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Evaluation of the Living Voices pilot

Final report

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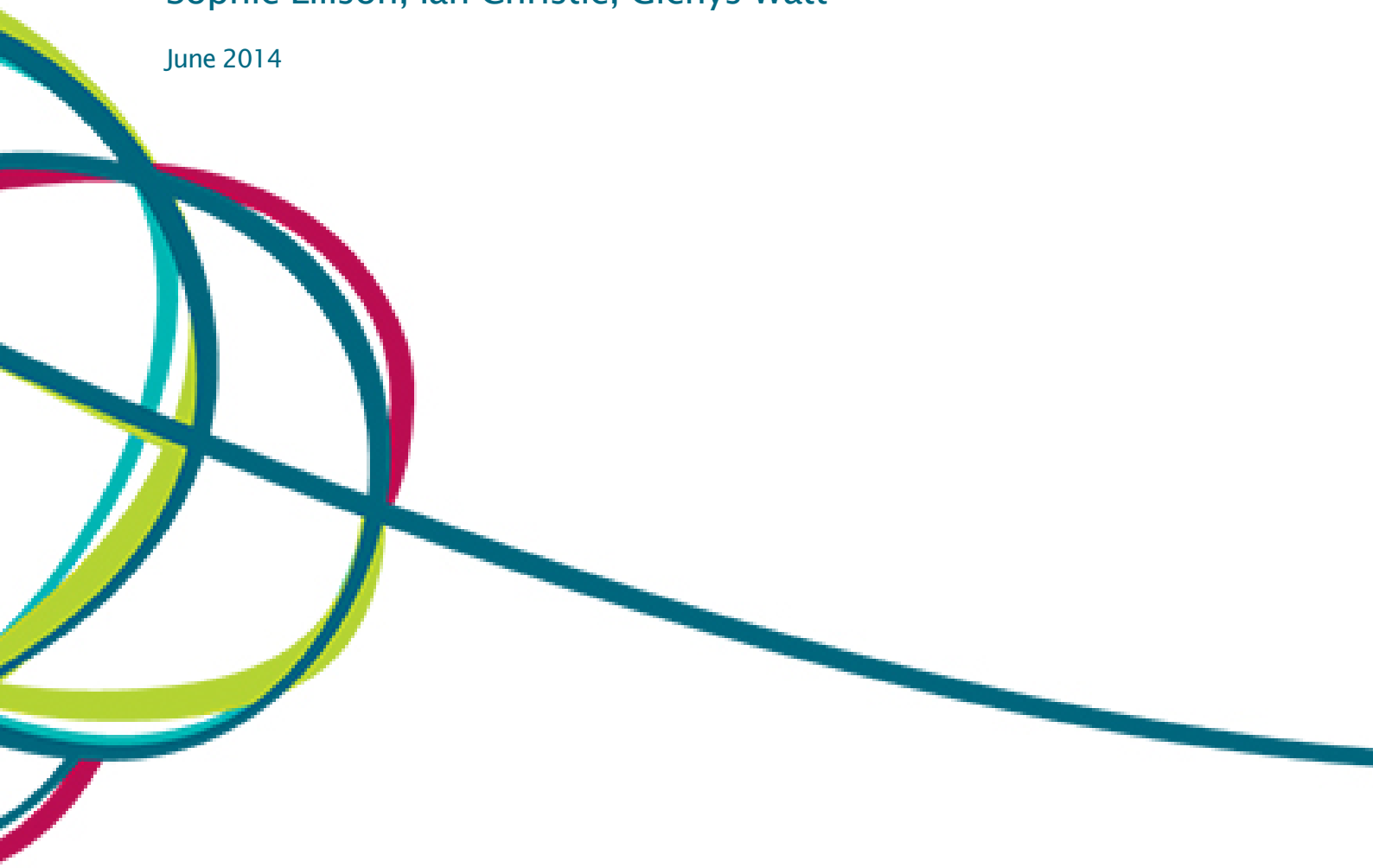

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1. INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT

Introduction

1.1 The Scottish Poetry Library (SPL) and Scottish Storytelling Centre (SSC) secured funding in 2012 from The Paul Hamlyn Foundation, The Baring Trust and Creative Scotland, and subsequently from the Gannochy Trust, to pilot Living Voices as a national programme, using the recommendations for programme delivery developed by Blake Stevenson in 2011. Blake Stevenson was commissioned to evaluate the impact of the pilot programme and this report presents the end of programme evaluation findings.

Background to Living Voices

National context

1.2 There is increasing evidence that participatory arts (including spoken word) and reminiscence can have a positive impact on well–being and quality of life for older people. In 2011 the Mental Health Foundation and The Baring Foundation published 'An Evidence Review of the Impact of Participatory Arts on Older People' which demonstrated the growing body of research in this field, and indicated what future project evaluation might bring to our understanding of the benefits of participatory arts for older audiences.

1.3 Developments in healthcare and public policy in Scotland increasingly recognise the role of social and cultural activity in continued well–being in old age and the importance of volunteering and communities in supporting our growing older population. This is reflected in policy and strategy, for example, Scotland's two National Dementia Strategies (2010; 2013), the Healthcare Quality Strategy for NHS Scotland (2010), the Reshaping Care for Older People Change Fund (2012 – 15) and developments around the integration of Adult Health and Social Care in Scotland outlined in the Public Bodies (Joint Working) (Scotland) Bill (2014).

1.4 Enhancing care services and volunteering become particularly important in the current climate of an increasingly ageing population and limited public spending. When care staff and caregivers are often hard pressed for time to attend to medical and physical needs, the time spent by volunteers and arts professionals in these sessions becomes an essential part of care and wellbeing. Evidence also suggests that the benefit of participation in this kind of activity is also felt by volunteers and session leaders, for whom it can be an enriching

way to use their skills and time, and gives focus to the generous impulse to do something for older people in the community.

Local context and identification of need

1.5 Prior to working jointly to develop and deliver the Living Voices programme, both SPL and SSC had been aware of the challenges of an aging population and the need for them to explore how their services and programmes could address this; backed up by research into then relevant policy, publications and research reports, particularly around creativity.

1.6 Separately, SPL and SSC had been working on a number of small–scale spoken word projects with older people: Life Stories (SSC's reminiscence and storytelling project for Edinburgh–based groups with professional storytellers); and Read Aloud (SPL's reading aloud project with Edinburgh City Libraries, using volunteers.) In addition, SSC had developed an Older People's Forum.

1.7 In line with findings from other participatory arts projects, the organisations found these small–scale projects to be greatly beneficial not only to participants in residential homes, older people's projects, day centres, sheltered housing units and other older people's groups, but also for care staff and for volunteers. The projects confirmed that talking, listening, reading and remembering are powerful ways to gain (and sometimes regain) pleasure, interest and companionship for older people and suggested that using story, poetry, music and song together could have a powerful combined effect. The projects also identified an absence of creativity, stimulation and human connection in many care settings for older people suggesting a clear need for more widespread activity of this nature and a role for the use of oral and literary arts to address these issues. SPL and SSC therefore set out to build on and develop their existing work as a single, well–resourced and sustainable model for delivery on a national scale. In 2011 they commissioned Blake Stevenson to scope and research potential for the Living Voices pilot phase.

About the programme

1.8 Living Voices is an ambitious and innovative programme which, over the two year funding period (July 2012–June 2014) has sought to develop and deliver a model of practice for working with older audiences, particularly in care homes, using spoken word (storytelling, poetry and song) and reminiscence.

1.9 The Living Voices model draws on the rich culture of the spoken word in Scotland, particularly the participative form of the ceilidh, and the recognition that a combination of spoken word art forms (notably story, poetry and song) can hold even greater potential to engage with older audiences and encourage participation than using the art forms

separately due to the fact they engage with different senses; use differing lengths and forms; and speak to different tastes. Poetry, story and song are linked by their use of rhythmic use of language, and are forms often shared aloud and in groups. Their rhythmic forms and the patterns of words and imagery they contain can powerfully engage the listener and make strong emotional connections or spark memories; and there is extensive research exploring the powerful effects of music for those with dementia; and that the arts can improve wellbeing for older people.

1.10 Participation is at the core of the Living Voices; the designed model aims to encourage a group dynamic in which everyone is able to participate in their own way, and to the degree that they are personally able to. It is not about artists performing to a group; but about artists facilitating a shared group dynamic in which spoken word is the foundation of a co-created session in which every participant is able to contribute in their own way; whether listening, reciting, sharing memories or participating in conversation.

1.11 The Living Voices pilot programme, supported by formative and summative evaluation, aimed to examine and demonstrate the potential of this approach to using spoken word and reminiscence to improve experiences and well-being of older people in care settings, particularly care homes, as well as to develop skills and learning for volunteers, practitioners and care home staff.

1.12 Over 18 months (Feb 2013 – July 2014), the programme delivered 16 Living Voices sessions in 18 care settings (16 care homes, one sheltered accommodation, and one Alzheimer Scotland support group) across three local authority areas (Perth & Kinross, Aberdeen and South Ayrshire). In total 288 sessions were delivered, reaching an average monthly audience of 140 people.

1.13 Sessions are facilitated by a paid professional artist and supported by a volunteer and one or two members of staff from the care home. Sessions accommodate between five to 15 residents, depending on support needs, and are all based on a common theme following patterns in the calendar year, which facilitators plan around flexibly using a session pack designed and provided by the programme, as well as their own material. The programme is co-ordinated by a central project manager and supported by a Steering Group comprising strategic representatives from SPL and SSC.

1.14 The programme is supported to varying degrees by different local partners in each local authority area, for example libraries and library services, Social Care Departments, and Third Sector Interfaces (TSI).

Evaluation aims and methods

Aims and approach

1.15 The evaluation has been both formative and summative, employing a reflective model with Blake Stevenson acting as a 'critical friend' throughout the pilot, capturing issues and learning and continuously feeding this back to inform project delivery through progress reporting and steering group attendance. Evaluation activity was built into programme set up and delivery from the very start to ensure it was integrated in a meaningful way.

1.16 The purpose of this final report is to review impact and benefit for the different Living Voices participant groups (older people, professional artists, volunteers, care homes and local partners) and to provide evidence to support the case for developing arts, specifically poetry and oral arts, in work with elderly and care home participants. In addition, it reflects on factors that have facilitated impact and key learning from the Living Voices model.

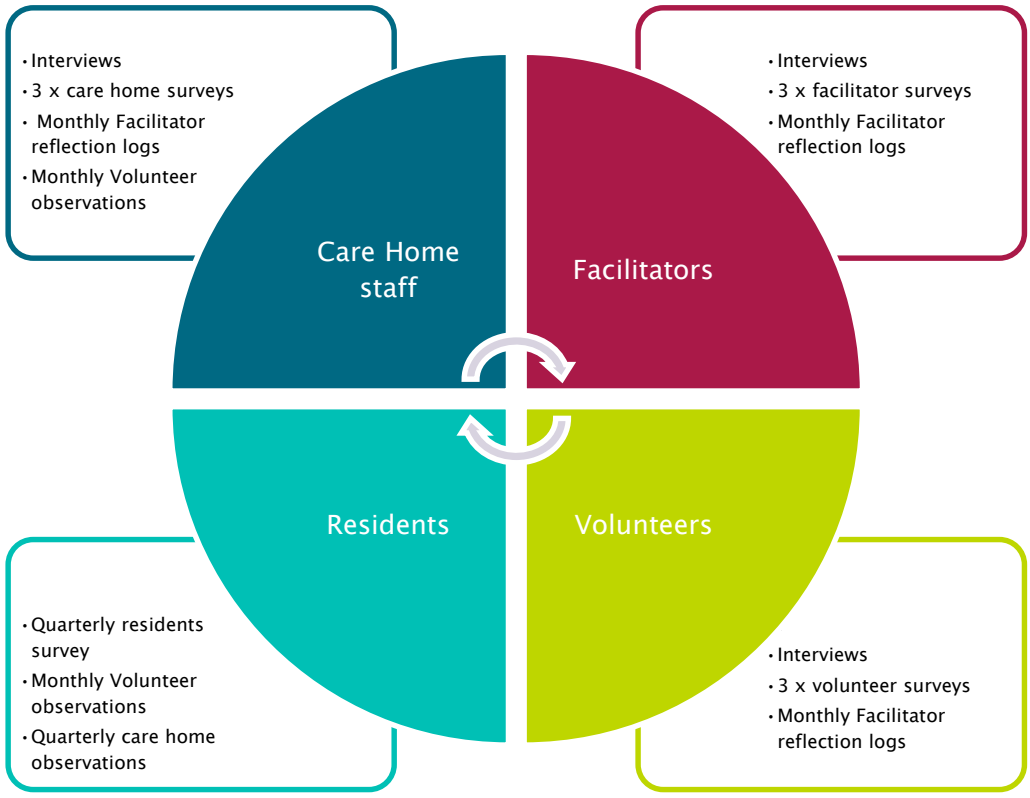
1.17 This report builds on an interim impact evaluation report produced in July 2013, and a process review conducted after the first quarter of the programme which informed programme delivery for the remainder of the pilot.

Methods

1.18 At the outset of the evaluation, key outcome areas for the evaluation were agreed with the Living Voices Steering Group. These were informed by outcomes experienced in other arts in health project evaluations identified by Blake Stevenson in our initial scoping research. The key outcome areas we agreed to explore and measure for each participant group were:

Residents	Care home staff	Professional artists	Volunteers
Relaxation & anxiety	Understanding the benefits of arts participation	Working with older people/care homes	Working with older people/care homes
Mood	Skills & confidence facilitating arts participation	Working with people with dementia	Working with people with dementia
Enjoyment & engagement	Engagement in oral & literary arts	Influencing creative practice	Facilitating oral & literary arts
Creative participation	Relationships w/ residents	Creative practice & use of unfamiliar art forms	Professional development
Memory recall	Job satisfaction	Combined use of art forms	Wellbeing
Relationships		Wellbeing	

1.19 The following diagram summarises the comprehensive methodology we used to collect rich qualitative and quantitative data in relation to the outcome areas for each participant group on an ongoing basis throughout the pilot period.



1.20 In addition, Blake Stevenson researchers attended and observed Living Voices sessions in three different care homes on three occasions, taking the opportunity to have informal discussions with facilitators, volunteers, residents and care home staff wherever possible. The evaluation team also liaised closely with the national co-ordinator, attended and fed into Steering Group meetings (as appropriate) and participated in the Basecamp community of practice set up to support and share learning between facilitators and volunteers.

1.21 To inform the final stages of the evaluation we undertook in depth qualitative interviews with local partners who had supported Living Voices programme delivery in some way, in each of the three participating local authority areas.

Methodological benefits and limitations

1.22 Research with older people with mental health, memory and or physical issues and research with time-pressed care homes presents a unique challenge in undertaking robust evaluation and our approach has had to evolve and adapt to their needs, requirements and capacity to be involved over the course of the evaluation. Close collaboration with the Living

Voices Project Manager as well as with facilitators delivering the sessions has been key to establishing an approach that will deliver the evaluation objectives while not over–burdening participants and there has been useful learning for all involved.

