used for the discussion groups, and a kitchen, we were able to run the drama and visual art groups simultaneously in the morning in the large and small rooms respectively, while in the afternoon the music and dance took place together because they both required the large hall. The drama workshop took the form of games and story building, while the visual arts workshop concentrated on creating an object, a tree sculpture, from nature. The creative music and dance leaders opted to use samba as their stimulus because they were familiar with samba structure in their respective arts and were used to working together.

We researchers and one co-researcher were also involved in leading workshops, but when we were free, we could join in with other workshops which gave us a flavour of the experience which the co-participants were absorbing. The exception was drama, where the leader asked us not to enter after the start of the workshop, understandably, as that would have interfered with the process. It was easier to enter into the spirit of the visual arts workshop and add a bit of painting or sculpting to the creation, which was underway. In the music and dance workshops, we were all in the same space although the co-participants had to commit to one or other art.

### 3.7.9 Cycle 3 - Observing and reflecting

During lunchtime, there was much stimulating discussion, with which we, the researchers and co-researchers, were a part. 'Offscreen', as it were, the co-participants relaxed and exchanged impressions of their experiences in the morning workshops as well as talking about their arts experiences in a wider frame. Most took advantage of the opportunity to

write anonymous comments about their feelings of creativity through art and put them in the box provided, and/or add to the graffiti wall.

At the end of the workshops we came together for a period of reflection on our experiences of the day, using some of the comments on the response sheet as starting points. These were recorded and transcribed and written up in the following findings chapters.

### 3.8 Analysis

Thematic analysis was used to analyse the interviews and participant observations from the workshops. Flick (2002: 186) identifies this as a 'multi-step procedure' in which the data are continually re-visited in order to identify a list of key themes. In this project the interview transcripts were initially read and re-read by each researcher. At various stages of the project meetings were held where the research team and the co-participants (during the workshop day) identified and discussed the key themes that had emerged, these formed the basis of the final analysis.

### 3.9 Ethical considerations

The ethical guidelines outlined by Queen Margaret University ethics committee were followed. Written consent was obtained from all co-co-participants for all aspect of the research (Appendix C). Co-participants were free to withdraw from the project and any time without giving any justification for their decision. No real names were used in the writing of the report.

# Section Four – Findings: Experiences of Creativity

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## 4.1 Introduction

Section four of the findings focuses on addressing the research question; *what are the experiences of recently retired older person regarding creativity?* The findings relevant to answering this question were taken from a thematic analysis of the two focus group interview transcripts. The focus groups were held in November 2007 and March 2008.

## 4.2 The co-participants prior experience of the arts

Fifteen co-participants attended the focus groups and subsequently the workshop day (which is described in the methodology chapter). Fourteen women and one man. The co-participants came from many walks of life; some had been teachers, bankers, administrators or had stayed at home to look after their families. Most of the participants had spent their life living in the town although three had lived in rural communities. For most of the co-participants retirement had come naturally as they came towards the end of their working careers. For Mary (Co-participant – CP1), however, retirement had come prematurely due to the ill health of her husband. She had given up work to look after him.

In terms of prior engagement in the arts and arts type activities, six of the co-participants had a lifelong interest in pursuing different arts activities as hobbies while seven had become interested in the arts post retirement. Kim and Joan’s statements (Table 3) typified the diverse experience that co-participants had of engaging in the arts

<b>Table 3 - co-participants pre-retirement arts activity experience</b>	
<b>Kim (CP2)</b>	<b>Joan (CP3)</b>
“I didn’t really know what arts was. I thought it was paper and painting. I certainly didn’t go to art exhibitions. My daughter got me a paintbox and said “go to a class”. I found out like that. Now I really love painting something which I didn’t think I could do”	“I haven’t really concentrated on one particular art (form). I have just done all kinds of things. Throughout my life I’ve done all kinds of workshops, courses on painting and batik. I like colour, so activities where you have a chance to use lots of interesting colour.”

Kim’s (CP2) statement illustrates that she had not been engaged in arts activities prior to her retirement but rather had become interested, through the encouragement of her daughter, when she retired. Joan (CP3) on the other hand had been actively engaged in number of

different activities throughout her life. From her statement we get a sense that Joan (CP3) took part in a variety of short-term arts workshops and courses. This seemed to be a shared trend amongst other co-participants who had previous pre-retirement experience of engaging in the arts.

### 4.3 Creativity in the context of this project

Co-participants began the focus groups by defining what creativity meant for them. Three different strands emerged. The first related to the arts as a specific type of activity. These were primarily 'formal' arts activities such as visual art, music, drama and dance generally undertaken outside the home at an organised day or evening class. Participation in formal arts activities is the main strand discussed in this study. Within this context co-participants agreed that they were focusing primarily on *active* participation in the arts (ie. taking part in a specific arts activity) although some comment was made with regards to *passive* participation in the arts (ie. watching a performance). Some co-participants felt that the term *passive* participation did not truly reflect the *act* of listening to or observing a performance. They felt that this too was a form of active participation.

In terms of further defining creativity the second strand related to traditional arts activities such as knitting, sewing, weaving, crochet and embroidery, these were taught in the home by 'mother' or 'granny'. The third strand related to nature as a form of creativity. Julia (CR1) one of the co-researchers commented:

“one of the most noticeable themes (in transcript 2) was the way that co-participants related strongly to nature, the great outdoors, theirs and others' gardens ...”

Co-participants spoke about the shapes, sounds and textures of natural world. Many took inspiration from the natural world when engaging in arts activities (e.g. painting a landscape).

