

Summary of Pilot Programme Evaluation, July 2014

Living Voices is an innovative national pilot programme run by the Scottish Poetry Library (SPL) and Scottish Storytelling Centre (SSC) with the aim of developing and delivering a model of practice for working with older audiences, particularly in care homes, using the spoken word (storytelling, poetry and song) and reminiscence. Living Voices was piloted between July 2012 and July 2014 and was evaluated by Blake Stevenson to evaluate impact and benefit; this summary presents key findings from their evaluation.

Background

There is increasing evidence that participatory arts (including spoken word) and reminiscence have a positive impact on wellbeing and quality of life for older people. Furthermore, healthcare policy in Scotland increasingly recognises the role of social and cultural activity in continued wellbeing in older age. In the current climate of an ageing population and limited public spending; when care staff are often hard pressed for time to attend to medical and physical needs, let alone social needs, time spent by volunteers and arts professionals has potential to offer residents opportunity to engage with high quality arts, experiment with their own creativity, and make important human connections. Further, professional artists have knowledge and expertise that can be shared with care staff to support development of creative cultures in care homes. This can all support wellbeing and contribute to a positive quality of life in care settings.

The Pilot

Living Voices set out to explore a model of service provision using a combination of two spoken word art forms, poetry and story, combined with music. The 18-month programme was delivered in care homes and other care settings in Aberdeen, South Ayrshire and Perth and Kinross working with groups of five to 15 residents (depending on individual support needs). Sessions were planned and facilitated by professional artists (storytellers, poets and community musicians) usually supported by a volunteer and care home staff. We:

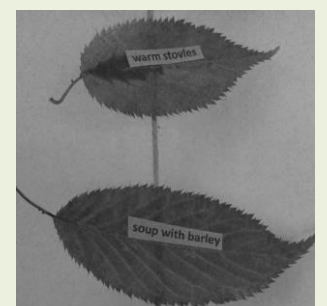
- ✂ Delivered 288 sessions in 18 care settings over 18 months
- ✂ Reached an average monthly audience of 140 people
- ✂ Worked with a team of 10 freelance artists and 15 volunteers
- ✂ Worked in partnership with local libraries, councils and NHS.

Living Voices draws on the rich culture of spoken word in Scotland, particularly the participative form of the ceilidh. Participation is core to the model: Living Voices is not intended to be about artists performing, but about artists facilitating a shared group dynamic. Spoken word is the foundation of a co-created session in which every participant is enabled to contribute in their own way, whether listening, reciting, sharing memories or participating in conversation.

Evaluation methods

Evaluation findings draw on qualitative and quantitative evidence gathered using the following data collection methods:

- ✂ Baseline, interim and final surveys with facilitators, volunteers and care homes
- ✂ Monthly facilitator reflection logs and volunteer observation sheets
- ✂ Quarterly residents' survey and care home observations
- ✂ Researcher observation visits to three sessions at three different care homes
- ✂ Interviews with facilitators, volunteers, care home staff and local partners.



Supporting wellbeing and quality of life in residential care

Living Voices is designed to be inclusive of all residents in care homes, and is dementia-friendly. The evaluation aimed to assess benefits and outcomes for older people participating in Living Voices; it demonstrates Living Voices is effective in benefitting mood, and wellbeing, providing access to creative activity that can support improved social interaction and relationships for carehome residents, all factors that support quality of life in residential care. Evaluation indicates:

- ✘ Living Voices has had a significant positive impact on group dynamics, social interaction and residents' relationships with each other and care home staff. Facilitators and care home staff have observed residents making new friendships and close bonds with one another as a result of Living Voices. This has reduced feelings of loneliness and improved resident experiences within the care home.
- ✘ The rhythm of the different spoken word art forms used in the Living Voices session model facilitates an environment that is both relaxing and engaging for participants.
- ✘ Living Voices has a positive impact on participants' mood, many people feel happier or more content after a session, and this impact can be felt for a period of time afterwards.
- ✘ Living Voices sessions also creates a space for participants to be contemplative and share and express sadness. Staff and participants often describe sessions as a "safe place" to engage with each other and share memories, both good and bad.
- ✘ The combined use of different art forms provides a stimulus that appeals to a variety of tastes and taps into different personal experiences and memories. It can help participants recall and share stories and memories; but does not rely on memory recall, enabling participants to share responses to poems, stories and songs "in the moment".
- ✘ Enables care home residents to actively participate to the extent that they desire and they are able. We work with small groups, which can enable those who might be less engaged in a larger group environment or more passive activity to participate.
- ✘ Enables residents, where possible, to influence and inform the direction and content of the sessions.
- ✘ Enables residents to use their own creativity, for example singing, sharing stories, using verbal or physical humour, in some cases writing songs and poems.

"This model gives us all dignity. Living Voices is enjoyable shared activity and because it is facilitated you know what you offer, is what people want. People in care homes might be just as likely to want the Rolling Stones as old War songs and using this model they get their say and get something appropriate." (Facilitator)

"It has a huge impact on residents who participate... they're more relaxed, they have better morale and they are more talkative" (Care home staff).

