



Live and Learn 2015

Evaluation Report



Acknowledgements

Third Age Acting Company

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Background

Liverpool based **Collective Encounters** is an arts organisation and registered charity specialising in Theatre for Social Change. Working with professional artists and local people, the charity uses theatre to engage those on the margins of society, telling untold stories and facilitating personal and social change.

Over the course of the last ten years **Collective Encounters** has been working in partnership with older people in the region to run a range of arts projects aimed at reducing isolation, supporting older people to develop positive relationships in the local community and explore relevant social and political issues that affect or are relevant to them.

Collective Encounters' work with the third age community offers the following services under the project title **Live and Learn**:

- a Third Age Acting Company which brings older people together on a regular basis to make theatre about social and political issues affecting them.
- theatre for social change workshops in support settings for older people including care homes, GP surgeries and community centres.
- training for family and professional carers in the use of arts in dementia care.
- international field research in age and creativity.

Collective Encounters is also the delivery agent for National Museum Liverpool's **House of Memories** performance based training programme for the health and social care sector.

This is the fourth report **Collective Encounters** has published on arts and older people. Further documentation can be found on www.collective-encounters.org.uk/research.

This report documents activities undertaken through the **Live and Learn** programme in 2015 only.



Project Summary

Overview

In 2014 Collective Encounters was awarded a grant of £9700 for Live and Learn from the Liverpool Clinical Commissioning Group. Live and Learn promised to be a yearlong creative programme offering older people the chance to explore issues pertaining to health & lifestyle, reduce isolation amongst older people in the local community and undertake work to foster good relations between older people and the wider community.

Activities undertaken through Live and Learn comprised of:

- a series of performances in the community exploring and raising awareness of issues relating to health, lifestyle & ageing.
- 30 theatre workshops and rehearsals for up to 25 older people per session which looked to develop confidence, performance skills and make theatre.
- a series of workshops in community, care and health settings designed to encourage older people to take part in the wider programme and to generate research material around health, lifestyle and ageing.
- desk research into the relevant health and lifestyle issues affecting older people
- an evaluation report of the activities undertaken

The reach of the project can be found in the Reach & Engagement section of this publication.

Evaluation Methodologies & Outcomes

Live & Learn 2015 hoped to a/ increase audience and participants understanding of health, lifestyle issues affecting older people and the role of economics on health and b/ give participants a greater sense of empowerment and positive identity. These outcomes were evaluated using post intervention discussion, workshop games and audience feedback forms.

Live & Learn 2015 hoped to improve participants' wellbeing by encouraging them to be active; take notice; keep learning; and give. These outcomes have been evaluated using participants feedback, workshop games and the WEMWBS indicators. Participants completed WEMWBS forms before and after more than three interventions.

All evaluation activities were undertaken inline with Collective Encounters' Quality & Evaluation Policy. Within this publication, progress towards outcomes is documented within the personal, social and political outcomes sections. The quality of the artistic product is analysed on page 10, Artistic Outcomes using Collective Encounters Quality Indicators. A copy of the Quality Indicators can be found in Appendix 1.

Project Timeline

Deadline	Milestone	Lead
December 2014	Project set up: Evaluation framework, promotion of project to older people's networks	Head of Participation Marketing Coordinator
January 2015	Outreach workshops, field and desk research into ageing, health & lifestyle issues	Artistic Director Head of Participation
February 2015	Outreach workshops continue, research analysed and theatre writer commissioned	Artistic Director Head of Participation
March 2015	Script deadline and rehearsed reading	Artistic Director Head of Participation
April - September 2015	Rehearsals, further outreach workshops and event preparation	Executive Director Head of Participation General Manager
June - September 2015	Promotion of event	Executive Director Head of Participation General Manager
September 2015	Live & Learn Symposium takes place	Full team
October 2015	Data analysis and evaluation	Executive Director Head of Participation



Theatre for Social Change Approach

Throughout all its work Collective Encounters adopts a Theatre for Social Change approach. The Theatre for Social Change approach allows for theatre to be made out of the community it serves. Collective Encounters' programme responds to research, ideas and concerns uncovered through work with communities. Work undertaken can be anything from a series of workshops, an artist residency or a large-scale professional production.

The Theatre for Social Change approach operates on the cutting edge between cultural and social intervention. Much of Collective Encounters' aims to reveal more clearly the way on which the world works, to make strange the familiar and to expose the systems that largely are invisible in everyday life.

Collective Encounters' Theatre for Social Change programme aims to find ways to engage people who would not normally access the arts. All performance and workshops are provided free of charge and most take place in non-traditional arts settings.

Collective Encounters' participatory programme can lead to a wide range of personal and social benefits to the individuals and communities taking part. Individuals often feel empowered by the work and report an improved mental health and wellbeing.