### 4.4 Participating in arts activities

#### 4.4.1 Getting involved

Kim (CP2) and Joan's (CP3) experiences illustrated the diverse background of the co-participants in terms of their pre and post retirement engagement with the arts. Since retirement most co-participants had taken part in some type of arts workshop or class.

These tended to be local arts classes run by the council. The council offered a variety of different arts activities from stained glass making, pottery, painting, sewing and silk painting. These courses, however, were time limited and so had offered co-participants more of taster rather than longer-term experience of the art form. In the absence of these more formal classes some co-participants had been motivated to join a traditional music band and play in their local pub. Others had set up their own art days at home. Jill (CP8), for example, had set up her own “playdays” as she called them. These were days when she invited friends to come and try different art activities such as silk painting or batik work. Jill (CP8) said that the “playdays” offered her flexibility in the sense that she was quite happy to experiment with things she had collected in her sample box while her friend was more interested in creating an end product and selling it.

All the co-participants agreed that arts were important for everyone regardless of age.

#### 4.4.2 Time and opportunity to participate

Retirement offered the co-participants the *time and opportunity* to participate in an arts activity. During their working life co-participants spoke about their not being enough time to take part in the arts. Busy careers and family life had meant that many of the co-participants had not been actively involved in the arts during their early and middle adult years. Even many of those co-participants who had expressed a life long interest in the arts commented that their commitment to engaging actively in the arts was sporadic during this period. It was not until they had retired that their interest in the arts was fully realised because they now had time to take part.

A busy career and family life were not the only reasons why co-participants were not actively engaged in the arts activities pre-retirement, another was the lack of opportunity. Jenny (CP9) commented that; “there weren’t the same number of opportunities for participating in the arts when I was younger”. Jenny (CP9) remembered learning traditional crafts from her mother and her granny at home but had not been able to engage in the formal arts because there were no local evening classes or venues nearby where she could participate in such activities. Susi (CP6) felt that people were prohibited from taking part in the formal arts because of their financial cost.

“Financial cost was a consideration. When I was younger I could never have afforded piano lessons” (Jenny: CP9)

Jenny (CP9), like Susi (CP6), said that her family could not afford to send her for private piano lessons but that instead she was able to attend the local dance club which had been set up for children, like her, “living in the prefabs”. The cost implication was a major factor in whether co-participants had the opportunity pre- or post-retirement to take part in any form of arts activity. Several co-participants commented that today they could afford to take part as long as the cost was reasonable. However, in saying this co-participants acknowledged that they were reliant on the local council and initiatives such as the former East Lothian Community History and Art Trust (ELCHAT) to subsidise the running costs of arts classes. Julie (CP5) commented on the time-limited nature of funding

“Courses which people had previously enjoyed seem to dry up due to a lack of funding, or become prey to policies of assessment etc ...” (Julie: CP5)

Co-participants reported that the often ad hoc funding of projects led to a lack of permanent arts activities being available to the co-participants. Maya (CP7) was concerned about the European Union’s recent ruling outlawing positive discrimination. She said that from next year pensioners would no longer get reduced or subsidised rates to attend arts and/or other special interest classes. Many of the co-participants expressed anxiety about how far this legislation would be taken (e.g. no senior citizen bus passes) and the impact this would have on their lives in terms of staying active.

#### 4.4.3 Motivation to participate

The motivation to participate in arts activities was primarily determined by the personal preference of the person. Joan (CP3) noted that; “different people are drawn to different things”. Paula (CP10) gave the example of different people’s taste in artists.

“It’s all very personal. Somebody might enjoy looking at Picasso and Andy Warhol exhibitions while somebody else might think they are horrendous”

Personal taste was important when selecting an arts activity to engage in. Sally (CP13), for example, did not like modern art but preferred to paint more traditional landscape scenes. She looked for visual art classes that catered for her taste. Each person had his/her own preference and according to Jill (CP8) this often depended on what type of person you were. She noted that different types of people suit different art forms.

“I think painting and writing are things were you have to be self contained and focus on them. I have noticed that when I have been to an art class painters are not talkers but potters like to yap, yap, yap” (Jill:CP8)

Many of the co-participants agreed with this point they felt that different art forms suited particular types of personality. Co-participants such as Sally (CP13) expressed the need to undertake a more self-contained activity because of her dislike of large groups.

“I am a bit of a loner when it comes to doing such activities. I get tied up in knots if there are too many people watching me” (Sally:CP13)

Whereas Stella (CP12) enjoyed the buzz of the dance class

“I enjoy arts that involve doing such as dance. I really enjoy the jive class. You see yourself progressing each week (Stella:CP12)

Jill (CP8) and Stella’s (CP12) comments highlight group versus individual potential that the arts activity offered co-participants. If the person was looking for a more social experience then arts activities such as pottery and spinning groups offered the potential for “chatter” while more contemplative engagement could be sought in a painting class where the person could work more individually. However, even such individual work had to be undertaken within the group context as no or limited funding was available for the person to pursue individual arts activities.



Figure 3 - co-participants during the workshop day

Personal taste and preference for a particular art form could also be shaped by life experience. For example, Samantha’s (CP4) family had sent her to piano lessons when she was child. For her this became an “obligatory” chore. Samantha (CP4) commented that; “not everyone wants to practise scales”. Being forced to play the piano had become a demotivating experience for her.