1.23 Some of the limitations of the evidence sources analysed to inform this evaluation report are listed below.

- Variable content of monthly facilitator reflection logs and volunteer observations (guidance was produced to support a consistent approach, but level and nature of detail has varied considerably).
- Observational data collected outside of the research team is restricted by what participants have chosen to share with us.
- Resident surveys do not include views of participants with severe dementia (but care home, facilitator & volunteer observations do).
- Due to different cohorts of residents responding to each residents' survey it has not been possible to track individual responses and therefore the surveys provide a snapshot of impact related to four sessions, rather than measuring impact over time.
- Quantitative baseline surveys undertaken with care home staff, volunteers and facilitators established a very high baseline in terms of skills and knowledge at the outset so additional reflective quantitative statements and qualitative questions were added to the interim and final surveys to provide a more accurate sense of progress.
- Less than a third of care homes engaged with the residents survey and care home observations; findings in relation to the other two thirds of participating care homes have been drawn from other elements of the evaluation approach.

1.24 Despite these limitations, the approach has gathered significant and rich data to draw on, from and in relation to each participant group. Other key benefits of the approach have been:

- responsive and adaptive to the needs of evaluation participants;
- facilitators have benefited from the opportunity to reflect on their practice through production of monthly logs for the evaluation team;
- a triangulated approach with findings drawn from multiple stakeholder perspectives;
- as of the interim reporting period, the National Project Manager has been able to access monthly feedback on experiences, challenges, issues and effective practice to inform programme delivery and support, through access to facilitator reflection logs.

A note on terminology

1.25 To ensure clarity and common understanding in reading this report, a number of key terms are explained below.

- ***'Spoken Word'***: Living Voices uses a combination of story, poetry and song (with some music); we use the term 'Spoken Word' in this report to refer to the use of this combination of oral and literary art forms.
- ***'Participative'***: the Living Voices session model draws on the participative form of the ceilidh and is designed to support participation by the whole group in whatever way they can; our use of the terms 'participative' and 'participation' is based on this concept.
- ***'Participants'*** or ***'residents'***: where we refer to 'Living Voices participants', or 'residents' this relates to older people participating in a Living Voices session, many of whom (but not all) were care home residents.
- ***'Facilitators':*** where we refer to 'facilitators' this relates to the professional artists (storytellers, poets, musicians) who were paid to deliver the Living Voices sessions.

Structure of report

1.26 The rest of this report focuses on the impact Living Voices has had for key stakeholder groups, and reflects on the key factors that have supported impact, as well as key learning to inform sustainability and expansion of the Living Voices approach.

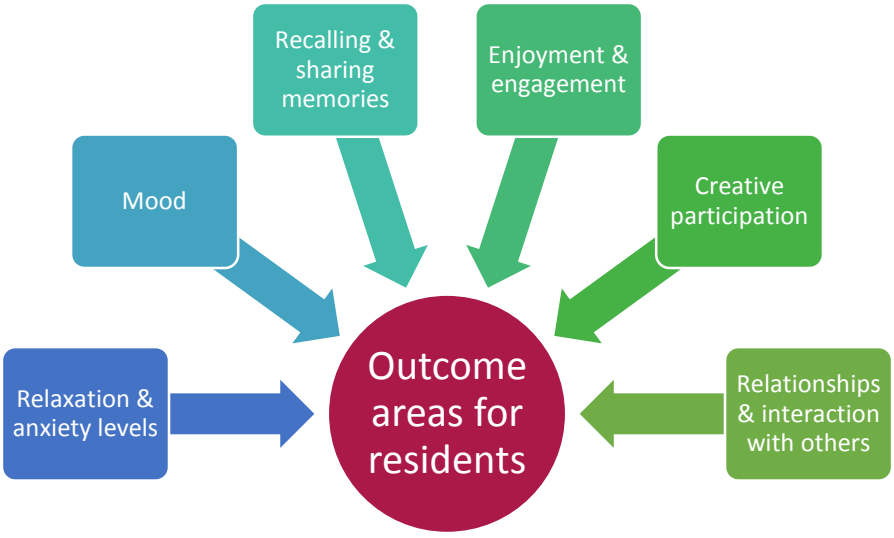
1.27 It is structured as follows:

- Chapter 2: Impact for Living Voices participants
- Chapter 3: Impact for care homes
- Chapter 4: Impact for Living Voices facilitators
- Chapter 5: Impact for Living Voices volunteers
- Chapter 6: Wider impact
- Chapter 7: Reflections on the Living Voices model and considerations for the future

2. IMPACT FOR LIVING VOICES PARTICIPANTS

Introduction

2.1 Assessing the benefits and outcomes for older people in care homes/care settings that have participated in Living Voices has been a key aim of this evaluation. Due to session frequency and length (90 minutes, once a month) and the fact many participants have memory/cognitive impairment and the likelihood of natural decline in participants' physical and mental wellbeing through ageing over the evaluation period, activity has specifically focused on measuring outcomes and benefits for participants during and immediately after the session; while exploring any longer term changes where evident. The key outcome areas the evaluation has sought to measure for residents were informed by outcomes experienced by participants in similar programmes[1] and are summarised in the diagram below:



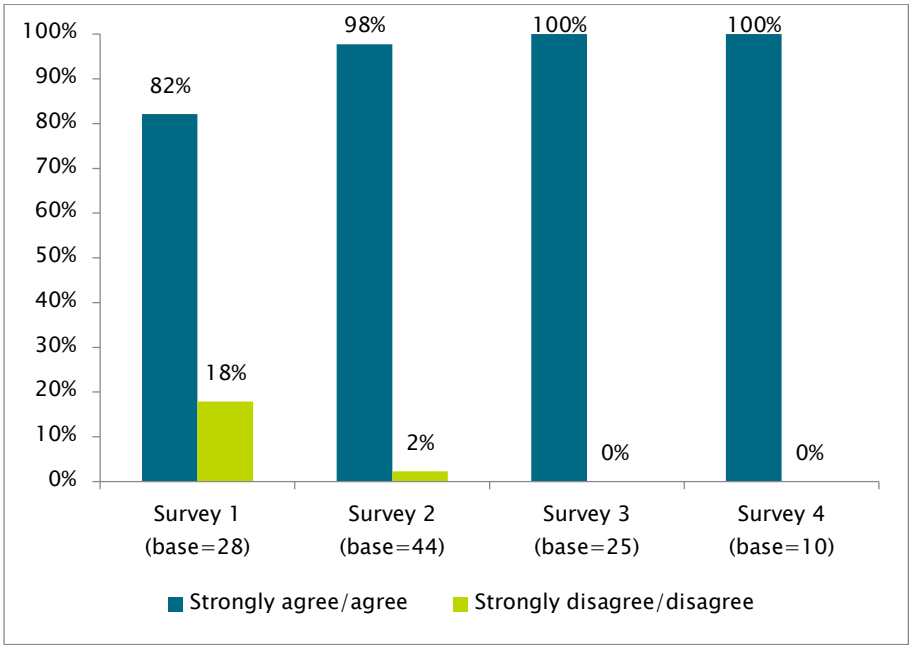
2.2 This chapter explores the extent to which Living Voices has influenced these outcome areas for residents, and what has supported these outcomes where they have been achieved. It draws on evidence from the residents' survey, surveys and interviews with care home staff, facilitators and volunteers, and observations by staff, facilitators, volunteers and Blake Stevenson researchers.

[1] Blake Stevenson's Scoping Report (2011) which informed the development of the programme included an evidence review of the benefits of oral and literary arts on older people's health and wellbeing.

Impact on relaxation and anxiety levels of participants

2.3 It has been a common finding throughout the evaluation that during Living Voices sessions, many participants appear to become more relaxed and less anxious than usual for the duration of the session, and for some, a period of time afterwards. This is confirmed by observations from facilitators and care home staff, as well as residents participating in surveys conducted after four separate sessions over the 16 month duration of the programme.

Fig 2.1: Today's Living Voices session helped me to feel relaxed



2.4 Fig 2.1 illustrates that responses to all four residents' surveys were high in respect of this outcome. In the final evaluation surveys, the majority of care home staff (67%, 6) and facilitators (60%, 6) reported that all, nearly all or most residents seemed more relaxed during the sessions. All care home staff (9) and 90% of facilitators (9) reported that at least some residents seemed more relaxed. Similarly, Living Voices has impacted positively on participants' boredom levels: all care home staff (9) and 90% of facilitators (9) observed reduced boredom among at least some residents, with 56% of care home staff (5) and 50% of facilitators (5) reporting that all, nearly all or most residents seemed less bored during the sessions.

2.5 Our researchers, observing sessions in three care homes, also noted residents generally appearing relaxed and at ease during the sessions, and that this tended to increase throughout the session (although we cannot comment on how this compares to the individual's usual state). Staff, facilitator and volunteer observations of whole group and

individuals' experiences also confirm that many residents in the majority of participating care home groups become more relaxed and less anxious than normal during the Living Voices sessions, with examples of this improving over time:

2.6 Living Voices was described by care home staff as "an opportunity for spontaneity and letting your hair down" and a "beautifully relaxed atmosphere", attesting to the relaxed environment the sessions generally create. Facilitators and volunteers highlighted factors that can detract from this sense of calm (e.g., an ill or particularly anxious resident, general activity of a busy care environment, inappropriate heating or room size) however, on the whole Living Voices sessions have been effective at creating an atmosphere where residents feel relaxed and where any discomfort and worries are often tempered by the session.

2.7 A central reason for the use of a combination of poetry, story and song in the Living Voices session model is that they are linked by their use of rhythmic patterns of words which can powerfully engage the listener when spoken and sung aloud; it was anticipated that a combination of the three would have particularly strong potential to engage with groups. Facilitators' comments confirm the benefits and value of this approach and that in general, the rhythm of spoken word helps residents relax, as well as participate. The pilot suggests that combining spoken word with use of sensory props (particularly those that appeal to the olfactory sense) is effective at creating an environment which can reduce anxiety as well as an environment which enables everyone to feel part of the group and participate,

irrespective of ability. The value and importance of sensory and tactile props as a companion and enhancement to the stories, poems and songs has become clearer over the course of the project, and in response to this facilitators have developed this element of their work over time and it has become an integral part of the Living Voices approach. Many facilitators and volunteers have been active and innovative in building the use of artefacts and props into their sessions and their logs provide an abundance of examples of this in practice.

2.8 The following examples highlight the positive impact Living Voices has had on individual participants' levels of relaxation and anxiety.

Resident A: increased relaxation

"The session helped engage and relax this resident – although he was up every few minutes to look for his wife, he managed to stay for the whole session and became more relaxed as the session went on – very helpful as his wife could sleep during this time!" (care home staff member).

Resident B: reduced boredom and restlessness

"This resident is easily bored and so the session helped her to focus her interest and calm down – she loves to take part in the sessions" (care home staff member).

Resident C: reduced restlessness

"C was anxious to start with but lovely to see her smiling so soon after the session began – not at all restless and did not attempt once in over an hour to get up and move away" (care home staff member).

2.9 There were also examples cited where people with advanced dementia have benefited from reduced anxiety and agitation during the sessions.

Resident D: reduced agitation and improved engagement

"Resident D who has dementia couldn't sit in the session and was very agitated so one of the carers persuaded her to sit just outside the room with the door open rather than leave completely. She could hear everything going on and was tapping her feet when we sang. When the carers went to fetch the tea trolley she came in saying 'can I say hello to everyone?' and everyone welcomed her in saying 'You're just in time for tea!' to which she said "I thought I could smell tea!' As she sat the lady next to her took her hand and sat holding it for a while. D said 'I am sorry about being such a dud with you' – she was reassured by the group that she had come just at the right time and she sat happily drinking tea and joining in a wee song. The next Living Voices session, she joined the group again and remained in the room for the whole session. She spoke at great length about where she had been brought up and her brother's work and her work in service – the wool winding really seemed to help her recall. At the end of the session she said as she left to the carer 'Please forgive me for leaving... I have had a lovely time... it reminded me of when we had our family get–togethers. I enjoyed myself today!'" (facilitator).

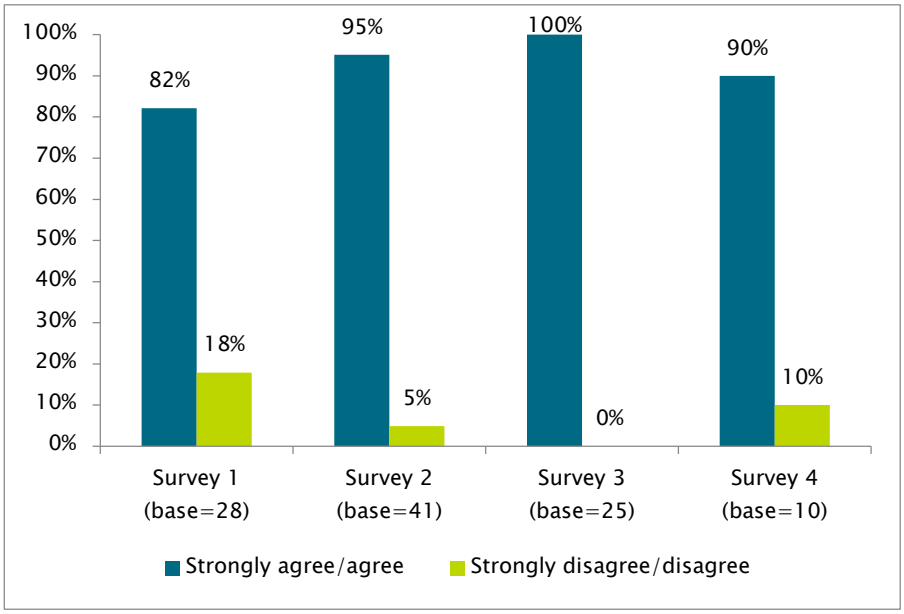
2.10 While Living Voices has impacted positively on the majority of participants' relaxation and anxiety levels, staff, facilitator and volunteer observations suggest a minority of participants have not benefited in this way, or the outcome has been less pronounced for some,

particularly those with advanced dementia. On a few occasions, residents with more advanced dementia have demonstrated increased anxiety or restlessness during the session. Although this has been challenging for volunteers and facilitators as well as other group members, these examples were in the minority and were not out of character for the individuals involved and were not attributable to involvement in the session.

Impact on participants' mood

2.11 Living Voices sessions have had a positive impact on participants' mood, including helping to maintain or improve an already good mood, as well as improving a low or poor mood, leading to many participants feeling happier and more content overall during and following a session. Fig 2.2 illustrates that in each of the four residents' surveys, the vast majority of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the Living Voices session had helped to improve their mood[2].

Fig 2.2: Today's Living Voices session helped to improve my mood



2.12 Qualitative observations gathered throughout the evaluation also support the finding that Living Voices sessions have a positive impact on the mood of most participants during and immediately after the sessions:

[2] The proportion decreased slightly (but remained high) among survey 4 respondents (90%, 9), however this decrease is not statistically significant, and is not substantiated by qualitative evidence.