Artistic Outcomes

The Live and Learn 2015 project culminated in a September tour of a show which articulated older people's concerns about the privatisation of the NHS, health and wealth inequalities and life expectancy in poorer communities. **Wealth is Health** is a 40-minute variety production performed by the project's Third Age Acting Company.

Material from **Wealth is Health** was drawn from desk research into wealth and health inequalities in Britain in the 21st Century; conversations between Collective Encounters' facilitators and older people both living in the community and in care homes and creative exercises undertaken by the Third Age Acting Company.

Wealth is Health was written by Sarah Thornton and rehearsed and directed by Amanda Redvers-Rowe over a four-month period. The production used comedy, songs, music, tableaux's and naturalistic sketches to engage the audience in the debate around health and wealth inequalities. 81% of audiences thought the piece was of a very high quality. Other audience feedback included:

"Fantastic show, I smiled the whole way through".

"Loved the songs"

"Lovely voices"

"Loved the chair dance routine and the lyrics of the songs"

"Story was told with great enthusiasm"

"Surprised at the comedy"

"I wasn't expecting to laugh so much"

"The show was very professional"

"Loved the education [al] nature of the show"



Personal Outcomes

Live & Learn 2015 hoped to improve participants' wellbeing by encouraging them to be active; take notice; keep learning; and give. These outcomes have been evaluated using participants feedback, workshop games and the WEMWBS indicators. Participants completed WEMWBS forms before and after more than three interventions.

Feedback from participants who attended weekly sessions regularly indicated they highly valued the companionship, and the coming together to share ideas. They felt the sessions helped them to maintain active minds and facilitated them to talk about issues they would not normally engage in. Although challenging, they also welcomed the opportunity to learn lines.

Regular participants particularly enjoyed learning movement sequences, undertaking physical warm ups, dance, voice and breathing exercises.

All participants reported they found it good fun and enjoyed meeting and talking to new people. Many reported at the end of the process they felt like they had known each other for years.

"The experience was good and I was glad to be given the opportunity. It improved my wellbeing and that of everyone else"

"I wasn't expecting to laugh so much"

"I loved every minute of it".

"We've got brains, let us use them".

"I think it was fabulous. I'd love you to come and stay here and walk out into that room and get those people out of those chairs.....your brains are there for life not just till you're 60."

"I'm on the same plane as you, I've loved every minute of it..... I'd love us all to meet again and go through the daft things we've done in life and the nice things we've done.....just have a laugh"

"Made me happy that other people have similar views to me".

"I never knew theatre could be theraputic."

"Before the acting I would have been shaking and my mouth would have been dry, but the acting's helped me. I was still nervous, like, but I could control the nerves."

A sample of participants who performed in **Wealth is Health** were asked to complete the WEMWBS questionnaires at the beginning of the creative process and after the final performance. The seven questions asked under the WEMWEBS questionnaire are listed below. Participants are asked to record their response using a 1 - 5 scale, with 1 being low and 5 being high:

- | | |
|----|--|
| 1. | I am feeling optimistic about the future |
| 2. | I am feeling useful |
| 3. | I am feeling relaxed |
| 4. | I am dealing with problems well |
| 5. | I am thinking clearly |
| 6. | I am feeling close to other people |
| 7. | I am able to make up my own mind about thing |

Areas that showed the most improvements are '*I am feeling relaxed*' and '*I am dealing with problems well*'. At the end of the project improvement in wellbeing ranged from 2 to 14. The mean average improvement was 8. The most common change and improvement in wellbeing recorded was 8.

Social & Political Outcomes

As well as the personal outcomes, Live & Learn 2015 hoped to increase audience and participants understanding of health and lifestyle issues affecting older people and the role of economics on health. This outcome was evaluated using post intervention discussion, workshop games and audience feedback forms.

All of the participants reported an increased understanding of health and lifestyle issues affecting older people. Most participants were also particularly interested in the effect of money on health. The majority of the participants who took part were from a disadvantaged background. One outreach workshop was undertaken within a more affluent area of the city. The responses of these participants was very different. All the participants enjoyed the chance to engage and expand their intellectual capacity and many stated this was quite a rare opportunity as usual activities undertaken were more passive such as bingo and bridge. 81% of the audience also reported an increase in understanding of lifestyle and economics on health after watching the **Wealth is Health** performance.

Participants and audience members commented:

"Brilliant. I loved the energy of the acting company. It was funny, informative and very poignant. Financial inequality is on the greatest crimes of the developed world"

"I was surprised how passionate the British public are about the NHS".

"The subject was well told and informative."

"The NHS is in crisis"

"I never knew that people live 19 years longer in a healthy, wealthy environment"

"Learning about health inequality is eye opening".

"People rely a lot on the NHS"



Audience Engagement & Reach

The target participant for Live & Learn workshops was older people - both those living in the community and accessing care settings. The target audience for **Wealth is Health** was those involved in delivering services for older people, the north Liverpool community, the creative community and older people not yet involved in creative activity.