However, while personal taste and personality type were viewed as key motivators by many of the co-participants for selecting a particular arts activities a few did speak about their willingness to throw caution to the wind and try something new in their retirement. This happened particularly if the person had been recommended a particular arts class or workshop through word of mouth. In such a small town a friend might have attended a class and then told his/her friend about it. In this way the person - new to the activity - felt more motivated to attend because of this trusted recommendation. Moreover, the person's initial nervousness about taking part in something unfamiliar could be abated by the presence of a familiar face. In this respect this group of people were less motivated by a desire to try a specific art form and more by the potential of the new experience and of sharing that experience with others. The findings suggested this group of co-participants comprised of people who had not previously had the opportunity to engage in any form of arts activity pre-retirement. They were generally not interested in learning a new arts form technique but more in experiencing the fluidity and flexibility of the creative process.

Another key motivator for co-participants to take part in the arts was the desire to seek new challenges. Susan (CP14) spoke of engaging in the arts activities in order to keep herself stimulated. She was fearful that she would 'stagnate' if she did not keep active. This theme was shared by many of the co-participants. Sally (CP13), for example, commented:

“... It is always good to make a person strive a bit. I think that's good for me because I don't just sit and think, get complacent and stodgy and turn into a dumpling” (Sally: CP13)

There was a shared sense amongst the co-participants that keeping motivated prevented premature ageing and eventual decline into ill health. Several co-participants knew of friends who had retired and had not engaged in any activity but had rather stayed at home and watched television.

“I know a lot of people who are retired like myself and do nothing, literally nothing” (Martha CP11)

Some knew of people who had retired and decided not to engage in any activity. These people had prematurely become ill or died.

Another motivating factor for many of the co-participants was what resulted from the arts process - the final product or performance. Within this context it was interesting to note that although there was some desire to engage experientially in the specific arts activities there

was a stronger desire for these activities to be structured around creating a tangible artefact or performance.

“I like to have something to show for my efforts at the end of the day” (Sally: CP13)

The desire to have something tangible to show for their efforts led co-participants to consider the aesthetic quality of the end product or performance that they created. The theme *self-critic* emerged. Self-critic relates to the judgement co-participants and their families placed on the end art product or performance that was produced following engagement in the arts activity. Some co-participants were motivated to take part in a specific arts activity because of the completed end product or performance. They felt this was an important aim of the process. Whereas other co-participants were more influenced by the experiential potential of the arts activity. They considered the aesthetic quality of any product or performance that was produced to be of secondary importance to the notion of taking part and enjoying the experience.

#### 4.4.4 Self-critic

As previously discussed the notion of self-critic emerged in response to comments that co-participants made about the aesthetic quality of the art product or performance they had created. Several of the co-participants were self critical about their own perceived artistic skills. Jill (CP8) commented that she did not always value her own work enough to get it framed. She would on occasions get a piece framed as a present for a friend but never for herself. There was a sense that she never felt that the end product was good enough to be put on her wall and that only when friends had shown an interest in a particular piece did she feel it was 'worthy' to be framed. Susi (CP6) similarly was a harsh self-critic. She said that often what she produces "goes in the bucket". Again she had a sense of wanting to strive to create perfect piece of work. Samantha (CP4) and Carol (CP15) both felt that the more they took part in an activity the more self-critical they became as they began to notice the finer details of what they were trying to create. This meant for Susi (CP6) that she didn't always enjoy the activity. She commented that it could be challenging in ways that she had perhaps not considered. This resonates with the remarks of Nassedden's (2007) participants who enjoyed the cognitive challenge of dance as much as the social stimulation.

#### 4.6 Reflections from the research team

On analysing the transcripts there was sense that some co-participants became self-critical because they were new to the arts process. When reflecting on the discussions groups we observed that there was an overwhelming sense for us that many co-participants were still 'finding their feet' in terms of making the transition from working life to retirement. They had not yet had an opportunity to relax and feel comfortable with the process. This situation was exacerbated by the fact that outlets for creativity such as arts classes were generally short-term funded and were only usually offered in the most popular art forms. This meant that the person often did not have time to settle into a particular way of working or to experience a variety of different art forms. As a result of this we felt that certain co-participants might benefit from a day of exploring different arts activities. This would help free co-participants from their initial anxieties over the aesthetic quality of the work and allow them to relax more and try new art forms.

The findings illustrated that there was not much crossover in terms of co-participants experimenting with different art forms. We could offer this opportunity during the workshop

day and this in turn could help to facilitate our understanding of potential social and psychological benefits associated with participating in different arts activities.

The aim for the workshop was therefore to offer a structured day in which a series of experiential workshops were offered in art, dance, drama and dance.

## Section Five – Findings: The Arts and Wellbeing

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### 5.1 Introduction

The previous section explored the experiences of recently retired older persons' creativity. In section five of the report the focus turns to addressing the second research question; *“can the creative experience enhance the older person’s wellbeing?”* In order to answer this question the interview transcripts, feedback sheets from the workshop day (Appendix D) and researchers reflections were analysed.

### 5.2 Workshop profiles and facilitators reflections

#### 5.2.1 Profile of Drama Workshop

Games are widely used by actors and directors to develop story, plot, action and imagery. This workshop is designed to offer an introduction to devising short scenes using games as a starting point. The emphasis in all the activities is on playing, having fun, on not ‘getting it right’.