- "Clients on the whole are very upbeat at the end of sessions. [The facilitator] is very animated which they appear to find funny and laugh along with her. [The volunteer] tells wonderful stories and poems and what a look on their faces as they take it all in!" (care home staff member).
- "The mood of most was much better during and at the end of the session" (care home staff member).
- "This is an escape for this group, a bit of normality" (care home staff member).
- "You forget about your worries" (resident).
- "A lady who can be slightly aggressive and non–communicative was the surprise person for me today – she engaged with everything I presented and smiled the entire session – several members of the group commented how jovial she was" (facilitator).
- "Residents leave the room animated and express delight in how much they have enjoyed the session" (volunteer).
- "Staff have commented that participants are happier, more alert and that their communication improved directly after sessions" (facilitator).
- "[Care home staff member] and 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 member).

2.13 For some residents the sessions have a longer lasting impact on mood, for example:

- "The moods before and after are much improved which lasts on for quite some time" (care home staff member).
- "The positive effect is not just tangible in the time the session is on but also beforehand when we talk about past sessions and refresh their memory with our scrapbook and also long after the session in dinner table discussions and overall positive mood" (care home staff member).

2.14 The energy and activity created by facilitators in the sessions through their use of engaging literary materials, props, use of "humour", "silliness" and "mischievousness", as appropriate to their audience helps support a positive and "uplifted" mood within the sessions, "a break from the norm" compared to daily life in the care setting for many residents. However, facilitators have developed an approach to their practice which is quick to adapt to the mood of their group and times have often been cited where a sombre and contemplative mood has been created due to sharing of sad and personally emotive stories and memories, or due to reflection on the age and stage of life for residents; while emotional, this has generally been greatly welcomed and appreciated by residents. Therefore, while improved and uplifted mood has been a key benefit for many residents, Living Voices has demonstrated that the space to be contemplative and express sadness is also valuable.

2.15 The follow case studies highlight impact on mood for three individuals.

Resident E: calmer, more relaxed and better mood

"Definitely improved mood – often this resident is rather unhappy but engaging in the singing and conversations lifted her mood very much – she said it was a good morning and not to be missed!" (care home staff member).

Resident F: calmer, more relaxed and better mood

"She can be exceptionally fiery but after Living Voices sessions is totally relaxed and very pleasant and agreeable. She loves this group and gets so involved. She especially loves the sensory activities and it really cheers her up and stimulates her" (care home staff member).

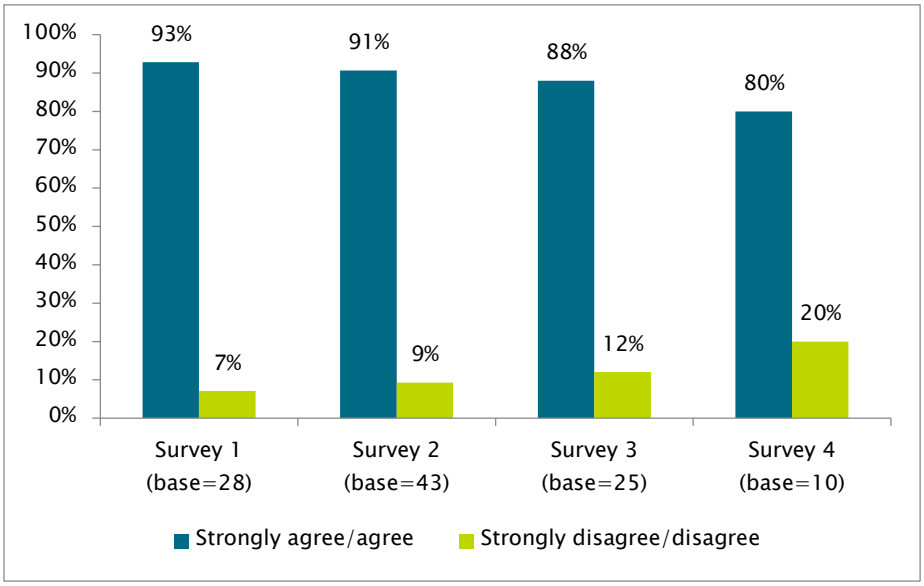
Resident G: improved mood

"She has to be coaxed out of her room usually and this can cause her stress, but as soon as you tell her it's Living Voices she smiles and is always willing to come and join in. As soon as she joins the group she is willing to tell jokes or sing or chat. When the group is finished, she is still happy and chatty about it and regales the staff with stories of the session. Outside of sessions, she normally stays in her room with her eyes closed (even though she is not asleep)" (care home staff member).

Impact on participants' sharing and recall of personal stories and memories

2.16 There are numerous examples where Living Voices has supported individuals to share personal stories and memories during the session, often demonstrating a degree of improved cognition and recall ability for individuals as assessed by care home staff and residents themselves. The vast majority of respondents to each of the residents' surveys (Fig 2.3) reported improved ability to share stories and memories during the Living Voices session. While the slight decrease over time is not statistically significant, it could reflect decline in cognitive functioning and memory recall over the evaluation period, or differences in the respondent sample for each snapshot survey.

Fig 2.3: Today's Living Voices session helped me feel more able to share stories and memories



2.17 Residents' comments in response to this outcome area included: "Over a period of time it [Living Voices] helps to share in the group, you become more open"; "you hear sad stories and relaxing stories but you share them", and "if you share something you feel a lot better".

2.18 All care home staff felt at least a few residents demonstrated improved ability to recall and share memories during Living Voices sessions and the majority (78%, 7) said that all, nearly all or most residents demonstrated an improved ability to recall and share memories. There are numerous examples from facilitator reflections and volunteer observation logs reporting residents sharing memories or personal stories. One story/memory often prompts other members to regale tales of their past life and free-flowing, whole group conversations develop where the facilitator becomes more of a participant themselves rather than a leader of the session; creating a conversation through use of story, song, and poetry.

2.19 A key feature of many Living Voices sessions is the use of personal stories by the facilitator/volunteer and sometimes care home staff member to prompt discussions. This very personal engagement is widely considered by the different stakeholder groups to increase the connection and empathy within the group which creates an atmosphere of trust and respect and further helps facilitate sharing.

2.20 Across the stakeholder groups, Living Voices sessions were frequently described as a "safe place" for residents to engage with each other and to share memories, both good and bad. As the following quotes highlight, there were a number of moving examples where Living Voices sessions have created a supportive and trusting environment within which residents

have felt able to share personal stories about sadness, loss and life's challenges (both past and present):

- "There is a feeling of genuine caring between the women and they look forward to these sessions as a place they can share amongst themselves in confidence sometimes care issues that have cropped up (which they can't talk about anywhere else)" (facilitator).
- "Some of the photos the group brought [to the session] elicited sad memories and it was very special to share them. The group sympathised about deaths and losses in families and there developed an enhanced atmosphere of trust, empathy and sharing" (facilitator).
- "One woman said the sessions were great and since she didn't have any family in Britain it was good to have a session where she could remember her brother who died" (facilitator).
- "Many residents were very candid in their sharing. Talking of death and families split up/broken homes. In the main, most people appeared comfortable enough to share stories" (care home staff member).

2.21 Many groups have encountered loss of members over the pilot period, and in these situations, the sessions have also provided a space to help residents to deal with death in the home:

- "We shared the sadness that two of our ladies had passed away over Christmas and recalled them as we sang and shared what we remembered of some of the stories they had shared over our year of gathering" (facilitator).

2.22 As might be expected, the ability to share or recall memories has been highly dependent on the capabilities of the individual. There are a number of qualitative examples that suggest some residents, particularly those with more advanced dementia, benefit from immersion in the conversation and different art forms, but are able to recall or share few memories themselves during the session – although the memories they do share are often considered a great achievement by those who know them:

- "As the people I'm working with mostly have profound dementia only a few intermittently have memory of me, or the project…they have over time mostly come to recognise that I'm friendly and something different is going to happen when I'm around. And from moment to moment they really appreciate and listen to story or poems and sometimes join in, which is heart–warming. Staff report that residents do really appreciate the sessions and in one or two cases are able to remember and look forward to them" (facilitator).

2.23 There are however, qualitative examples of Living Voices eliciting memories and stories from individuals with dementia and/or memory impairment and supporting improved cognition, as well as examples where residents, including those with memory impairment, have shared memories from the sessions in between them happening. Examples include:

- "X found great joy in this group. She loved the stories and the singing. She loved how everyone got a chance to have their say and to reminisce. Although a dementia sufferer, she remembers these sessions and yourself [facilitator] and [the volunteer]" (care home staff member).
- "6/10 recalled the session afterwards and 3/10 enthusiastically discussing the session for at least four days afterwards" (care home staff member).
- "J is a man whose short term memory was virtually non-existent. But from day one until he went home [from the care setting] we were amazed how he remembered these sessions and how he talked of them so fondly and frequently" (care home staff member).
- A care home staff member reported to a facilitator that one lady with dementia remembers every month when the storyteller is due (an unusual level of memory for this lady) and tries to get other residents ready for the session to start.
- "My big surprise today was when one lady who has been away from the group for the last two months due to illness, held my hand and told me that she remembered me" (facilitator).

2.24 The following quote illustrates how Living Voices supports some residents to have improved cognition during the session; but that for some this can quickly recede after the session finishes:

- "X had sung, engaged and answered questions during the session in a completely normal way i.e., complete cognition, but now I was asking her for verbal feedback she was incoherent and showing signs of advanced dementia" (facilitator).

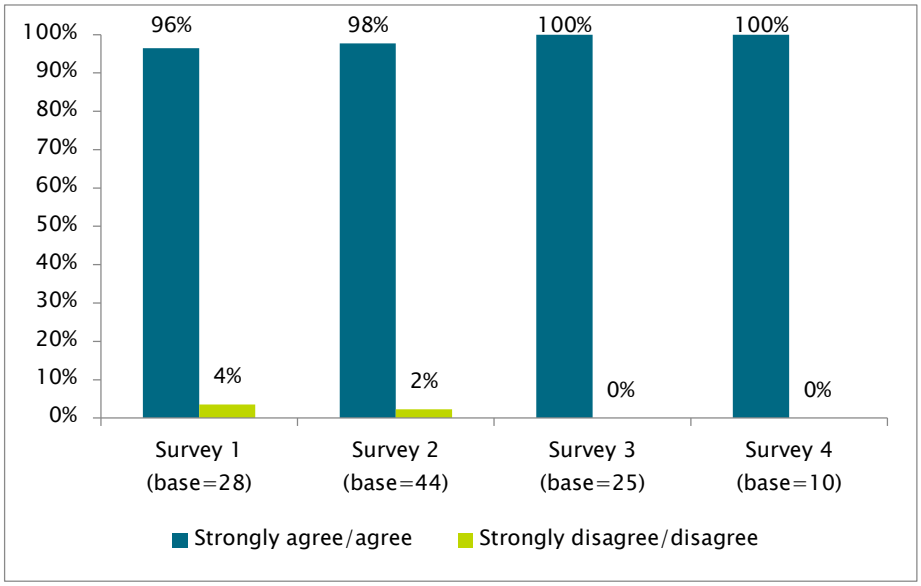
2.25 Blake Stevenson researchers observed a session where the theme of harvest festival successfully engaged the full group (including those with memory and visual impairments) in lengthy, spontaneous and very natural, free-flowing reminiscence and memory sharing – by the end of the session they had all agreed to go on a trip together to re-discover a local destination! On this occasion, the use of seasonal props with wide sensory appeal (taste, smell, touch, sight and sound), a group endeavour to turn butter into cream by the end of the session, use of songs and poems already known to many residents, and a story that held everyone's attention until the final punch line were clearly key to this engagement and reminiscence. A further session we observed also illustrated how sensory objects (in this

case the touch, smell and sound of seashells) prompted residents with dementia to successfully recall and share memories, stimulating a vibrant group discussion. Building on findings at paragraph 2.7 on the benefits of the combined use of different spoken word art forms alongside sensory and tactile objects and artefacts, facilitator and volunteer reflection logs also confirm that appealing to all of the senses greatly enhances reminiscence and memory sharing; the mix of art forms means participation is not reliant on memory and enables residents to listen to/respond to a story, poem or shared memory in the moment.

Enjoyment and engagement

2.26 Overall, enjoyment of Living Voices has been extremely high amongst residents, as evidenced by the residents' survey (see Fig 2.4) and qualitative evidence from facilitators, volunteers, care home staff and Blake Stevenson researchers. Six care home staff (60%) said that Living Voices is one of the most popular activities in the home among residents who participate.

Fig 2.4: I enjoyed today's Living Voices session



2.27 Qualitative observations reveal that overall engagement with the sessions has been high, and in many cases has increased over time, as one care home staff member described: "Our participants seem more talkative and more alert during and after the sessions they are also more confident in themselves. Looking back to when Living Voices started, there has been a huge change in our participants including them being more relaxed, more confident, talkative and more interactive and we all hope that Living Voices continues in the future".

2.28 Understandably, engagement has varied from individual to individual and has been influenced by mood on the day as well as additional support needs. External factors such as inappropriate group size, room size, time of day and room temperature can all impact negatively on engagement levels as well. Groups can be quiet and quite passive one month, but more actively engaged the next; facilitators have learned how to adapt their approach and use their materials flexibly to respond to this.

2.29 Reflection logs highlight that, generally, individuals who appear to be disengaged at the start of a session often become increasingly engaged as the session progresses. There are also many examples where group engagement has improved session on session as trust and knowledge of each other within the group increases. After 12 months into the pilot, most facilitators, volunteers and care home staff were reflecting on improved engagement over time.

2.30 A minority of reflections in the first six months of the pilot from volunteers and facilitators suggested occasional frustration and a sense of demoralisation at the level of engagement from some participants, particularly those working with residents with more challenging needs, including advanced dementia. Frustration and concerns about limited engagement have lessened over time. As facilitators have got to know the groups they are working with (and the groups have got to know them), and as they have become more confident and aware of how to adapt their session to best engage individuals, they have tended to become more comfortable with the idea that while resident engagement may not be very participatory, participants are still benefiting. More passive signs of engagement demonstrated by residents in these circumstances are listening intently, being visibly more relaxed and/or physically and mentally attentive and alert, maintaining eye contact or waiting until the end of the session to share their stories when things have quietened down. Facilitators and volunteers have gained confidence in recognising these cues.

2.31 The participatory nature of the sessions appears to facilitate good engagement from those who might be less engaged in a larger group environment or more passive activity. On the whole, facilitators and volunteers seem to be finding that the most active engagement with groups comes when singing, sharing jokes or using verbal or physical humour, or props to elicit memories or bring to life poems and stories. However, in some of the care settings, residents' preference is to sit and absorb the stories and poems rather than engage more actively, and the Living Voices session model is flexible enough to facilitate this.