"I find this of terrific value...It's very good, stimulating to be learning new things when you get to this age!" (Resident).

"I feel more relaxed [after Living Voices], the days don't feel so long" (Resident).

"One lady didn't like to join in with activities and wasn't very social often making excuses not to join activities or eat with others, and her family were worried about her wellbeing but she was persuaded to attend Living Voices and now she actively wishes to speak with other residents, the sessions helped her make connections and reduced her isolation" (Care home staff)

"Oh yes, I enjoy it. No complaints because if I did I would have told you! [laughter]. I like sharing my stories. I like the poems and some of the stories you tell us are awful good, and I love a sing song, not that I can sing! [laughter] I love to hear everyone singing, and yes, singing puts me in a good mood, definitely!" (Resident)

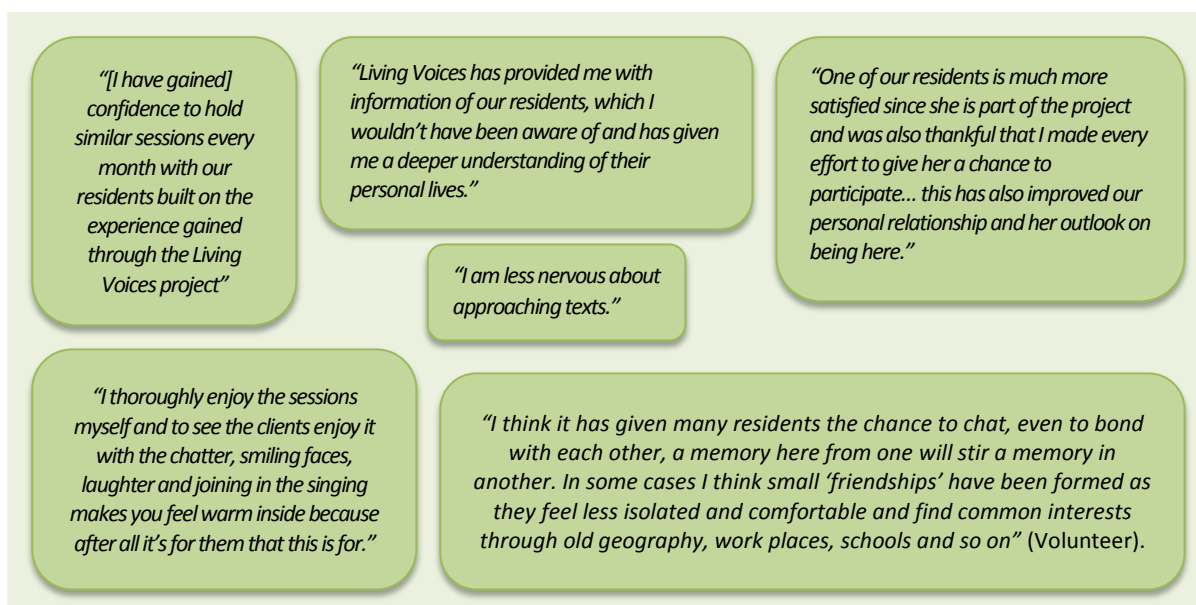
"I love this group and how it allows everyone a chance to express themselves. It is such a morale booster and their confidence has shown such an improvement, it truly is remarkable" (Care home staff).

"It's given them something to look forward to, to fully connect with, whatever their communicative level they have someone who listens to them actively... some began to speak where before they were withdrawn, another started to mix in the home...I think they appreciate they are not pressured to behave a certain way and are accepted for who they are today" (Facilitator)

Supporting staff skills and satisfaction

Participating care homes identified staff to work with the Living Voices group every month. Evaluation demonstrated that involvement in Living Voices is a very positive and welcome experience for care staff and has a positive impact on relationships with residents, understanding of their past and preferences, and other components that support person-centred care.

- ✘ Living Voices can have a significant positive impact on staff and resident relationships, helping staff to know their residents better, communicate more effectively with them, spend quality time with them and to see residents as unique individuals with a better appreciation of their past and preferences; all key components that will assist in the delivery of effective person-centred care. Living Voices training packages for care staff can improve confidence in ability to deliver creative activities with residents; particularly using poetry, story and song.
- ✘ Understanding of the benefits of engaging with the oral and literary arts for residents.
- ✘ Developing skills and confidence in using poems, stories, songs and reminiscence as tools to run activities or engage with residents one-to-one, supporting the development of creative activities in the care home.
- ✘ Living Voices can have a positive influence on how the care home is viewed by residents.
- ✘ Care staff involved with the Living Voices pilot reported increased job satisfaction as a result of participation.



Case Study: Staff Training

In Perth and Kinross, Living Voices is delivered in close partnership with the Care Home Activity Network (CHAN). With CHAN and local partners, we identified that care homes involved in the CHAN network would value the opportunity to receive training to deliver activities influenced by Living Voices techniques and approaches. Funding from The Gannochy Trust enabled us to develop pilot training, comprising of a full day of practical, skills-based training on facilitating activities using a Living Voices approach, and confidence in using poetry and story; and a half-day follow-up session four weeks later. Staff from 8 care homes attended the training, with every care home nominating two people to attend, so they could support each other in implementing learning.