Figure 4 - co-participants taking part in the workshop day

**Table 4 – Orla's (F1) reflections on the drama workshop**

The workshop took place in the morning session after a welcoming cup of coffee and an introductory session by the Arts Day organisers. Participants took part in, amongst other things, an ensemble exercise which was spontaneous and provoked a strong feeling of 'listening' among the group members – listening to the group and finding a way to accept each others ideas. Other activities that we undertook were:

#### Image Theatre

In this section of the workshop the participants were split into two groups and asked to make several still images as a precursor to creating short scenes based on and including the images. The exercise helped the group to explore key points in a narrative, Where were they? Who was there? What were they doing? What happened? Why? When they had established the images they were then asked to turn them into scenes that included the images they had devised.

#### Scene Sharing

The final exercise involved showing the scenes to each other and giving each other constructive feedback. I enjoyed the meeting the group and felt that they enjoyed the opportunity that the Arts Day had offered them. At the start of the day people were friendly but a little reserved, indulging in polite conversation, helping with setting out chairs and drinking tea and coffee. As the day progressed people relaxed with each other and got into animated conversations over lunch. A happy confident group of people. I like to think that the drama workshop contributed in some measure to this warmth and camaraderie and I thoroughly enjoyed my day.

### 5.2.2 Profile of Art Workshop

“Art takes nature as its model” (Aristotle, 315BC) Nature has always inspired the artist. In this workshop we will explore, through image making, our response to the natural world. Working with objects from nature we will begin by looking at different forms, shapes and texture before coming together to create a group image. No prior experience of art making is required. Please wear older clothes.

**Table 5 – Jaya’s (F2) reflections on the art workshop**

Having had a chance to analyse the first set of interview transcripts in which co-participants had spoke of the importance of the natural world, I was eager to explore this theme further in art workshop. The session began with an introduction to the different art materials. In pairs we did an exercise called ‘conversation on paper’. Each person took turns to make a mark on the paper beginning the process of engaging in a non-verbal dialogue with the other person as well as familiarising themselves with the art materials.

I had brought along a selection of different natural objects (leaves, bark etc...) I asked the group if they would like to create a group object – a tree. The group used wire and cardboard to create the trunk and branches. Once the base structure was complete we began to decorate. An assortment of tissue paper and paint was used to create a vibrant and colourful tree. Gold and bronze paint was added to give the tree an exotic quality. Pieces of newspaper were rolled, cut and painted green to give the impression of palm leaves cascading from the top of the tree.

During the making of the tree the group came together as we first spoke about our anticipation about the potential of the final tree and then got down to experimenting with the different art materials. Laughter could be heard ringing round the room as the tree took on a life of its own. Jill (CP8) commented “they’ll not have seen a tree like this before” ...

### 5.2.3 Profile of dance workshop

Samba is traditionally an intergenerational activity in its native setting. In our workshop, we will be creating samba-inspired movement in tandem with the musicians. Participants will learn some authentic samba steps which can form the basis of a dance, and they will have the freedom to build on to it their own ideas, inspired by the spirit of samba. By the end of the workshop, we aim to be able to dance a short routine to the musicians' accompaniment.



Figure 5 – co-participants taking part in the workshop day



**Table 6 - Eve's (F3) Reflections on the Dance Workshop**

“Samba (the festival variety, not ballroom samba) is an intergenerational dance type, and although there are recognised steps and distinctive rhythm, there is scope for creativity in the expressive use of arms, head (line of focus) and direction as well as adding more steps. Normally it is seen on our screens as a processional dance along a street, but can also be danced in a circle or alone. As a community creative dance artist, I do not pretend to teach authentic samba – we are fortunate to have some wonderful real samba teachers on our shores who have had it in their very bones since birth - but I use it to create dances using some authentic samba steps, combined with co-participants' created variations to make up sequences. Whatever dance form I use, I always stress to my group that this is a creative version of the original, to give them a chance to explore the feeling of a new way of moving and have fun with it. I help my dancers to pick up the infectious flavour of the music and feel it in their bodies.

The responsibility for fitness to dance was assumed by the dancers. It was emphasised that they were the experts on, and therefore in charge of, their own bodies and the co-participants knew that if they needed to take a break, they could, so long as they built up gradually again. That was built into the workshop plan.

In tandem with the musicians, we started with some basic warm-up movements at an appropriate speed and gradually built something more intricate. I used a much more gentle approach than I would have with a younger class, but being of similar age to some of the younger co-participants made it easier for me to empathise and judge the optimal pace for the group. This was not about building up speed, but of trying different movements. This was possible because the music was following a similar pattern of simple and then more intricate beats as members of the 'band' learned their parts. When the music leader's whistle indicated a change of instrument and pattern in true samba style, the dancers used the signal to change the focus from one subgroup to another or to change direction, cut the energy level or opt out or in. They were each given the chance to initiate a movement that became incorporated into the dance. Even those who sat out for a rest were encouraged to keep the beat with hands or feet.

Normally when I use a specific dance form in a creative context, I would anticipate having a number of sessions, firstly to teach the basics, then to experiment and ultimately to create a dance. On this occasion I had one workshop, which obviously limited what could be achieved. I felt that what we had done was not really creative enough, but just nodded to creativity, giving the co-participants the merest hint of how creative their bodies could be. What made it special, however, was having the accompaniment of genuine samba instruments played in samba style. That made it easier to immerse one's body in the rhythm and experience it kinaesthetically.