2.32 Qualitative comments to illustrate the range of findings above include:

From care home staff:

- "It did capture her attention as usually she is rather sleepy in the mornings, but not for Living Voices sessions!"
- "Residents thoroughly enjoy it and seem so much more alive. Some residents have said that it has been the quickest year since it started…they really look forward to sessions".

From facilitators:

- "They seem genuinely excited and happy to be there".
- "They were engaged but often listen intently or drift off looking relaxed".
- "The group always appear to be engaged and communicative... sometimes there are weeks where things are less lively just depending on how the residents feel but it isn't negative".
- "We notice our members, in both groups speaking and sharing more each visit"
- "X made a huge effort to let me know how much he loved the song 'Three Steps to Heaven' by Eddie Cochrane, so we had this twice".
- "Everyone in their own way engages and at different moments…there is a great mixture of abilities but everyone can share in their own way. People listen and look out for one another and recall a tale that is responded to with another story! Great!!"
- "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".

From residents:

- "I like all of it. I like singing the songs and the stories and I like that bell you brought in today. I don't know what theme for next month, just you choose".
- "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!"
- "We have enjoyed ourselves, and no one has discussed politics!"
- "We are very lucky to have this group".
- One lady, in response to finding out the sessions were to end soon said "I have enjoyed this very much. Would a petition help?"

- "I think this is interesting, and you work very hard. You're good at putting it over, like the poetry, I'm not so fussed about poetry, but you do it well, so it's good. And I love the old songs and things. I think for some people it's particularly good because it jogs their memory. It certainly jogs my memory".
- "What can I say? I enjoy it all and I look forward to it. I enjoy telling the stories from the past, but I can't remember all of them now, your stories are good!"

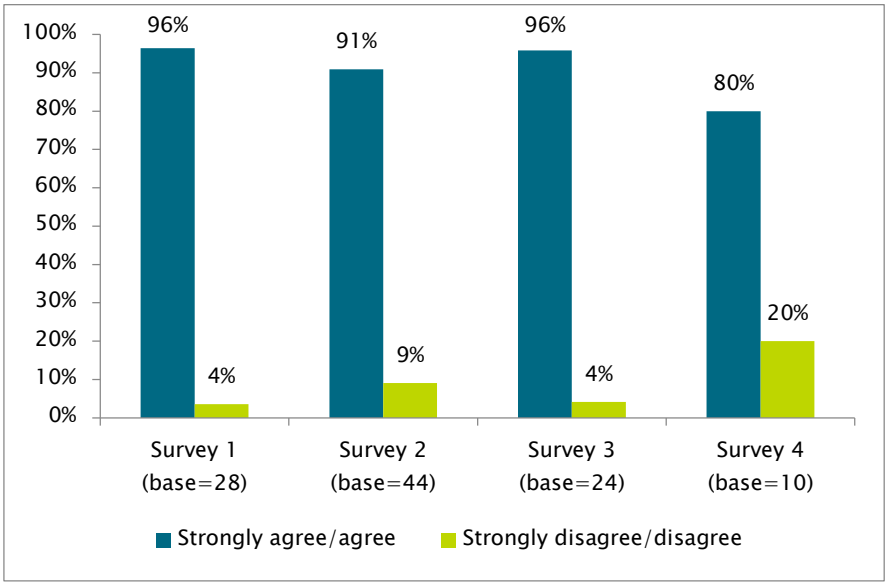
And from family members:

- A facilitator noted that a family member of one resident reported that Living Voices brought about a change in his manner: "A brightness returned to his eyes".

Creative outputs and participation

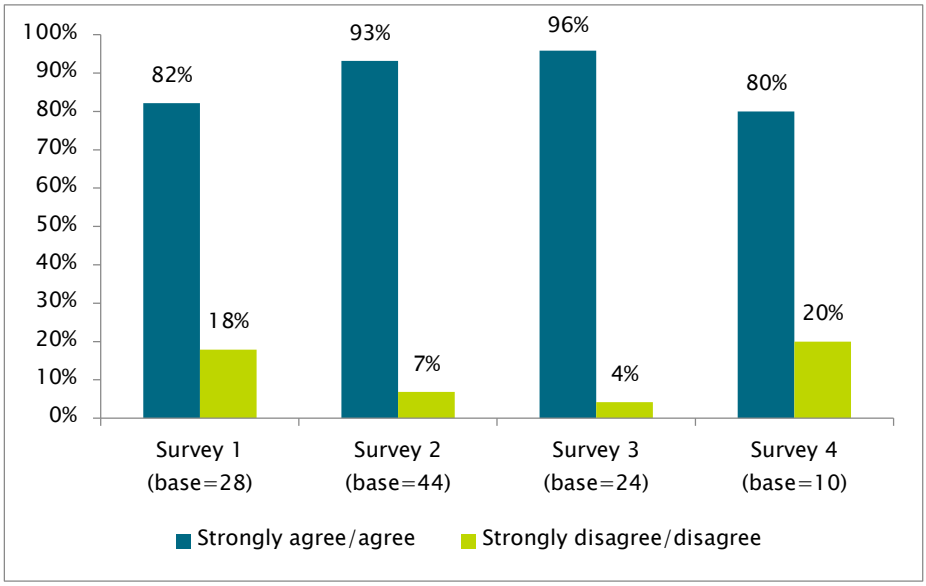
2.33 Survey responses from residents suggest that overall, Living Voices has enabled participants to engage creatively as well as to input, within their abilities, to the direction and content of the sessions. As Fig 2.5 shows, 96% of respondents to survey 1 (27) reported that the Living Voices session made them feel like singing a song, telling a story, reading, or writing a poem. This figure remained high in the other residents' surveys.

Fig 2.5: Today's Living Voices session made me feel like singing a song, telling a story, reading, or writing a poem



2.34 All care home staff (9) reported that at least a few residents had increased interest in other arts and creative activities and 44% (4) reported that all, nearly all or most residents were more interested in these activities. The vast majority of residents also reported in the residents surveys that they felt able to contribute to Living Voices sessions (see Fig 2.6).

Fig 2.6: I felt able to contribute to today's session and was able to suggest themes for conversation.



2.35 It is clear from qualitative observations that the main form of creative participation for participants comes in the form of joining in group singing or through sharing personal memories and stories, or where residents are prompted to remember and tell the group a poem, song or joke of their own that they have remembered. This seems to have developed and increased over time and sessions in many homes have increasingly been driven and led by resident input: "The energy is greater after less than a year… a lot of smiles and more contributions; feels more like a joint activity. They realise their input is vital, expected and valued" (facilitator).

2.36 Creative participation in terms of more tangible outputs also seems to have increased over the evaluation period in some care homes, including examples of creative outputs co-produced by residents and facilitators as well as examples of residents creating outputs themselves outside of sessions, inspired by Living Voices, and choosing to then share these with the group. Examples include:

- song-writing using colloquial language led by the residents and structured by the facilitator (who wrote the beginning and end);
- residents sharing and discussing poems they have written with the group;
- residents, on their own initiative, bringing personal photos or objects into a Living Voices session to share and prompt discussion with the group; and
- residents acting out and telling a story together: "The residents enjoyed taking part in the story. They engaged fully in the bit of role play, miming out their contribution to the pot of soup" (facilitator).

2.37 The case study below gives an example of how involvement in Living Voices has led to one resident participating more widely in the creative activities available within their home. There were also examples cited of residents acquiring a liking for poetry or singing which they didn't previously have.

Resident H: increased engagement with wider care home activities

"H became a resident just as the group began. She was so shy and she absolutely refused to leave her room and mingle. She feigned illness so as her meals would be served in her room. When we explained what the group was she tentatively said she would come and see what it was about. The change in her was so dramatic. She started joining in all our arts activities, quizzes, sing songs etc. all because she found her voice at Living Voices. It was magical" (care home staff member).

Improved relationships and connection to others

2.38 Living Voices has had a particularly positive impact on residents in terms of the dynamics of the group and residents' relationships with each other, as well as with care home staff (the latter point is explored at 3.14) and facilitators/volunteers. All care home staff (9) reported that at least a few residents were more engaged with staff and other residents and 78% (7) reported that all, nearly all or most residents were more engaged with staff and other residents. Similarly, all facilitators felt that at least a few residents were more engaged with staff and other residents and 60% (6) felt this was true for all, nearly all or most residents. 89% of care home staff (8) reported that Living Voices had made all, nearly all or most residents more communicative. 60% of facilitators (6) felt that all or nearly all residents seemed more communicative.

2.39 It is evident from qualitative evidence that participants have become more comfortable and relaxed, willing to share memories and engage in the sessions over time, particularly where there has been a core group attending regularly. Facilitators and care home staff have observed residents making friendships and close bonds with one another as a result of discovering common memories and interests during the sessions.

- "They are extremely communicative and each session brings a feeling that we are a gathering of friends who look out for each other and care" (facilitator).
- "There were a number of moments when residents turned to one another and shared a wee story together without prompting and it really feels as if the LV sessions help connect these residents and that in between our sessions they talk and share" (facilitator).

2.40 A number of facilitators have observed that many of the residents had previously felt lonely despite living with so many people as sitting in a large room without much stimulation can make it difficult for residents to spark conversations and get to know each other. Living

Voices has provided this opportunity for many. Care home staff have noted that as a result of Living Voices, some participants are more communicative in general as a result and have "made friends they possibly wouldn't have done otherwise". One care home staff described to a facilitator how "A, who had been lonely since she arrived in the home...was visibly delighted with the company and really blossomed [at Living Voices]. She made a big connection with B and the knitting and hand work...and they went off together at the end". One resident described how "In company you are cheered up a bit, you're not as sad as you would be when you're on your own" (resident).

2.41 At the outset, Living Voices did not intend to include family/carers, but over the pilot period, where family members have shown interest in attending, they have been included in the session. Where they have been present, facilitators have observed Living Voices facilitating improved connection between the resident and their family member, for example: "One of the residents' daughters came in half way through. I encouraged her to sit with her mum and join in…she was in tears seeing her mum engaging in this lovely group and singing and listening and enjoying herself…she still didn't recognise her daughter but she was able to find a different way of connecting supported by the group and songs and stories and poems". Over the pilot period, a number of facilitators noted recognising the value and benefit (for all involved in the caring relationship) of having family members present at the sessions and feel this is an important aspect for Living Voices to explore with future programme delivery.

2.42 We did not ask residents directly about this outcome area, however the following examples from qualitative evidence sources indicate that Living Voices is having a positive impact on the way residents engage with others and socialise both during and in between sessions, and is helping reduce social isolation and increase a sense of belonging within the home:

- "Our new lady is new to the home so by the end of the session she got to know more about the home and other clients" (care home staff member).
- "For a couple of them, they leave their rooms much more now and are more social. It's given them things in common to talk about and more confidence" (facilitator).
- One facilitator received feedback from their care home to say that "they [residents] are stimulated, relaxed and also talk to each other more outwith the sessions".
- "People are now asking how each other is and cracking jokes" (facilitator).
- "More interaction and conversation between residents this time... we notice our members, in both groups, speaking and sharing more each visit" (facilitator).
- "Some residents have formed deeper friendships. They discovered their similarities and shared interests during the LV sessions" (facilitator).

- "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 member).
- "I think it has given many residents the chance to chat, even to bond with each other, a memory here from one will stir a memory in another. In some cases I think small 'friendships' have been formed as they feel less isolated and comfortable and find common interests through old geography, work places, schools and so on" (volunteer).

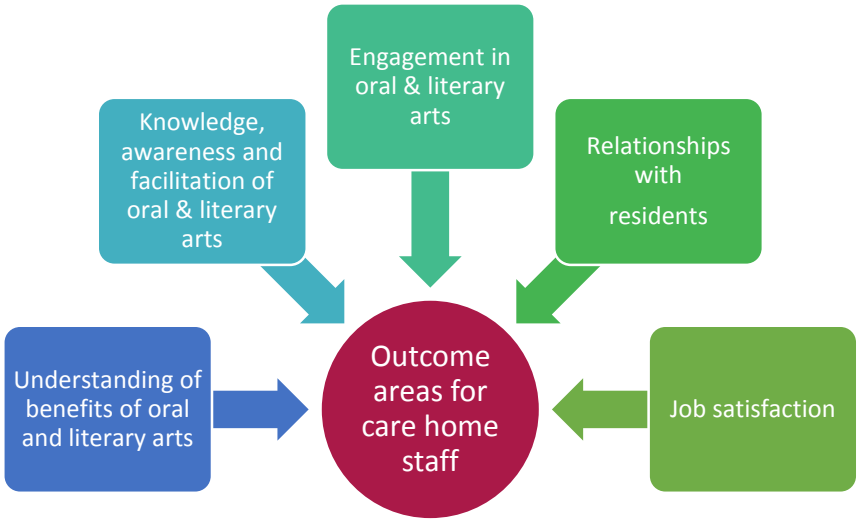
2.43 Comments from staff, facilitators and local stakeholders and residents suggest Living Voices has in some cases helped create a "sense of community" that didn't exist for participating residents prior to the programme, for example:

- One local stakeholder observed that there was "much more of a community feel" across one participating care home since Living Voices had been introduced.
- Another local stakeholder described a change in the dynamics in a care home they knew well: "There was previously a lack of interaction in the care home. When I attended Living Voices I was blown away by the interaction people were having… people sitting next to each other chatting who wouldn't have communicated before and kept themselves to themselves… I've never seen them communicating with each other like this before".
- One facilitator described how "the sessions have engendered that feeling of a small intimate family gathering – indeed we are now after a year and half great friends and have developed all together a real sense of a Living Voices community. A number of times I have witnessed a new resident introduced into the circle and been welcomed by one and all to the gathering and they have voiced that the sessions have really helped them settle in and have a feeling of belonging".
- "I think I see a more empowered community in front of me when I arrive and leave" (facilitator).

3. IMPACT FOR CARE HOMES

Introduction

3.1 This section of the report explores outcomes for care homes and care home staff as a result of their involvement with Living Voices. Sources that have informed this section include volunteers' observations, facilitators' reflection logs, the baseline and final surveys, and observations from sessions attended by Blake Stevenson researchers. The key outcome areas the evaluation has specifically explored for care home staff are summarised below and discussed in this chapter.



3.2 In addition, this chapter discusses the contribution of care home staff to Living Voices sessions over the pilot period, the anticipated legacy of Living Voices in care homes and the extent to which care homes are likely to be able to continue undertaking Living Voices type activity independently without support from the programme.

Understanding of the benefits of oral and literary arts activities

3.3 Living Voices has had a positive impact on care home staff members' understanding of the benefits of oral and literary arts for older people. Survey responses show that, while care home staff felt they already had a high level of understanding before Living Voices, this increased slightly from a mean of 4.91 in the baseline survey to 5.11 in the final survey (on a scale of 1 (non-existent) to 6 (very good)). In addition, some facilitators observed that staff had increased their understanding of the benefits and value of oral and literary arts and providing intellectually stimulating activities for residents as a result of observing the positive impact of Living Voices sessions on residents. In particular, Living Voices has supported many care home staff to realise how oral and literary arts can be used to

improve the emotional wellbeing of residents and create a relaxed, therapeutic environment where relationships between residents can develop and personal memories and stories can be shared.