A database of 256 contacts of activity coordinators in care homes, care home managers, day service managers and community centre manager across Liverpool was put together. Collective Encounters also updated its contact base of individuals who were responsible for making decisions about services for older people within the five borough of Greater Merseyside and this included local Councillors and civil servants. The project was launched in December 2014 with electronic information distributed to these individuals and follow up calls made in January 2015.

From 12 outreach workshops took place in support settings for older people. Venues included: *The Poppy Centre, The Clock Community Centre, The League of Well Doers, Porchfield Community Centre, Merseyside Dance Initiative's 50 Moves Group, Sedgemore Care Home and Childwall Fiveways Family Medical Centre*. 96 older people attended these workshops.

Following these workshops a Third Age Acting Company was put together made up of nine core members. This group met weekly to further interrogate some of the ideas uncovered through the outreach programme. Membership of this group remained open through the preparation period for performance. Updates on the progress of the project were posted on Collective Encounters' social media platforms and quarterly newsletter.

Promotion for the Live & Learn Symposium event started in June 2015. Fliers were printed and distributed to the older person's support sectors, local decision makers and the artistic and cultural community in Liverpool. Two weeks prior to the event it was promoted on Radio Merseyside and the Liverpool Echo. A large banner was fixed to the front of the Poppy Centre building in attempt to attract interest from the local community.

Whilst outreach workshops reach a significant number of older people, attendance at the Live and Learn Symposium event was more successful in reaching and engaging artists the creative sector. The Arts & Dementia Masterclass was very well attended by both participatory artists, arts managers and other cultural sector workers. Recommendations for future events are to:

- schedule for weekday in order to reach more decision makers within older people's services.
- work more closely with the family carers and those working with voluntary organisations whose aim it is to befriend the more vulnerable and isolated older people.

Engagement Figures	Target	Actual
Project workers (artists & support)	3	3
Participants & Audience	170	176
Volunteers	3	5
Workshops	34	38
Performances	3	3

Learning & Recommendations

Below is a list of recommendations for the delivery of future Theatre for Social Change projects with older people on Merseyside:

Budget cuts to older people's services, in particular Luncheon Clubs, and leisure activities, has meant reduced staffing making it more challenging to find existing groups of older people. Further work needs to be undertaken in ways to access older people living in their own home and not accessing services. Greater collaboration with Housing Associations is recommended for future delivery as well as befriending organisations.

Participants particularly valued the Theatre for Social Change approach. Many commented services and activities on offer do not challenge or stretch them in anyway. Participants seem to highly value the opportunity to engage in an intellectual capacity.

Further research could be undertaken into the value of touch improvisation with people with little or no verbal communication skills, and in particular those in the later stages of dementia. The project found engaging people through touch with the support of classical, calming and peaceful music enabled more successful communication and instruction.

People with dementia often take a little more time to engage in the activities undertaken. Often staff dismissed the activity stating some people did not want to take part, but ultimately everyone engage in activity of some kind.

Staff and professional carers often took a little time to come around but many commented on the value and the simplicity of the approach. Training for the health and social sector on the use of arts and the undertaking of simple exercises for the people they care for is recommended.

Relationships need to be fostered with those who care for or support older people living in their own home. This will ultimately help older people to take part in positive activities and connect with the local community. It is recommended that further research should be undertaken in this area if a project of this nature is to access the more vulnerable and isolated.



Appendix 1: Quality Indicators

We aim for all our work to be of a 'high quality'. In order to assess whether our work actually is excellent and of a high quality it is necessary to understand what we mean by those terms so we have produced a set of quality indicators against which we can evaluate our creative processes and theatre products.

For Collective Encounters, a high quality process is:

Inclusive: participants are treated equally and fairly; their contributions are valued and their differences are respected; the environment is safe.

Creative: the process involves artistic and creative development for all involved; it is exciting, fun and enriching; it increases understanding and appreciation of theatre and the arts.

Challenging: participants are encouraged to ask questions and explore ideas that they might not otherwise have done; and to try out new ways of tackling old situations.

Empowering: participants are supported to make sense of their place in the world, to think in different ways, to break down barriers and challenge received wisdom.

Responsive: to the needs of individuals and the group; as far possible, the process and subject matter are guided by participants; and there is a strong sense of ownership.

Developmental: the process offers opportunities for progression, the chance to develop new skills and affects or changes participants in a way that they deem positive.

For Collective Encounters, a high quality product is:

Exciting: in its theatricality, invention, ambition and communication of ideas; reinforcing the value and distinctiveness of live performance.

Provocative: in stimulating its audience to think in new ways, ask questions they might otherwise not have asked, offering new insights to old problems, and challenging the status quo.

Technically accomplished: demonstrating an appropriate level of technical expertise, sound production values and seamless delivery.

Important: in helping us to make sense of our place in the world, lifting the audience above the realm of the day to day, offering something beyond simple entertainment; and holding the possibility of change.