In the capacity of dance leader, I was very much a part of the group rather than being an objective observer. I hope that I conveyed my genuine enthusiasm effectively, and judging by the response, I think that the co-participants were as enamoured with the dance as I was. Any trace of shyness quickly disappeared, helped, I believe, by the fact that I was doing it all with them, rather than teaching and standing back to watch. A little bit of work on isolation of limbs, hips and ribcage was designed to let them feel the shifts in weight, balance and centre of gravity at a very basic and safe level, which gave them a new experience. The one man in the group happily rose to the challenge and I gave him some bigger, more masculine moves to play with as he was also one of the younger, more physically active retirees. Looking around at the dancers' faces, I realised that although they were paying close attention to me rather than thinking about their own physical input, they were smiling, heads were held high, seemingly at ease with the physicality of the dance within their own limits.

Towards the end, we took the energy level down gradually, to cool down safely. Altogether we had danced for about an hour, although at different levels of intensity. The dancers were tired but gave the impression of having found satisfaction in an activity which caused them to feel a new rhythm kinaesthetically”  
(Dance Facilitator, reflection written after the delivery of the workshop)

#### 5.2.4 Profile of Music Workshop

The workshop will begin with some general rhythmic work based on an African drum pattern from Nigeria. We will then move on to do some drumming on the Samba drums (offering the potential for the music and the dance sessions to come together) and integrate this with other instruments such as cowbells, shakers, triangles and tambourines.

**Table 8 –Julia’s (F4) Reflections on the Music Workshop**

“I really enjoyed being part of the COPA project. It was lovely working with adults instead of children, for a change! The exhilaration of the dance and music together is another strong thread, which several had not anticipated ... it’s that thing of getting the blood flowing and the brain works better! The concept of this exercise has interested me greatly, and made me think quite hard about how one involves older people in the arts in a challenging way which continues to draw them into the excitement and commitment necessary to give one a real learning experience of the sort that makes any learner hungry to continue with their education. We all know the kind of experience that sends one home elated and raring to go on to bigger and better things or maybe deeper and more intricate explorations. In the arts, I fear it may not always be easy to access the next step in some cases, due to cost, or even just where one is living. One thing for sure about our project was that mostly everyone had already made efforts for themselves to participate in the arts in some way, and some in several ways. Generalising a bit, and going by my own experience and those of my many friends, I would say that art clubs, drama groups, choirs of various types, and maybe tea dances/ ballroom dancing and Scottish music and dancing seem to be the most popular means of accessing the arts, though of course if you live in Edinburgh there is a lot more in the way of dancing available. And I think that on the whole, our day of workshops was fairly successful in giving folks an introduction to something they had not done before.

What worries me a bit, however, and this is not especially what we did, but a kind of a general ethos, is that in a sense all the above can be rather anodyne and susceptible a sort of "therapy" outlook in the way the arts are used in retirement. Those of us now at this annoyingly older age have experienced a good number of exciting events in our time, and want that kind of experience to continue!

Sometimes, it happens! There is the wonderful Really Terrible Orchestra which just goes for it and plays whatever they want despite being amateurs. And the Zimmers singing "My Generation" and getting into the charts. And Twyla Tharp, I think, choreographing a ballet for older people, which was on in London a few years ago.....they were all amateurs. We would like to paint on HUGE canvases or walls maybe, with big brushes, not do polite watercolours. I'm sure this must be available SOMEwhere! So, I guess what I am trying to say is that engagement in the arts for Older people is exactly what should be happening as we can confirm using our experiences of this project and the feedback. But we have to be sure we get to people who haven't done it before, and for them and those who have had more opportunities, be sure the experience is of a life-enhancing, heart-leaping, eye-opening variety!" (Music Facilitator, reflection written after the delivery of the workshop)

### 5.3 Co-participants response to workshops

From the thematic analysis of the co-participants responses to the workshop two key strands emerged; the first centred round the potential for *creating social connections* via engagement in the arts and the second entitled *being-well* related to understanding the significance of the arts in terms of aiding the person's psychological state.

### 5.4 Creating social connections

Co-participants reported that taking part in arts activities had the potential for *creating social connections*, reflecting the findings of Harris and Hastings (2004) and Helliwell and Putnam (2005). *Social connections* in this study are defined as people and activities that help to give the person a sense of community, of sharing an experience with others. Julia (CR1), one of the co-researchers, who reviewed the interview transcripts commented:

“(an emerging theme) was the feeling of how participation can create a variety of relationships, from getting betters at working with others, to making and retaining friends who might spur one on to trying yet more undiscovered creative activities” (Julia:CR1)

During the course of the study we observed how people began to form their own connections with each other. After the workshop day some telephone numbers were exchanged so that participants could be informed about future arts events. In this way a small network of contact was established. Arts classes and workshop provided the retired

older person with access to such vital contacts. For example at least five of the co-participants were friends who had met through their participation in a local arts group. Martha (CP11) and Sally (CP13) story illustrates this point.

“Martha and I started going to the stained glass making classes and then to the silk making classes. I wasn’t the least bit interested in going to that but Sally made me go and now I love it”

It is clear that without Martha’s (CP11) input Sally (CP13) may never have found her love for silk painting. The co-participants spoke of such friendships being vital in helping “kick start (them) into taking part” (Paula:CP10). Without the encouragement of other people the co-participants commented that they often found it hard to get started on their own because they lacked the confidence to step outside their door and try something new. The importance of the taking part in a group arts activity could not be underestimated. Co-participants were in a period of transition in their lives moving from working to retired life and as such they felt it was easy to loose contact with other people. The familiar routine of going to work and seeing colleagues was no longer possible and so a new set of activities and acquaintances had to be found. Maya (CP1) rather poignantly remarked:

“We do need contact with other people. We need to be honest about that!”