Knowledge, awareness and facilitation of oral and literary arts

3.4 We asked staff members to rate their skills and confidence in relation to oral and literary art forms (storytelling, poetry, and song, use of reminiscence materials, reading aloud and using a combination of these art forms) in the baseline, interim and final surveys. Analysis of responses to these questions indicates marginal increases among care home staff members' skills and confidence in relation to most of the oral and literary art forms used in Living Voices sessions. Responses from staff members to reflective questions in our final survey demonstrate a more significant increase in knowledge and awareness of arts and creative activities. Two–thirds of final survey respondents (6) reported that Living Voices has improved their awareness and understanding of arts and creative activities.

3.5 Similarly, responses to reflective questions indicate that staff members have increased their confidence in facilitating arts and creative activity with residents. Two–thirds of care home staff who completed the final survey (6) reported that their confidence has improved quite a lot in this respect. 50% of facilitators (5) agreed with this.

3.6 Similarly, 67% of staff (6) reported an improvement in their skills in facilitating arts and creative activity for residents, with some using this confidence to deliver activities similar to Living Voices outside of the monthly facilitator–led sessions. Comments from staff members include:

- "[I have gained] confidence to hold similar sessions every month with our residents built on the experience gained through the Living Voices project".
- "You learn how to do things, how to involve the residents".
- "[I learned about] how to use different materials".
- "I have learned to use a lot of different things [art forms]".
- "I am less nervous about approaching texts".

Engagement in oral and literary arts

3.7 Living Voices has led to increased or enhanced engagement in oral and literary arts in many participating care homes. Despite being subject to significant time pressures from daily care tasks and duties, survey responses suggest staff in many (but not all) care homes have taken steps to build spoken word, reminiscence and other arts activity into their everyday work with residents as a result of involvement in Living Voices. All staff members who

completed the final survey reported that they undertake some form of Living Voices–related activity between sessions:

- 89% (8) said they talk about Living Voices with residents;
- 78% (7) said they use techniques observed in Living Voices sessions in their work with residents;
- 33% (3) use the Living Voices scrapbook and/or box with residents between sessions;
- 44% (4) now lead other Living Voices–inspired oral and literary arts activities in the care home in between sessions, and 67% said they support residents to take part in other oral or literary arts activities in between sessions, through use of the resources left by facilitators (poems, stories and song sheets) on a small group and/or one to one basis with residents, including those not attending the sessions.

3.8 Comments which illustrate the activity between sessions include:

- "The [care home] manager enthused about what we are doing and said she wanted to make links throughout the month after sessions and was creating a memory wall of photos that lead down to the room we are working in… and a memory table with a collection of old artefacts" (facilitator).
- "I am not sure how much goes on in between sessions but the carers are very much hands on and have the residents' interests in heart and mind and therefore I feel they are happy to sit and chat when there is time and have a wee sing song!" (facilitator).
- A staff member "regularly re–uses our material in little sessions (sometimes one–to–one) in between LVs" (facilitator).
- "The scrapbook plays a big part for us and we have used it each month to reminisce on previous sessions and expand on the subjects and themes" (care home staff member).
- "I use the box of poems and stories and sing along sheets with other residents who are not attending the Living Voices group" (care home staff member).

3.9 The final survey and interviews with care home staff reveal that in some homes, Living Voices has led to an increase in arts and creative activities, including increased use of spoken word. 56% of final survey respondents (5) reported that Living Voices has led to more arts and creative activities being introduced in the care home and 44% (4) reported introducing new activities to their programme as a result of or inspired by Living Voices. For example, one home has created a reminiscence room with memorabilia and Living Voices materials. A staff member in another home said that "involvement in the arts and the like... [is] more present in [the care home] due to Living Voices".

3.10 The following comments from staff members illustrate the nature of new activities introduced as a result of Living Voices:

- "More reminiscing, reminiscing with Living Voices scrapbook, more music and creative activities".
- "A lot more storytelling and poetry being done now than before, and the clients are really liking it".
- "Reading groups and 1:1 poetry reading: more opportunities for residents to recite".
- "Poems, stories, we now have a memory lane".

3.11 Some care homes made significant use of arts activities before Living Voices, so the programme has perhaps not led to the same increase in activities in these homes as others. In the baseline survey 82% (9) of care home respondents said they had been involved in co-ordinating or facilitating arts-based activity within the care home before Living Voices started; this included: arts and crafts activities (mentioned by five respondents), entertainment including music, poetry reading, storytelling and theatre (4), reminiscence (3), poetry and singing groups (2), life story work (1) and outings to theatres and concerts (1). In the final evaluation fieldwork, when one care home activities co-ordinator commented that "I have always used craft, poetry and song in my work with our residents" and a facilitator said "the activities staff here already did and do a range of activities for the residents including reminiscence work and many musical events". However, qualitative data shows that Living Voices has had a positive impact on these homes by providing:

- high quality resources;
- new ideas to enhance and develop activities;
- support and development opportunities for staff; and
- a professional artist to facilitate.

3.12 On the whole, care home staff have enjoyed and benefited greatly from working alongside a professional, external facilitator who, as well as providing specialist and professional skills in oral and literary arts, provides a 'new face' which is commonly believed to evoke more interest among residents than if activities were facilitated by the care home staff who residents see every day. Care home staff feel the monthly facilitator visits have helped to foster a sense of occasion which enthuses and excites residents and makes them feel valued.

3.13 Some care home staff feel working alongside the facilitator and volunteer has provided a supportive environment for them to develop their own work related to facilitating oral and literary arts with older people and reduced their isolation in this task, for example one activities co-ordinator reported enjoying working with the facilitator and volunteer because she "felt like I was in a team".

Relationships with residents

3.14 The positive impact Living Voices has had on staff and resident relationships has been significant, and this has increased over the duration of the pilot. Survey responses and comments from several care home staff suggest that Living Voices has helped them to get to know their residents better, to find out more about their likes, dislikes and preferences, to spend more quality time with residents and to see them as unique individuals; all key components that assist in the delivery of effective person-centred care. Final survey respondents reported that Living Voices has improved their:

- knowledge of residents' past, likes and dislikes 'quite a lot' or 'a lot' (78%, 7);
- ability to provide positive evidence to the Care Inspectorate 'quite a lot' or 'a lot' (78% (7);
- relationships with residents 'quite a lot' or 'a lot' (67%, 6);
- communication with residents 'quite a lot' or 'a lot' (67%, 6); and
- ability to offer person-centred care 'quite a lot' (56%, 5).

3.15 Comments from care home staff that indicate how Living Voices has supported them to get to know their residents more intimately and to develop better relationships include:

- "You see a different side to them [residents]".
- "I have learned about residents' experiences".
- "(I have gained) awareness of residents' past lives e.g., their hobbies, their past occupations etc. I have thoroughly enjoyed spending time and listening to their stories and adventures, things I would not have had the time to talk through with them otherwise. The ability to see each resident as a unique person".
- "Getting to know our six people and what they really do think and say".
- "Living Voices has provided me with information of our residents, which I wouldn't have been aware of and has given me a deeper understanding of their personal lives".
- "When you take time away from your working day and have these two hours with our clients and you don't have to leave them to answer bells you really get to know them as people and their lives and then they become very interesting. They were not born old and we sometimes as carers forget this in our busy working day".

3.16 There is also some evidence that Living Voices has had a positive influence on how care homes are viewed by residents:

- "One lady stayed on longer in her trial of the home as she knew I was to visit – and it gave her a more favourable view of being in a home" (facilitator).
- "One of our residents is much more satisfied since she is part of the project and was also thankful that I made every effort to give her a chance to participate… this has also

improved our personal relationship and her outlook on being here (care home staff member)".

Job satisfaction

3.17 Living Voices has had a positive impact on care home staff members' satisfaction with their job: the vast majority (89%, 8) reported their job satisfaction has increased quite a lot (56%, 5) or a lot (33%, 3) as a result of Living Voices. Several care home staff described a feeling of satisfaction at helping to deliver an activity which residents enjoy. As one said, "I thoroughly enjoy the sessions myself and to see the clients enjoy it with the chatter, smiling faces, laughter and joining in the singing makes you feel warm inside because after all it's for them that this is for". In addition, a volunteer noted that the activities co-ordinator at her home seemed "more enthusiastic about her job" as a result of Living Voices.

Care home involvement and associated challenges

3.18 Care home staff have played an important role in supporting facilitators to deliver and, in some cases, prepare for Living Voices sessions. The level of involvement varies from home to home; there are examples of staff who sit fairly silently during sessions, and also examples of staff who are highly active in supporting the planning and delivery of sessions. For instance, in one case the care home staff member gathers residents one hour before the session to warm them up and "get them in the reminiscing mood". In a small number of homes there are examples of staff members who lead or have started leading activities during sessions (for example, telling a poem, story, or leading a song). While examples such as this are quite unusual, qualitative data indicates that, overall, the care home staff member has supported facilitators and volunteers in preparing for and delivering sessions in the following ways:

- ensuring the room is set up appropriately;
- bringing residents into the room and settling them;
- sharing personal stories and memories;
- generating and driving conversation (often using their knowledge of and familiarity with individual residents to prompt resident engagement);
- 'drawing out' quieter residents;
- one to one support to residents who require additional assistance to engage with the session;
- keeping an eye on residents and responding to any signs of distress or need for support;
- taking photos of sessions to act as prompts and reminders in between sessions; and/or

- organising tea, coffee and other refreshments.

3.19 Often, staff members provide an important source of knowledge about residents' background, interests, likes and dislikes. Some staff members use their knowledge of and familiarity with individual residents to prompt engagement, as one volunteer commented, "she [the staff member] encourages them [residents] to participate and understands the best way to engage each resident". Similarly, staff members' knowledge of residents can help facilitators to prepare for the session. For example, in one case, a staff member warned the facilitator that one resident had some particularly unpleasant memories of school and to bear this in mind when covering this subject. The input of care home staff in this respect enables the facilitator to tailor the sessions to the needs, desires and abilities of individuals and the group as a whole, within a safe environment.

3.20 Facilitators' logs reflect on the importance and value of having engaged staff in the sessions:

- "Their [care home staff] participation made the session flow wonderfully".
- "Both care home staff were highly supportive and intuitive as to the group's needs and my own needs".
- "They behave more as participants than overseers and were treated as such… there was a lot of banter".

3.21 The lack of time and support care home staff have to attend Living Voices sessions and to undertake Living Voices type activity in between the sessions has been a challenge throughout the pilot – "They're stretched to the limit – I can feel it when I go in" (facilitator). However, overall there appears to have been increased consistency of staff present at sessions as the programme has progressed and, overall, an increased awareness from care homes of the value of having the same staff member present at each session. There are some examples where care home staff have gone out of their way to ensure they can attend and contribute to the sessions fully and this is testament to the perceived value of the sessions:

- "Carers had a wee blip at the beginning as they were told they were too busy to come in. I said we had to have at least one of them if possible. They have both now said they will in future work a morning shift and come in to the session after work in their own time so they won't feel under pressure to leave the other staff struggling…amazing!" (facilitator).
- "Our carer had been promoted since the last session and she said this should really mean she stops coming to the sessions…but she said she wants to continue" (facilitator).

3.22 Although staff have been helpful in most care homes, some facilitators and volunteers encountered challenges related to working with care home staff who they perceived did not value the programme or found the activity of preparing the room and residents for the session as a "nuisance". Others have noted difficulties in getting any staff member at all to be present during sessions. This has improved over the evaluation period, with facilitators in a couple of homes that were initially indifferent towards/reticent to engage with Living Voices reporting a "complete turnaround" in reception, with homes now valuing the sessions and the difference they can make to residents: "They were reluctant and wary at first… then by the second session I think they [care home] realised it [Living Voices] was something very different…and by a few sessions in I was enthusiastically greeted and two or three care home staff were squabbling over who should attend!" (facilitator). However, in one or two homes, staff engagement has continued to be a struggle: "No staff available for sessions. Everyone seems to have low morale. But I get so much back from the residents and they make it happen. We make the most of limited space (facilitator)".

3.23 Facilitators' observations suggest that clarity of communication and expectations, concerted effort and time are key to building effective relationships with care homes, however this can be time-consuming on top of session preparation and delivery and has not been allowed for within the current model, and the evaluation reveals not all facilitators feel comfortable negotiating access with care homes and appreciate and require support at a national level to manage this.

Legacy in care homes and potential for future involvement

3.24 Evaluation participants (facilitators, care home staff and volunteers) identified various positive aspects of the legacy that Living Voices will leave, including:

- friendships formed between participants;
- increased understanding among staff of the benefits and importance of oral and literary arts for older people;
- resources, skills, confidence, ideas and motivation for care home staff to facilitate arts and creative activities with residents;
- increased interest among residents in arts and creative activities; and
- increased likelihood among care homes to take part in similar activities in the future.

3.25 Most notably, interviewees hope that the legacy of Living Voices will be continued arts and creative activities in care homes. There is a high level of interest in continuing Living Voices activities among staff: all final survey respondents (100%, 9) would like to continue involvement in the programme, and all said they are likely to continue delivering arts and creative activities after Living Voices ends.

3.26 However, the evaluation suggests it is unlikely that care homes will have the budget to fund an external facilitator[3] so the ability of care homes to continue these activities depends on the time, confidence and skills of staff. A key challenge will be addressing low confidence among staff in their ability to deliver these activities without Living Voices support (33% (3) feel quite confident, 44% (4) fairly confident and 11% (1) not very confident). Training may help to achieve this: care home staff responded positively to the suggestion of receiving training to help them run activities like Living Voices independently. 78% of care home staff (7) would be interested in receiving training like this and 78% (7) think they would feel confident in running activities like Living Voices independently if they were given appropriate training and management support. Even where care home staff have the skills and confidence to continue delivering Living Voices–inspired activity, there would be significant disappointment if the role of professional facilitator was removed:

- "X and X homes say they don't want LV to end. They could have a go themselves but what they valued so much was professionals like us coming in from the outside world… bringing it with us…bringing a fresh perspective. New and stimulating relationships and possibilities" (facilitator).

[3] Most care home staff who responded to the final survey (78%, 7) are not sure if their care home would be willing and able to pay for Living Voices sessions.