At the follow-up session, participants contributed to an evaluation discussion exploring the benefits of the training and ways Living Voices could support future working, including the development of support networks, which might include artists' mentoring care staff.

- ✘ All participants were able to implement learning from the training in their care home; either running bespoke Living Voices-style sessions or using skills and techniques learnt in day-to-day care or other activities they run.
- ✘ Participants were able to identify the benefits of a Living Voices approach and recognise positive outcomes for residents in sessions they ran. This included residents thinking more/being more interested/engaged/happy, residents getting to know each other; and importantly that they were getting to know important information about residents and felt a 'togetherness' with residents.
- ✘ Many training participants were able to co-produce activities with residents, involving residents in planning at all stage; and were able to share learning and resources with colleagues.

Impact for Living Voices Facilitators and Volunteers

Evaluation has demonstrated the benefits of Living Voices for artists and volunteers involved in the project too. Overall, it has been a highly positive experience for the ten professional artists (facilitators) and 18 volunteers involved. Evaluation demonstrates:

- ✂ Living Voices provides a valued professional development opportunity for artists in terms of their creative practice with older audiences. It has also influenced artists' wider creative practice and outputs.
- ✂ Living Voices has had a positive impact for volunteers in terms of professional development, with some volunteers gaining employment as a result of their experience, and others developing new contacts or skills.
- ✂ Positive impacts in terms of facilitators' and volunteers' own health and wellbeing, their outlook on life and their abilities to deal with challenges presented by their own personal circumstances.

"Professionally, it's had a massive positive effect for me... [it has] been a really useful learning experience to watch how the material I use has had a positive social effect – I've never witnessed this before. It's really taken my creative practice leaps ahead, giving me complete recognition of how and why things work...fantastic for my confidence." (Facilitator).

"I always leave the session feeling uplifted and centred rather than rushing on to the next meeting and the next problem to sort out... I keep hearing how volunteering gives workforces huge benefits in terms of wellbeing and mental health. I think this project really proves that" (Volunteer).

Reflections on the Living Voices model and future potential

The Living Voices pilot programme set out to develop and test a practice model for using spoken word to improve the wellbeing and quality of life of older people in residential care settings; and has been highly successful in doing this - evaluation concludes the piloted approach is highly effective at improving the experiences and wellbeing of older people in care settings, as well as supporting positive outcomes for volunteers, artists and care staff. The Living Voices model provides a personalised approach to care of older people, where people's histories, interests and personal preferences are addressed, which could support a range of care settings to deliver care in a more person-centred way. There are a number of factors which have been critical to the success of the Living Voices model and will inform future development of the programme:

- ✂ use of professional artists who can bring the "outside world" into the care setting and are skilled in using multiple and combined art forms flexibly to meet participant needs and create an atmosphere that maximises impact;
- ✂ rather than performing to an audience, Living Voices offers a curated conversation that facilitates participation and co-production; enabling and encouraging a resident-led model that offers a personalised and tailored approach;
- ✂ the use of a combination of spoken word art forms to "trigger stories, memories, participation, develop friendships and connections" and to relate to different needs and desires;
- ✂ a longer-term intervention which allows relationships to grow over time, and maximises impact for all.

The pilot also highlights a continued need and demand for activity; both within care homes, and in other health and social care settings from pilot local authorities and other regions. Evaluation suggests a number of potential options for future development including the involvement of family members/informal carers in sessions; expanding to other community-based settings to engage with older people living in their own homes; using professional artists to train and mentor carehome staff to deliver sessions independently; and making Living Voices resources and guidance widely available to care settings.

While the wider rollout of Living Voices may be challenging in the current economic climate, Scottish Poetry Library and Scottish Storytelling Centre are committed to exploring a sustainable future for the Living Voices approach. The evaluation confirms the value and benefits of using spoken word to develop and promote person-centred approaches to the care of older people, and the value of using professional artists who are highly skilled and experienced to undertake this kind of work, or to support care settings to undertake this work. The Living Voices model moves beyond more traditional, often passive and generic entertainment and craft-based activities commonly delivered in care settings for older people, to offer a group model that is participative and personalised and offers meaningful opportunities for social interaction, relationship building and fulfilment. It has great potential to support a range of current policy initiatives¹ relating to an ageing population and the care of older people.

Read the full project evaluation and executive summary at www.scottishpoetrylibrary.org.uk/learn/carers

Contact: livingvoices@spl.org.uk

¹ For example, Reshaping Care for Older People (Scottish Government); Scotland's Dementia Strategy 2013 -16 (Scottish Government); Standards of care for people with dementia (in particular 'People with dementia will have the opportunity to be included in community life and meaningful activities as they wish'); and The COSLA/Scottish Government report, 'The Future of Residential Care for Older People in Scotland.