In the arts class people could share and learn from each other. Stella (CP12) commented that it can be hard to get started on your own but that when you are part of the group you feel encouraged to give things a try. Several co-participants commented that through engaging in such activities they were able to meet a whole new group of people, people from different walks of life. Retirement takes no account of race, sex or class but rather could be considered an equaliser of people. Co-participants in this study were brought together by their initial interest in taking up a new hobby. The findings suggested that participating in such a fluid and creative activity with others became more than just another hobby. Relationships were formed with people who had a similar interest. As Nassedden (2007) found, people felt bonded together by their experience. Jill’s (CP8) response to the art workshop illustrates this point

“I found the workshop more hands on than I expected. I was initially a bit apprehensive as I knew one or two of the participants were experienced in “art”. I really just wanted to have fun, to take part in an enjoyable activity that stimulated my brain. I felt more comfortable than I expected I enjoyed the prospect of producing a piece of art. Felt very good working together. I felt as though people were prepared to listen to ideas and act on them. Everyone made positive encouraging remarks. The workshop lived up to my expectations. I loved taking part and felt very motivated” (Jill, CP)

Actively engaging in the arts afforded co-participants a freedom of expression that perhaps they had not previously encountered. As many commented engaging in the arts is a very personal experience, creativity comes from within thus sharing your inner world with others can be a very bonding experience. May (CR 2) commented that in her sewing group people pass on knowledge to each other about sewing and life in general. Real kinships can be formed which motivate the person to go out of the house on a rainy day rather than stay in and watch television.

## 5.5 Being-well

The findings suggested that there were many psychological benefits attributed to taking part in arts activities. Jenny (CP9) and Samantha (CP4) spoke about how engaging in the arts could take them away from the pressures and stresses of their lives. Samantha (CP4) commented.

“if you are really involved in doing something you forget about other things because you are kind of concentrating on it.”

In retirement people can feel isolated and lonely and unsure how to fill their days. Taking part in a purposeful activity could help to concentrate the mind and relieve the person, even temporarily, from his/her anxieties. Susan (CP14) felt that the arts were even more fundamental than that. She commented “healthwise where would you be if you didn’t do such things?” to which Martha (CP11) replied that she would have been in a straight-jacket” She needed something to do when her husband died, something that would give her an emotional release, a way of processing the feelings of loss and grief that she had experienced. In a similar vein Susan (CP14) suggested that engaging in the arts can help a person battle with depression.

Within this context several co-participants commented on the therapeutic nature of the arts, therapeutic in the sense that engaging with the art form can be a cathartic exercise. One co-participant writing on the anonymous comment sheets wrote that

“I found the workshop enjoyable, but it was a short period and a lot of work for the time available. Most activities I do are quite structured whereas this was an opportunity to ‘let go’. Great fun”

There are many levels of engagement possible when taking part in such an activity. The artefact or performance can be taken on face value as a tangible product. It can also be taken on a deeper level as a symbolic representation of the feelings and emotions

experienced by its creator. Such flexibility facilitates personal growth at a pace that is manageable for the person, particularly if s/he is new to the experience. For some people arts are therapeutic because they offer a 'doing' activity. Martha (CP11) spoke about needing to do things when her husband had died, while for others participation offered them the opportunity for some self-reflection.

In terms of the therapeutic nature of the arts there was a shared understanding amongst the co-participants that it was "better to get it out than keep it in". Some co-participants commented that that they had been told at school that they were no good at art or music. This had stayed with them and lacked the confidence to engage in different arts activities during their life. The day of the workshop offered these co-participants the opportunity to revisit these feelings and see themselves in a different ways. An unnamed co-participant writing on the anonymous comment sheet wrote that

"Be confident with your own ideas and actions. Be proud but not boastful. Contentment rather than frustration. Don't worry about approval from others"

The above quotation gives a sense of the learning that had taken place. Naturally the co-participants were a little uncertain and apprehensive at first about taking part in the day, but as soon as they 'found their feet' and engaged in the workshop these initial feelings seemed to disappear. Laughter filled the rooms and everyone became very focused on what they doing.

Facilitating a more open experiential type of workshop day afforded all the co-participants the opportunity to see that they could take part in different art forms and be successful at that, echoing the need for challenge (Nassedn 2007). This was something that Julia (CR1) and May (CR2) observed in their reflections on the research process.

### Table 9 – May's (CR2) reflections on the research process

Many were too busy to pursue new interests as their work, home and family filled all their time. Retired people not long ago found family activities were all they needed to fill their days, and some may think they are expected to be at home! Today, retired people are fitter and younger and often don't have the family life around them. Therefore, we need interests and need to keep busy enough so we do not have time to brood over problems. *For the sake of our health – mental and bodily* –we need the arts (in any form now) to stimulate to find different experiences and take part, to take you out of yourself, to enjoy and concentrate on something else. This gives us a reason to start each day.

A challenge, however small, is good for body and mind. Some need a kickstart to go out to find out what is on. We need contact with people, so to join a club, class or group we will find others with similar interests, and it is good to share and encourage others. A need to strive a bit is good and to share time with like-minded people.

Whatever art we join, it does not matter how good we are, it is good for us – body and mind.