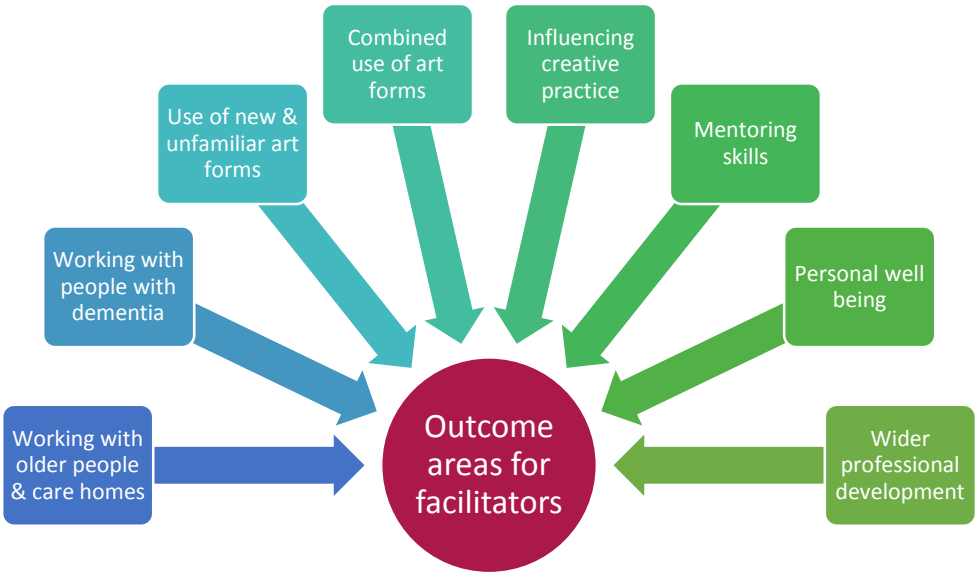
4. IMPACT FOR LIVING VOICES FACILITATORS

Introduction

4.1 Ten professional artist practitioners (facilitators) have been involved in delivering the Living Voices Programme. This section reports on how they have benefitted from the Living Voices programme, professionally and personally.

4.2 The evidence from this section is drawn from the baseline surveys and interviews with facilitators, as well as facilitators' reflection logs where we asked them to reflect on their experiences of delivering Living Voices and their learning and development in terms of professional and creative practice as well as mentoring volunteers.

4.3 Outcomes for facilitators are explored under the key themes summarised in the diagram below and discussed in the following chapter.



Skills and confidence in working with older people

4.4 Overall, Living Voices has had a positive impact on facilitators' skills and confidence in facilitating arts sessions with older people. All ten facilitators reported in the final survey that being involved with Living Voices has increased their confidence in this respect (40% (4) quite a lot and 60% (6) a lot).

4.5 Qualitative evidence suggests that all facilitators, including those who already had significant experience in working with older audiences, have benefitted to some extent

from improved confidence in facilitating oral and literary arts activities with older people and working in a care home setting. This confidence has, for many, increased over the duration of the Living Voices pilot. One facilitator commented on their increasing confidence in working with older people: "My lack of experience in working with older people was my biggest challenge. Quite honestly, I was terrified… but the more sessions I do, the better that has become".

4.6 Similarly, taking part in Living Voices appears to have increased facilitators' skills in facilitating arts sessions with older people. All ten facilitators who completed the final survey reported that their skills have increased (50% (5) quite a lot and 50% (5) a lot). One facilitator commented that Living Voices "has necessitated very different skills in some ways than are required for working with young people. It has allowed me to develop a gentler, more mindful approach at times, and to slow down, listen very carefully and respond to needs that are very specific and potentially very difficult to overcome (in terms of communication)". Another commented that they were now "more informed on impact and modes of working with older people, have more contacts in the field and have visited other projects".

4.7 Most facilitators (90%, 9) reported that being involved with Living Voices has improved their understanding of the benefits of oral and literary arts for older people and all facilitators felt that Living Voices has improved their understanding of how best to use participatory oral and literary arts with older people (60% (6) quite a lot and 40% (4) a lot). For example one facilitator said: "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".

4.8 While many facilitators' understanding in this respect was already fairly high at the start of the pilot, where they had previously worked with older people, facilitators have generally been quite overwhelmed and surprised by how meaningful and valuable the sessions have been and the positive impacts the sessions have had for residents both "in the moment" and longer term over the pilot period. The following quote captures the Living Voices approach and a sentiment shared by many facilitators:

- "You see these residents opening like butterflies having hidden deep inside a cocoon retreating from the world… their voices, their stories, their lives matter and this is what counts in every session. It is about the human interaction between us which is precious… the art forms I use are just a bridge to help us connect. It's how we use these art forms that counts… what threads we pick up from residents as we share a

poem or song or story and give space for them to weave their thread of a story into the group" (facilitator).

Working with people with dementia

4.9 In qualitative interviews a number of facilitators commented on how Living Voices has improved their awareness and understanding of dementia and how to work effectively with older people with cognitive impairment. Facilitators' exposure to people with dementia and the different stages of dementia has varied depending on the composition of their groups. During the earlier phases of the pilot, facilitators working with people with more advanced dementia found this particularly challenging; their confidence and skills in this respect have grown over the evaluation period. For example, one facilitator commented that "the residents I work with… have varying degrees of dementia and it can be hard keeping everyone engaged. It took me a long time to feel comfortable speaking to people with advanced dementia, though it feels easier for me to do so now". Reflection logs also suggest that Living Voices has given many facilitators greater exposure to using oral and literary arts with people with dementia and has helped them develop their professional practice and confidence in this respect.

Skills and confidence in new and unfamiliar art forms

4.10 The Living Voices programme encourages facilitators to deliver sessions using a combination of art forms including storytelling, poetry and music/song alongside reminiscence techniques. Consequently, while facilitators are professionally experienced and trained in one or a mix of art forms, they were not necessarily experienced in the full range of art forms Living Voices employs when the pilot started. Evaluation suggests that Living Voices has had a positive impact on facilitators' *skills* in using various (and for some, new) art forms. In the final survey, all facilitators reported that Living Voices had increased their skills in new art forms to some extent (20% (2) a little, 50% (5) quite a lot and 30% (3) a lot). All facilitators reported that Living Voices has increased their *confidence* in new art forms to at least some extent (20% (2) a little, 50% (5) quite a lot and 30% (3) a lot).

4.11 Of the six facilitator responses to the baseline and final survey that we can match and compare:

- three (50%) reported improved skills, and four (67%) reported improved confidence in using song;
- three (50%) reported improved skills and two (33%) reported improved confidence in using reminiscence materials;
- two (33%) reported improved skills and three (50%) reported improved confidence in using poetry; and

- one (17%) reported improved skills and two (33%) reported improved confidence in storytelling.

4.12 Improvements in skills and confidence in using new, or lesser used arts forms was a common theme in qualitative interviews with facilitators. A selection of comments from facilitators about their skills and confidence development in the various art forms employed in Living Voices sessions include:

- "[Living Voices is] a baseline from which to develop storytelling – a new skill".
- "There isn't really enough time to develop creativity in a major way but my storytelling has definitely been improved and refined".
- "Being involved in Living Voices is stimulating me… I'm sure this experience will enrich my creative practice".
- "I now regularly use poetry and song in other sessions as a result [of Living Voices]".
- "Now believing I can sing well enough to lead a group in song. Discovering I can tell a story and hold the group's attention although I have no formal training in 'storytelling' as such".
- "[I have] more confidence in my own experience and skills".
- "My poem choice is usually spot on now… as I always know what they like, but always include something a little bit difficult and challenging".

4.13 Qualitative interviews and reflection logs also suggest that Living Voices has supported facilitators to gain confidence and experience in using other creative techniques and approaches with an older audience: examples include experimenting with drama, story and poetry making as a group, and use of props and artefacts to stimulate the sessions.

Use of art forms together

4.14 Qualitative data confirms that in nearly all sessions, facilitators have used a combination of each of the art forms to some extent, including those they did not previously have experience in. These art forms are not delivered as single, standalone performances of 'a song', or 'story' but are skilfully woven and threaded together seamlessly throughout the session to reflect and provide prompts related to the theme of the session, while at the same time accommodating and responding to individual responses, stories, and memories. The balance of different art forms varies depending on the mood of the audience, the topic in question and in response to the memories that are prompted during the session. To this end, facilitators often come prepared with far more material than they will use to enable the sessions to be as responsive and coherent as possible.

4.15 This is a skilled approach that comes from significant relevant experience and training and it is also clear from observed visits and the reflection logs that this approach is not new to

many of the facilitators who were already skilled and experienced at working in this way. However, Living Voices has given facilitators the opportunities to hone and develop their combined approach to using different art forms to work in a very person–centred, resident–led way:

> "I definitely took a step back today and let the group find its own way – just popping a wee anecdote and story and poem suggestion and initiating songs etc. but letting the moment of inspiration take its course with everyone and when the moment came to drop in another wee seed!"

4.16 Of the six facilitators whose baseline and final survey responses we could match, four (67%) reported improved skills and confidence in using a combination of art forms together. Reflection logs and interview data also suggests that over the pilot period, facilitators have developed and improved their practice in terms of use of multiple art forms and have learned how to best use and combine the different art forms to best engage the groups they are working with. One facilitator said that Living Voices "has helped me combine the three disciplines more naturally". Other comments from facilitators which illustrate this point include:

- "I learned that my assertion of 'plan but expect your plan to change' is correct".
- "Poems are great because of their concision, potential thematic impact and the way they can serve to deepen thinking, move thinking ahead, or change gear. Songs are the lifeblood as everyone liked to sing, tap feet and conduct".
- "I learned that variety – not spending too long on any one thing – seemed to work well".
- "I now have no particular concern over how much of the plan is achieved because the aim is to engage and if the group wants to linger over a topic or theme, we do so. If this means there isn't time for other bits of the material, I'm not fazed. I do feel I've learned to determine at any time, when it is good to move on and refresh the conversation or focus. But I never rush to get things in".

4.17 Reflection logs suggest that over time, facilitator confidence has grown in terms of managing different art forms and threading them together in a seamless way, meaning less preparation time/material to hand is required as a result of greater confidence in the fact they can lead a well–flowing session in a natural way. As their confidence has grown, they have come to further appreciate the flexibility of the session model and national resources, as one facilitator said: "This model gives us all dignity. LV 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".

4.18 Facilitators have found and shared their own approaches to creating good flow into and between art forms, for example, playing music (live, e.g., from a harp, or from a pre-recorded playlist) to notify the start and end of the session, to introduce a poem, story or change in direction, and to hide any gaps in conversation. As one facilitator said: "The music was a real thread of connecting with the rest of the group and seemed to bring calm when there was frustration".

Influence on creative practice

4.19 In addition to the impact Living Voices has had for facilitators in terms of the way they work with older audiences and their confidence in and use of various and combined arts forms, the pilot has had a number of other notable influences on facilitators' creative practice and creative outputs. Some facilitators have used the oral histories gathered through their Living Voices work to inspire and inform their creative practice with other audiences and groups, for example:

- One facilitator said Living Voices had provided "social history to feed into my own creative practice of making stories and songs".
- Another facilitator said: "I am creating new stories which are used in other community sharing sessions".
- One facilitator shared stories and memories from one Living Voices group with another Living Voices group to extend the sense of connection across the programme.

4.20 A number highlighted the potential of Living Voices groups to be a valuable source of local oral histories and narratives that could be used by schools, libraries and museums, as one facilitator said: "I see Living Voices as just the beginning. Oral history, song writing and creative projects in local schools are easily potential spin-offs of this work".

4.21 Other influences on facilitators in terms of changes in their creative practice and producing creative outputs inspired by Living Voices include:

- a facilitator producing more work in Doric;
- a facilitator writing and performing more poetry: "I have created a body of unique stories [and] have found the confidence to attend poetry classes and share my own poetry which I now write weekly not occasionally";
- facilitators using material inspired by Living Voices with other groups (see examples above);
- a facilitator creating poems out of the life stories residents have told her;
- a facilitator creating photographic portraits of residents' hands;

- a facilitator producing a transcript of a story a resident had told and giving this to them the following session ("She was quite taken aback and expressed surprise, disbelief, and delight – I think she felt very proud and moved to see her story in print" (facilitator);
- changes in a facilitator's approach to writing poetry: "I am aware that now when I write a poem I jot down ideas as they occur without ordering them in any kind of narrative or thematic way as I used to – I tried to write sequentially – but simply noting ideas that aren't joined up (at that moment) then reviewing such a draft later I can order such 'single units' into stanzas and poems – or enjoy the oblique connections between them".

Mentoring skills

4.22 Living Voices has had a positive impact on most facilitators in terms of their mentoring skills and working with volunteers, although the impact in terms of this outcome area has been slightly less positive than for other areas. Seven facilitators (70%) reported in the final survey that they have developed their mentoring skills as a result of being involved with Living Voices (30% (3) a little, 20% (2) quite a lot and 20% (2) a lot). Eight facilitators (80%) felt that Living Voices has developed their skills in supporting volunteers (30% (3) a little, 20% (2) quite a lot and 30% (3) a lot).

4.23 For many of the facilitators who have worked alongside a volunteer, the experience has been challenging:

- "Mentoring volunteers is new to me and I am finding it a challenge… but a worthwhile challenge! Working out the balance and how much 'control' to have and how to encourage and speak honestly about listening and when to share…interesting!"
- "I'm concerned as to whether I've been able to do much at all in terms of supporting volunteers to really develop skills as they might have wished".

4.24 Qualitative comments from facilitators' logs have offered some insight into facilitators' relationships with volunteers as well as some insight into their skills development in terms of mentoring and supporting volunteers. While discussion around volunteers in reflection logs has been fairly limited it seems that the majority of facilitators have found the relationship with and involvement of their volunteer very valuable in terms of delivering the session, however they also suggest that while facilitators have been aware of the development and support needs of their volunteers, they have not been able to address these either because a) they were not sure how, b) there has not been time to address development needs adequately within the sessions due to the focus on session delivery, and c) there has been limited resourced time outside of the session to support volunteers'

development needs. The challenges associated with the facilitator–volunteer dynamic are further explored in the following chapter.

Personal wellbeing

4.25 The evaluation evidence suggests that Living Voices has had a positive personal impact on facilitators in terms of their own health and wellbeing, their outlook on life and their abilities to deal with challenges presented by their own personal circumstances. Key benefits in this respect experienced by a number of facilitators include an increased sense of general wellbeing, increased sense of making a positive societal contribution, increased connection to their community/reconnecting with communities they have previously lived in, improved mental health and increased capacity to deal with the impact of dementia on their own lives. The following quotes (from different facilitators) are illustrative of these points:

- "It's been very positive for me revisiting X, the city where I was born and was educated in and stayed until I was 23. It has led to me writing more in Scots and giving an opportunity for personal reminiscence".
- "The project has come at the right time for me personally, given my father's dementia, and has helped me to cope with this".
- "Working on the project … has had a positive effect on my mental health. I've suffered from depression and anxiety disorder for many years and undertaking this work brings me greater peace and joy than does any medication… of course it can be stressful work, but this is mitigated by the apparent pleasure of Living Voices".
- "That you could be 100 years old and not be able to walk but still retain a wicked sense of humour and banter and sharp wit that many 20 year olds couldn't keep up with! I love spending time with these women, they are teaching me much about a life lived and loved for whatever it has dealt along the journey".

Wider professional development and future involvement

4.26 Working on a longer term contract has been an unusual and welcomed experience for many facilitators and one which many feel enhances their CV. The opportunity to work with two national bodies (SPL and SSC) has also been a very positive experience for facilitators and they are appreciative of the support, resources and gravitas being part of a "well–co–ordinated" national programme has brought. Facilitators have also, on the whole, valued working together as a community of artists who have been supported at national level to share and learn from one another's practice and experience; although feel they would have benefited from more opportunities to do so over the pilot period.

4.27 Nearly all facilitators (90%, 9) would be interested in being involved in any future roll out of Living Voices.

5. IMPACT FOR LIVING VOICES VOLUNTEERS

5.1 This chapter explores outcomes for Living Voices volunteers resulting from their role in the programme. Sources that have informed this section include volunteers' observations, facilitators' reflection logs, the baseline and final surveys, and observations from sessions attended by Blake Stevenson researchers.

5.2 The key outcome areas the evaluation has specifically explored for volunteers are summarised in the diagram below and discussed in this chapter.

5.3 In addition, this chapter also looks at the development of the volunteer role over the duration of the programme, and associated issues.

Confidence and skills working with older people and care homes

Confidence

5.4 Living Voices has had a positive impact on volunteers' confidence in working with older people. All volunteers who completed our final survey reported that Living Voices had improved their confidence in working with older people to at least some extent (13% (1) a little, 63% (5) quite a lot and 25% (2) a lot). 60% of facilitators (6) observed increased confidence in working with older people among the volunteer(s) they work alongside.

5.5 We asked survey respondents to rate their confidence in working with older people on a scale of 1 (not at all confident) to 6 (extremely confident). Responses to the final survey indicate an improvement: the mean average response among final survey respondents was 4.5, compared with 3.8 among baseline survey respondents.

5.6 For example, a volunteer explained that Living Voices has "given me confidence [in my] ability to go into a place where you don't know anyone" to facilitate oral and literary arts

activities and engage with older people who have difficulty in responding: "It's made me think maybe I'm quite good at this... people have opened up to me". Another volunteer commented that "working in a care home using poetry, story and songs has given me confidence to do similar work".

5.7 A facilitator gave an example of her volunteer who "undertook the first 20 minutes or so of a session, reading poems and generating chat. I'd always thought her very shy, preferring to support, and somewhat under-confident in her delivery skills. But she was very very good indeed, in her selection of material, her blending, sequencing, stimulus techniques and delivery... maybe the project has been a powerful learning process for her, that has helped her develop skills, particularly in delivery and group-leading. I really don't think she could have delivered as she did at the start of the project".

5.8 Other comments which illustrate volunteers' growing confidence over the pilot period include:

- "Volunteer was more comfortable with the group and happy to start new songs or work with a subgroup in a supportive way" (facilitator).
- "[The volunteer] is becoming more confident delivering material" (facilitator).
- "[I have] learnt more about how to engage with the elderly, what they respond to and what they are less likely to enjoy and respond to" (volunteer).
- "(I have) developed confidence in working with older people" (volunteer).
- "I feel more comfortable and confident working with this group [older people]" (volunteer).
- "I have noticed my volunteer becoming more confident within the environment: [before] she felt very nervous of what people might be like, what she might see or hear" (facilitator).
- "[volunteer] emailed me the next day to say how much she'd enjoyed it and that she'd gone in feeling oppressed by the atmosphere and institutional feel of the home but left feeling energised and very positive which was lovely" (facilitator).

Skills

5.9 Volunteers reported an improvement in their skills in working with older people as a result of Living Voices. All volunteers said their skills had improved in this respect (13% (1) a little and 88% (7) quite a lot). A volunteer said she has "a better understanding of how to deal with older people". 60% of facilitators (6) felt the volunteer(s) they work with had demonstrated improved skills in working with older people.

5.10 Comments from volunteers and facilitators include:

- "(I have gained) increased awareness of what it appears to be like to be elderly and dependent… increased respect for the needs of the elderly to be treated with respect and integrity" (volunteer).
- "I have increased awareness of patterns of communicative behaviour associated with being elderly" (volunteer).
- "[Living Voices] Gives me skills to use in personal/professional life such as developing listening skills or how to positively encourage quieter residents" (volunteer).
- "I was impressed by [volunteer's] ability to ask questions and chat to residents – great to have a confident volunteer on board" (facilitator).

Skills and confidence working with people with dementia

5.11 Several volunteers commented on their improved skills, knowledge and confidence in working with people with dementia as a result of involvement in Living Voices:

- "I have learned more about people with dementia".
- "(I have gained) a better understanding of how dementia affects people".
- "I enjoy working with older people and have become more interested in dementia".

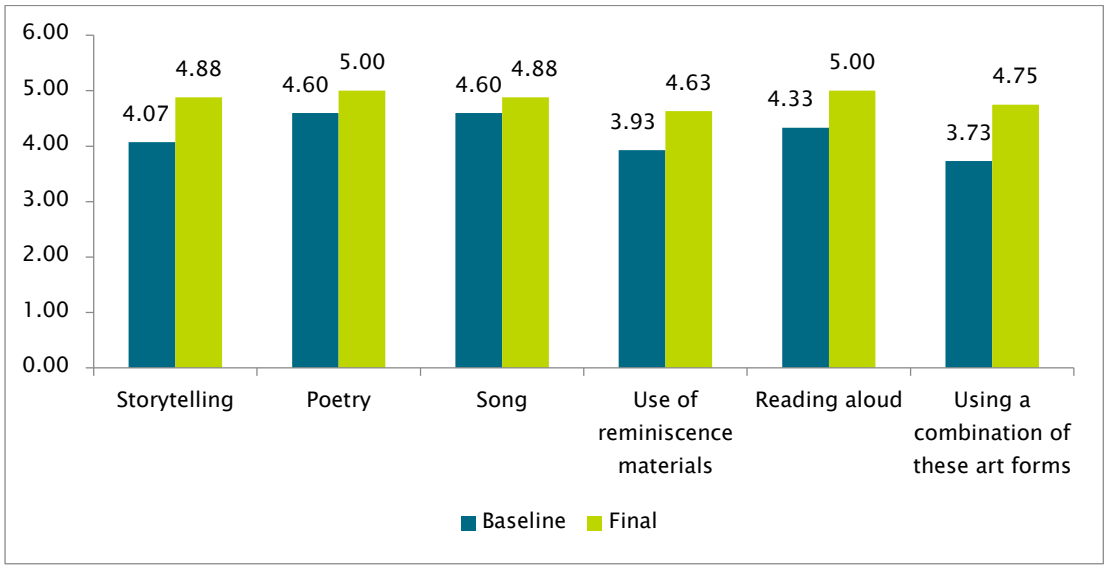
5.12 One volunteer noted that the experience had "made me more aware of issues for people with dementia in residential care" and "motivated me to do things to improve quality of life for people in residential care".

Use of art forms

Awareness and understanding of different art forms

5.13 Living Voices has had a positive impact on volunteers' awareness and understanding of various art forms. We asked volunteers to rate their awareness and understanding of various art forms on a scale of 1 (non-existent) to 6 (very good). Figure 4.1 on the following page shows that the mean response improved between the baseline and final surveys in relation to each art form.

Fig 5.1: Volunteers' awareness and understanding of art forms



5.14 The improvement seems particularly notable in relation to volunteers' awareness and understanding of using a combination of these art forms.

Skills and confidence in using different art forms and facilitating oral and literary arts

5.15 Living Voices has had a positive impact on volunteers' skills and confidence in using different art forms and in facilitating oral and literary arts activities. All volunteers who completed the final survey felt that Living Voices has improved their skills in participating in oral and literary arts (13% (1) a little, 50% (4) quite a lot and 38% (3) a lot). Similarly, 88% (7) reported that Living Voices has improved their group facilitation skills (13% (1) a little and 75% (6) quite a lot). 60% of facilitators (6) noted that volunteers have improved their skills in oral and literary art forms. Nearly all volunteers who completed the final survey (88%, 7) felt that Living Voices has improved their confidence in participating in oral and literary arts (13% (1) a little, 38% (3) quite a lot and 38% (3) a lot). 70% of facilitators (7) observed that the volunteers they work with have improved confidence in oral and literary art forms.

5.16 We asked volunteers in the baseline and final surveys to rate their skills in relation to participating in the range oral and literary arts activities employed in Living Voices on a scale of 1 (not at all skilled) to 6 (extremely skilled). The mean improved in relation to each art form, except song. Most notably, volunteers improved their skills in using reminiscence materials and using a combination of art forms. We also asked volunteers to rate their confidence in this respect. Volunteers' confidence increased in relation to participating in each art form, most notably poetry and reading aloud, where the mean scores showed the greatest increase between the baseline and final surveys.

5.17 Comments from volunteers include:

- "[I have] more confidence in presenting poems".
- "Increased confidence to read poetry aloud with the group".
- "Reawakened an appreciation of poetry as a form of communication".
- "Became more interested in poetry and reading".
- "[I have gained] experience from working with the facilitator and learning from watching how she handles the sessions".

5.18 Volunteers reported a slight increase in confidence in facilitating oral and literary arts activities between the baseline and final surveys.

Professional connections and opportunities

5.19 Living Voices has had a positive impact on volunteers in terms of developing their professional connections and opportunities. The experience has helped some volunteers to make links with professional artists and professionals who work with older people. 50% of final survey respondents (4) said that Living Voices has helped them to make useful links with professional artists to some extent. Similarly, 63% of final survey respondents (5) felt that they have made useful links with professionals who work with older people to some extent. There are also examples where some volunteers have developed connections with their care home outside of sessions, and others who have created links with local services and resources such as libraries, museums and heritage organisations as part of their involvement in Living Voices.

5.20 Volunteers reported an increased interest in volunteering or working in care homes and with older people in the future. All volunteers who responded to the final survey reported an increased interest in volunteering or working with older people in the future. Similarly, nearly all (88%, 7) have an increased interest in volunteering or working in a care home in the future to at least some extent. Comments from volunteers include:

- "I was initially wary of working with the elderly and care home residents but am now confident enough to consider volunteering in this sector in the future".
- "An increased desire and skills base to pursue further formal study and writing of poetry; with one eventual aim of facilitating creative sessions myself one day, drawing on poetry and other skills I have learned in Living Voices sessions".

5.21 There are two examples where volunteers' experience of Living Voices helped them to find a job:

- One volunteer who found a job working with a social care organisation feels that "one of the reasons I was well suited to the job was because of the experience I had gained from Living Voices of supporting an arts facilitator to deliver sessions".
- Another said "since beginning with Living Voices I have started a job at a resource centre for older people. Prior to this I had volunteered at the centre, leading a poetry group, something I would not have felt confident to do had I not had the Living Voices experience".

5.22 A facilitator gave an example of a volunteer who "gained a huge amount" from Living Voices. The volunteer was previously a Social Worker but had been away from work for some years while raising her children. She lacked confidence to apply for new jobs but, after starting to volunteer, she secured a job in a care home; according to the facilitator, this was "due in large part" to Living Voices volunteering.

5.23 There are another two examples of volunteers who said that volunteering with Living Voices provided learning which helped them in their paid job. For example, one volunteer works as an administrator in a care home. She said that volunteering with Living Voices has helped her in this role by helping her to become "more aware of what elderly people want and enjoy". Another volunteer said "I work with organisations developing projects to reduce isolation, so this has given me direct hands-on experience which has been immensely valuable" (volunteer).

Wellbeing

5.24 As with facilitators, taking part in Living Voices has had a positive impact on some volunteers' wellbeing in terms of improved understanding of dementia, ability to deal with personal and family challenge, feelings of satisfaction and self-worth from delivering enjoyable sessions and reduced stress.

Greater understanding leading to improved ability to deal with personal and family challenges

5.25 Some volunteers explained that Living Voices had helped them to understand more about dementia and ageing, thereby helping them feel better equipped to deal with personal and family challenges associated with ageing and death. A few examples are below:

- One volunteer said "it has helped me to understand the ageing process of my own Mum and Dad and what sort of things might affect them. It has increased my confidence in dealing with their issues and problems too".

- Another said "it has had a positive effect on me as I am not looking forward to getting older myself. Volunteering with Living Voices has alleviated some of my fears as the residents were so inspiring with their reminiscing and attitude to life".
- Another volunteer said that Living Voices helped her to come to terms with the death of her mother by giving her contact with older people – she said the experience "filled a personal gap".

5.26 On the other hand, another volunteer did not approve of the way in which some care home staff spoke to and treated residents. While this strengthened her desire to "do things to improve quality of life for people in residential care" it also made her slightly anxious about growing old.

Satisfaction and self–worth

5.27 Volunteers described a feeling of satisfaction gained from delivering a session which residents benefit from:

- "I always feel good after a session as the residents are so positive about our visit and are so pleased to see us. I feel that I am contributing something to their quality of life".
- "It has brought me satisfaction and enjoyment in knowing that at least for a short time I have maybe brought some joy to a resident's day".

5.28 Another said that volunteering in a worthwhile activity such as Living Voices made her feel that she can still contribute to something worthwhile, now that her family have grown up and left home.

Reduced stress

5.29 Some volunteers found that volunteering in Living Voices provided an enjoyable contrast to the stress associated with their normal job. For example, one volunteer with "a really busy job" noted that Living Voices reduced her stress levels: "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".

5.30 Another noted that Living Voices helped her to cope with the challenges of her paid employment: "I found working as a carer to be challenging because of the system it operates in, which to me felt very stark. But in Living Voices I found a humanising counterbalance that brought monthly reminders of the kind of beauty and creativity that can be brought out in care settings. I'm not sure I would have been able to cope with the care work in the way I did had I not also been doing the Living Voices volunteering" (volunteer).

The volunteer role and associated challenges

Involvement in sessions

5.31 The anticipation at the outset of the pilot was that each care home would have a facilitator supported by an appropriately matched volunteer. Challenges recruiting and retaining volunteers over the programme period have meant that a number of homes have operated without a volunteer for all or part of the pilot. Where volunteers have been in place, the nature and level of volunteers' involvement has varied from volunteer to volunteer. While facilitators have led, directed and delivered the sessions, volunteers have provided valuable input during the sessions in a variety of ways:

- helping to set up the room/tea break as well as sharing personal reflections or memories during the session;
- reading a poem or telling a story;
- handing props out to residents;
- supporting/reassuring residents who become distressed or confused;
- contributing questions and comments to prompt input from residents;
- contributing their own creative outputs such as poems they had written;
- contributing their own knowledge of the local community and the area in which the home is situated; and
- providing one to one support to assist residents with additional support requirements (e.g., visual or sensory impairments) to engage more fully with the session, e.g.:

> "[Volunteer] does a fabulous job sitting close to her [a lady who is deaf] and relaying/repeating carefully where we're at and helping her to find space to contribute and respond" (facilitator).

5.32 The absence of a volunteer in some places has not impacted negatively on session delivery; in some instances, the care home staff member has fulfilled a similar role either instead of or in addition to the volunteer. Our researchers observed strong collaboration between facilitators and volunteers in the three care homes we spent time in, aided by a feeling of mutual respect and a mutual desire to deliver a session which improved the quality of life of residents. There are examples where volunteer involvement in session planning and delivery has evolved and developed over time, and examples where volunteer involvement has tailed off or become more intermittent due to completing priorities.