**Table 9 – Jullia's (CR1) reflections on the research process**

I found it most interesting to read through the co-participants' views and ideas etc. both before and after the workshops. What comes over very strongly was a will from everyone to live life to the full, to go on learning as long as possible, to wring out every bit of fun and creativity there was on offer! There wasn't anyone who had ever just sat around doing nothing. One of the most noticeable themes was the way they all related strongly to nature, the great outdoors, theirs and others' gardens. What a lovely thought ... all those wonderful creations left behind with a mixture of pride, regret, and a comprehension of the creativity involved in what some might regard as just part of every day life. In fact, there was quite a lot about how homemaking skills were turned into craft and art. Future generations will not have those skills so readily available to draw upon after our age of buy cheap and throw away. (But there is apparently quite a renaissance of knitting and sewing in younger people, and perhaps the scarcity of oil will help the renewal of handwork and pride in it.)

Another strand was the feeling of how participation can create a variety of relationships, from getting better at working with others, to making and retaining friends who might then spur one on to trying yet more undiscovered creative activities. Many spoke of lack of opportunities to be creative in other than the home when they were young – that made them both hugely keen to do new things now, and a bit nervous about how they would cope too.

It was enlightening to discover how well the Botanic Gardens (Edinburgh) continue to offer new creative experiences to all, and this referred back to the stimulus of nature. Other courses, which they had previously enjoyed, seemed either to dry up due to lack of funding, or to become prey to policies of assessment, etc. It does sometimes seem to me that local courses are always offered with a piece of paper to take away and the insistence upon moving along to the next stage – not the way creating works at all, is it?

Overall, the experience came over as very positive, creative and motivational for all the co-participants – for me, too! ... and now????!!...

## Section Six – Conclusion

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### 6.1 Introduction

This project has illustrated the importance of engaging in the arts for the newly retired older person. It has uncovered what motivates the person to select and take part in certain arts activities. In general the reasons for participation were rooted in the artistically creative, social, and psychological realms of the experience. All these lead to artistic, personal and social fulfilment, enriching the co-participants experience of life beyond their working years. The demise of functional arts and crafts in the home was balanced by revived interest in creative art as a cognitive stimulus, an opportunity to make new friends and experience the satisfaction of making art as an end in itself. The co-participants also cited the need for challenge as a major stimulus which galvanised their intentions of taking part in activities provided in the community. Some of the co-participants happily initiated their own arts groups if what they wanted was not readily available. We, the researchers, were pleased to note this proactive approach, which reflects the position of Bennets *et al* (2005), Sandel and Johnson (1987) and Greaves and Farbus (2006), who recognise the need for active participation in relevant activities for personal fulfilment, and when some co-participants expressed the wish to continue the arts workshops outwith the project we were able to make some suggestions as to how this could be achieved.

The challenge of creating original new work in any artistic medium was clearly voiced by the co-participants as a welcome means of keeping their minds and senses stimulated, in accordance with the theories of Gardner (1999) and Eisner (2002): for some, the process of creation was more important, while for others the achievement of a finished piece gave more satisfaction. Creative art was a chance for them to define their own identities, which improved self-esteem, in keeping with the findings of McMurray (1989) and Seligman (2005). Being part of a creative community offered a sense of identity, especially for those who had come to live in the area in later life. Most of the co-participants felt that belonging to a group – an artistic community – gave them a supportive framework, in which their individual talents could be nurtured. The trade-off between the group ‘culture’ and the individual’s desire for creative fulfilment is consistent with Bourdieu (2005) in that the group benefits from a new source of inspiration, while the individual gains a ‘springboard’ for taking her / his creativity to a new level. It was acknowledged, however, that not everyone liked to work in a group. A few preferred to create their art alone, while two took an active role as organisers

in their music group, and another ran her own visual art group on an *ad hoc* basis with invited friends. These instances suggest that there is room for modification of Bourdieu's (2005) position.

This study is underpinned by a holistic understanding of "wellbeing" (WHO 31/07/08), encompassing the physical, mental and social experience of individuals. Recent research (Harris and Hastings 2004, Nassaden 2007, Nimrod 2007) supports the idea that joining an arts group for one reason might reap unexpected benefits for participants, e.g. joining a dance class had social spin-offs for Nassaden's (2007) informants. Our study, however, indicates that arts activities undertaken not just for recreation, but for the creative challenge, meet the criteria for wellbeing as defined by WHO (31/07/08) and Nussbaum (2000), and furthermore enable the older persons to reach a new level of fulfilment.

6.2 The key findings from this project are summarised as follows:

- A sense of community and sharing of arts experience are important outcomes of the arts experience for most – but not all – older persons.
- The person's motivation to participate in an arts activity is determined by personal taste. However, breadth of choice and duration of available arts activities is often limited due to economic factors.
- Motivation to participate in an arts class was significantly aided by prior personal contact with a friend or acquaintance attending the same class.
- Older persons were often self-critical about their artistic abilities and the aesthetic quality of what they produced. Some participants sought to create an end product and others wished to enjoy the process
- The sense of being challenged, cognitively and physically, was an important factor for reaping the benefits of participating in creative arts. The more active the participation, the more enjoyment was gained from it.
- Desire to seek new challenges was experienced as responsible for keeping the person stimulated and active and helping to prevent premature decline into ill health

- The notion of having fun is an important motivational factor. Findings suggest that apprehensions about participating tended to disappear once the activity was underway;
- Participation in the arts helped to alleviate the pressures and stresses of daily life; for many participants this was a cathartic and life enhancing experience.