Added value of volunteer's background

5.33 It is clear from reflection logs that where the volunteer has strong connections to and knowledge of the community the care home is based in, this can be valuable in supporting

session delivery. Their local knowledge (as well as sometimes knowledge of residents and their family and friends) adds richness and context to the sessions which supports reminiscence and engagement, particularly for those with cognitive impairment. Facilitators had the following to say:

- "[Volunteers'] memories of the area are a crucial thread to stimulate stories".
- "Volunteer knows some of the residents from when she was wee so she was able to remind them about what beautiful gardens they had. It's so important to have her there to fill those missing stories and take the memory a little further without residents feeling they can't recall or have forgotten".
- "Volunteer is a rich source of local community information".

5.34 There is at least one example where the volunteer is an experienced storyteller and has tended to lead on the storytelling aspects of the sessions for much of the programme and where the facilitator feels they have learned in this respect from the volunteer.

Challenges associated with the volunteer role

5.35 In most cases, the relationship between facilitator and volunteer seems to have worked well and the volunteer has provided valuable (in some areas invaluable) support. However the pilot has highlighted a number of challenges and learning associated with the volunteer role: concern that the volunteer role does not leave enough room for care home staff participation; differences in personalities and practice preferences between facilitators and volunteers; lack of time and resource available for facilitators to support development of volunteers.

6. WIDER IMPACT

Introduction

6.1 Each pilot area has engaged with a number of local partners to raise awareness of the programme and support programme delivery to varying degrees. Local partner involvement has varied across the areas, but included library services, local authority older people and wellbeing teams, local Third Sector Interfaces (TSIs), and local care home Activity Networks. This chapter reflects on the wider and unanticipated impact involvement in Living Voices has had for these local partners.

Impact for local partners

6.2 Involvement in Living Voices has resulted in a number of unanticipated benefits for local partners. One care home Activity Network has benefited from increased care home engagement as homes have come to value the importance of activities more as a result of the programme. The network has also benefitted from the opportunity to pilot Living Voices training with wider care homes in the area. This pilot has indicated positive early results in terms of care home staff's ability and inclination to deliver Living Voices–style activities in the home.

6.3 Local library services have benefited in a number of different ways. For example, involvement in the programme has helped highlight the potential role of library services in supporting community wellbeing with one example of Living Voices promoting joint working between the library service and social care department through the piloting of a reminiscence project. A staff member in another library has taken learning and confidence from Living Voices to inform their approach to reminiscence and use of literary arts with older people within an existing library–supported project.

6.4 One local authority wellbeing team felt Living Voices had helped them to develop a more holistic service (having previously focused on physical activity to support wellbeing in older people) as well as raising the profile of their work through the national focus on media attention the programme had received. One TSI has benefited from involvement in Living Voices through gaining a practical insight and understanding of life and challenges within care homes which is informing their approach to the Reshaping Care for Older People (RCOP) Change Fund activity.

Future involvement

6.5 All local partners interviewed were convinced of the value of Living Voices and would be keen to continue to support any future development of the programme at a local level. The support offered varied depending on the organisation, but included support with accessing community–based venues and accommodation, support with raising awareness through local third sector and care home networks, support recruiting and supporting volunteers, support recruiting care homes, support to source and supply literary materials, props and artefacts. Some of the organisations might be able to make some limited financial contribution to assist with local implementation of Living Voices but this would not be substantial; one organisation that has assisted financially to date will struggle to continue this.

7. REFLECTIONS ON THE LIVING VOICES MODEL AND CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE FUTURE

General observations

7.1 The previous chapters have demonstrated that the Living Voices pilot programme has had a highly positive impact on all participating stakeholder groups (participants, facilitators, volunteers and care home staff) and that all of the anticipated outcomes have been achieved to some extent. This final evaluation report confirms and strengthens the validity of the positive outcomes and impacts identified in the interim evaluation report (July 2013) and demonstrates that in many respects the strength of impact has increased over time as the programme has developed, as learning from practice and evaluation has shaped delivery, and as relationships and dynamics in each setting have developed and matured over time.

7.2 The evaluation provides strong evidence that the innovative model tested through the Living Voices pilot is highly effective at improving the experiences and well-being of older people in care settings, as well as supporting development, learning and improved wellbeing for volunteers, practitioners and care home staff. Many involved in the programme have been overwhelmed by the extent of the pilot's success in achieving positive outcomes for all involved and surprised by the intensity of the journey it has taken them all on.

7.3 This final chapter reflects on the elements of the Living Voices model that have been key to supporting the impacts identified in earlier chapters. It also offers key learning that can be taken from the approach the pilot has tested, and reflects on issues of sustainability and considerations for the future to inform the development and expansion of Living Voices and other initiatives seeking to take a similarly person-centred approach to the use of oral and literary arts to improve the wellbeing and experiences of older people.

Key factors that have supported impact and make Living Voices unique

7.4 In general, evaluation participants perceive Living Voices to have been somewhat "unique" and original in its approach to arts participation for older people in care settings, particularly care home settings, compared to other offerings that are traditionally available to older audiences. This 'uniqueness' has been key to the success of the programme. The evaluation reveals that it is the following factors that make the Living Voices model stand out as an innovative approach to participatory arts with older people, and have been key to the impact it has achieved:

- It offers a highly personalised, person-centred and tailored approach that values participants individually and as a group – while the model is well-structured and resourced around key common themes, it allows professionals the freedom to adapt flexibly and responsively to audience need and desires.
- It is resident-led and encourages participation rather than passive involvement, to the extent of individual's desires and capacities.
- Facilitators do not 'perform' to an audience as with some forms of arts participation, nor do they "ask people to remember" as some other forms of reminiscence do; facilitators creatively curate a meaningful conversation "using arts as a tool to trigger stories, memories, participation, develop friendships and connections".
- It offers a longer-term intervention with regularity and continuity which has allowed relationships between all involved to grow and strengthen over time, maximising impact for all.
- It flexibly and seamlessly uses a combination of art forms in a way that responds to individuals' desires, moods and responses during any given session: other activities often focus on one, or may move in a disconnected manner between art forms.
- It offers care homes the opportunity to learn and be inspired and stimulated by skilled and experienced professional artists who "bring the outside world in and connect the care home to it".
- It offers professional artists a longer term opportunity for professional practice and development.
- It utilises local history, knowledge and connections, where this is appropriate to the audience.
- It is well-co-ordinated, supported and resourced at a national level and has a strong national presence that brings gravitas and has supported the development of a community of practice.

Key learning from the pilot

7.5 As with all pilots, the purpose is to learn from them to inform future activity. Living Voices has provided a wealth of learning about how oral and literary arts can best be used to achieve positive outcomes for older people in care homes and the structures and processes that best support this. Key learning to bear in mind in developing the Living Voices approach, or similar approaches in future is highlighted in this section.

7.6 **Involvement of the two national organisations (SPL and SSC)** and being a **national programme of activity has given credence and value** to the work and emphasised its professionalism; this has benefited both artists and local partners.

7.7 **The national co-ordinator role has been critical to the success** of the pilot and the role is valued by all participants in terms of logistical and practical co-ordination, as well as professional and personal support. The programme was repeatedly described as 'well-managed' and 'well-co-ordinated' – several interviewees praised the project manager for her role and a number commented on how well-organised and well-run the programme has been compared to others they have experienced. No feasible alternatives for local co-ordination of the programme have been identified during the pilot and this role is likely to be required if the programme is to continue and/or expand in future.

7.8 The role **of the professional facilitators has been vital to the success of the programme** due to their skill in being able to build energy within a session and their ability to use multiple and combined art forms to adapt the sessions to meet the needs and desires of their audience. Furthermore, having someone from the "outside world" is considered crucial as it energises staff and gives residents a sense of value. While care home staff have gained skills and confidence in facilitating oral and participatory arts with older people, few feel they have sufficient skill or confidence to replicate a Living Voices session, although some now feel able to deliver Living Voices inspired activities. Further training and support for care home staff would be required if they were to become the lead facilitators of Living Voices sessions, and some form of input from professional artists would likely be beneficial.

7.9 Volunteers have benefited greatly from involvement in the programme and their role has been highly valuable in many care homes. However recruitment, retention and matching volunteers to facilitators has been challenging to organise at a national level and facilitators have often not had the time or resource to support and develop volunteers to play a more active role in session delivery. There is some potential for local partners such as library services to take on volunteer support and co-ordination, and in some care homes a staff member could be encouraged to take on the volunteer support role, and therefore **a more flexible approach to the volunteer role might be appropriate in future.**

7.10 In terms of the session model, **the national resources and common monthly themes have been valuable to facilitators as a starting point** and have supported a sense of coherence and a collective national identity for the programme. However, key to the success of the session model has been **selective and flexible application** by facilitators to provide a personalised and tailored approach. This flexibility and responsiveness is a key ingredient of the Living Voices ethos and should be retained in any future iterations of the programme.

7.11 The **long term nature of the programme and consistent group composition** in many settings has led to strengthened and longer term outcomes for participants over time, however positive outcomes have also been achieved in homes where groups vary greatly from month to month, attesting to the power of the Living Voices approach to also achieve impact over shorter periods of time with dynamically composed groups.

7.12 The **combination of art forms** employed helps to retain participants' attention and makes it more likely that participants will find something they can enjoy or relate to in each session. The **use of props and artefacts to create a multi-sensory approach** has been effective at supporting improved cognition and memory recall in many participants.

7.13 **Facilitators have valued having contact/sharing ideas, problems and resources with other facilitators** and the programme has supported the development of a vibrant community of practice, however more face-to-face opportunities for sharing and learning would be beneficial.

7.14 Having facilitator support in the form of a volunteer and/or care home staff member allowed for **occasional one-to-one engagement** with residents when appropriate and required and helped maintain the energy and flow of the session in many instances.

7.15 **Support from care home staff is important and needs to be negotiated and agreed at the outset** – their knowledge of and familiarity with residents can help to encourage and improve engagement among residents as well as impacting positively on the care delivered. However, care home engagement can be challenging and in some cases it has taken a long time to get care homes "on board". The pilot has demonstrated that getting buy in from care home managers is key to maximising care home involvement in the session. Training for managers at the outset to raise awareness about the purpose and value of Living Voices, and what support is expected from the care home might ease this in future, particularly where there is no activities co-ordinator. This would be in addition to training delivered to support care home staff to facilitate Living Voices activity which the pilot has also highlighted a need for.

7.16 While the programme has had a positive impact on many participants with dementia, the pilot suggests that the **greatest impact has been for those in the less advanced stages of dementia.** Working with people with dementia has been challenging for facilitators and volunteers and appropriate support and training is required to assist them in this role.

7.17 The person-centred approach Living Voices takes is **best facilitated in smaller groups** with access to a designated quiet and appropriately sized room.

7.18 While there has been limited involvement of family members/informal carers in the Living Voices pilot, where there has been involvement, this is perceived to have been of **great value to all involved in the caring relationship.** This may be an area for the programme to expand into in future.

7.19 A number of facilitators found **completing regular reflection logs** and gaining feedback from residents to assist with the evaluation valuable in terms of helping them to reflect on and develop their practice in a way they were not previously used to.

Sustainability and considerations for future development of the Living Voices approach

Sustainability issues

7.20 While some minor adaptations may be required based on learning from the pilot, this evaluation confirms that the Living Voices model is an effective approach to using oral and literary arts to improve the wellbeing and experiences of older people in care homes, as well as impacting positively on the professional and personal lives of artists, care home staff and volunteers.

7.21 The evaluation confirms the value and potential benefits of using literary arts 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. The tested approach could potentially be applied to a wide range of community settings, to improve the experiences and outcomes of more older people, including those with dementia, in support of key national policy drivers around re-shaping care for older people and enabling people to age well at home in their local communities.

7.22 However, the evaluation also reveals a number of issues in terms of the sustainability of the tested model. While the national programme and resources and the role of the professional artist are widely perceived to be key, if not critical, to the pilot's success, the infrastructure involved in training and supporting a community of paid professional artists to deliver these sessions requires a level of financial commitment that local authority departments and individual care homes will likely struggle to meet in full once current funding ends. However, care home staff are not yet at a skills and confidence level where they could take on the role of the facilitator and without some form of external input, it is likely that Living Voices type activity will lose its focus within the care setting due to competing priorities and in some cases lack of support/championing from care home management.

7.23 That said, there is significant appetite from those who have been involved to date to see the programme continue in their area/care home, and widespread demand from other areas/care homes to be involved in any future expansion of the programme.

Potential future funding sources

7.24 A number of care homes are currently exploring fundraising options to enable them to sustain the facilitator's visits to their home; however this is not a sustainable approach to spreading the Living Voices ethos and ethic more widely and would likely cover only facilitator fees rather than the expenses associated with the national programme. To sustain and/or expand the current model will require either continued funding from the programme's existing funders, or core funding from alternative sources. Key potential sources to investigate, identified through stakeholder interviews could include the Scottish Government, The Life Changes Trust[4], and/or other Charitable Trusts. There may also be potential for some Third Sector Interfaces and Local Authority Social Care and/or Library Service departments to contribute small pots of funding to add to core funding.

Ideas for enhancing sustainability and expansion of the Living Voices approach

7.25 Seeking alternative core funding to sustain and expand the Living Voices model as it has been tested in this pilot is one option for future development. This is the option preferred by evaluation participants as in the words of one stakeholder: "The ideal is to roll out to all care homes just as it is… it works".

7.26 Interviews with evaluation participants and local stakeholders reveal a number of other ways in which the Living Voices approach could potentially be expanded in a variety of more sustainable ways to ensure a wider audience can benefit from the approach. These are listed below and would require piloting and further investigation:

- raising awareness of the benefits of Living Voices more widely to potential funders, care providers, local dementia leads and networks to generate interest and demand;
- using libraries to support community-based Living Voices sessions (where venue access and volunteer support and recruitment might be facilitated through library services);
- producing national resource packs and 'how to' guidance informed by the Living Voices pilot that can be made available to a wide range of care settings and organisations that work with older people;

[4] The Life Changes Trust is an independent charity, established in April 2013 with a £50 million endowment from the Big Lottery Fund Scotland. The mission is to facilitate and support transformational improvements in the quality of life, well-being and inclusion of two key groups in Scotland: looked after young people and care leavers, and people with dementia and their carers.

- using professional artists to train and mentor care home staff over a period of time to deliver sessions within their skills and confidence, maintaining some form of (less regular) artist input to help care homes maintain energy and momentum;
- using professional artists to provide one–off 'taster sessions' to care home staff to pass on elements of the Living Voices approach that could be easily integrated into their day–to–day work;
- thinking about other ways in which Living Voices can benefit the local community, for example how the knowledge and stories from residents can be used as an educational resource for schools and/or libraries; and
- promoting learning from Living Voices to educate care homes more widely of the values and benefits of: resident–led and focussed services, small group working with older audiences, taking the time to have meaningful conversations, and facilitating engagement between residents.