### 6.3 The Implications for practice and policy, and recommendations for the future research are:

- In terms of future development more long-term provision of arts activities needs to be made available to the older person. The older person benefits from a sustained period of engagement in arts activities.
- Similarly, this project has illustrated that social networks may be enhanced when long-term arts activities are given the opportunity to thrive. Long-term provision of the arts needs to support the development of such networks and take into account the psychological wellbeing that they can provide.
- The older person's personal choice must be taken into account when considering what arts activities are offered locally. A sufficient range of arts activities needs to be made available to meet the personal tastes of the older person and to maintain an active interest in the activity.
- For example, arts activities that focus on artistic outcomes can offer a much needed link with different groups of older persons, different generations and the wider community. The artistic product, be it a painting or a performance can enable people to 'speak', and be present in an empowered way within the community.
- Equally important is the provision of process-based arts activities that have a psychological emphasis. Through such activities, issues around self-esteem, loss of the unknown and the familiar, motivation and personal direction can be further explored. Interventions such as the arts therapies can assist on this front for people who are finding the transition from working to retired life just difficult or those who have developed a more serious psychological problem. In both cases the presence

of an experienced arts professional and the use of the arts can address issues around self-critique and enable the person to relax into the arts making process.

- Other types of engagement in the arts such as witnessing performances and/or attending galleries and exhibitions can be further explored as contributing to wellbeing. Artistic distance and kinaesthetic empathy are concepts that can be further researched in relation to the older person and his/her perceived sense of 'wellness'.
- The involvement of multiple methods of data collection and different research designs can potentially allow for a number of different topics to be studied. In-depth qualitative research or mixed design study that involved both qualitative and quantitative methods of data collection can be further explored in future studies.
- Older persons can become actively engaged in research projects. This study has illustrated the valuable contribution of the co-researchers; their experience offered a fresh perspective on the research design. Research training would encourage older persons to become actively engaged in research studies that hold an older people's agenda. Arts-based research in particular can enable older people as researchers to achieve alternative ways of communicating ideas and discovering experiences that can lead to well informed and rich findings.

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## Appendix A – Invitation letters

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February 2008

Dear

*The older persons' experience of creativity in relation to wellbeing: a collaborative research project*

Thank you for your interest in the RBS COPA creativity and wellbeing project. Your participation in the project would be most welcome. Please find below some further information concerning the study.

Participation in the project would involve you taking part in one small group discussion with 5 or 6 other people and in a free arts workshop day where you would have the opportunity to participate in two different arts workshops of your choice (no prior experience necessary). We would then ask you to give us some feedback on the workshops

Please find enclosed an information sheet outlining the study more fully, a copy of the consent form and a stamped addressed envelope which we would ask you to sign and return if you do choose to participate in the project. If you do choose to take part in the study we will contact you shortly to arrange a suitable date for the group discussion.

Please do not hesitate to contact us if you require further information about the study.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank you for your interest in the study

Yours sincerely,

Jane Burns and Susan Oliver  
RBS COPA - IOP Creativity and Wellbeing Project



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24 February 2008

Dear \_\_\_\_\_

**IOP COPA - Arts Workshop 17<sup>th</sup> March 2006**

I am looking forward to welcoming you to the arts workshop in the 17<sup>th</sup> March 2008 at the Congregational Church Hall, \_\_\_\_\_.

Please find enclosed a programme outlining the events of the day as well as a profile of the arts workshops that will be available on the day. I would be grateful if you could select your preferred morning and afternoon workshop and return enclosed sheet to me in the SAE provided. I will attempt to allocate you to your preferred workshop but please note this cannot be guaranteed.

The aim of the day is to build on the group interviews. To find how you feel about taking part in the actual arts workshops. Feedback sheets and some group discussion will take place after the workshops in order to help facilitate our understanding of your response to the topic of creativity and well-being.

Lunch will be provided on the day so I would be grateful if you could contact me as soon as possible if you have any particular dietary requirements.

With your consent, we are considering placing disposable cameras around the venue for co-participants to photograph the workshops. The photographs would be kept as a record of the day and used in the evaluation report and subsequent community or peer reviewed publications relating only to the project. Please indicate on the attached consent form if you would be happy or not to be photographed. Please return the form in the SAE with your workshop preferences sheet.

Many thanks for your participation.

Jane Burns  
Project coordinator .

## Appendix B - Programme for arts workshop day

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### Programme for Arts Workshop Day – Monday 17<sup>th</sup> March 2008

Time	Programme
9.30 – 10	Registration/ Tea and coffee
10 – 10.15	Welcome and Warm up
2.00 – 2.45	Feedback and close
10.15 – 11.30	Workshop
11.30 – 11.45	Feedback
11.45 – 12.30	Lunch
12.30 – 2.00	Workshop

Appendix C – Consent forms



**Consent Form for Co-participants**

*The older persons' experience of creativity in relation to wellbeing: a collaborative research project*

Please initial box

I have read the information sheet

I have had the opportunity to ask questions relating to my participation in the project

I give permission for my contribution in the group discussion and feedback session to be tape recorded

I understand that my confidentiality is ensured

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw from the study at any time without giving any reason

I agree to participate in this study

Signed .....

Name (Block Capitals) .....

Date .....

**Consent Form for Photographing**

With your consent, we are considering placing disposable cameras around the venue for participants to photograph each other participating in the workshop day. The photographs would be kept as a record of the day and used in the project evaluation report and subsequent community or peer reviewed publications relating only to the project. Please indicate below if you would be happy or not be happy to be photographed.

I do not wish to be photographed

I do wish to be photographed

Name (Block Capitals)

.....

Signature

.....

Address

.....

Date

.....

## Appendix D - Workshop feedback sheet

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1) How did you find the workshop?

- Your expectations about the workshop
- Motivation to participate
- Were you an active participant

2) How did the workshop make you feel?

- Part of the group?

3) Any other thoughts about the workshop?