



## What can arts-based activities bring to a post-diagnostic support group for people with dementia and their relatives?

MSNAP Forum  
2<sup>nd</sup> October 2018

## Who's involved?

1. Dr Julia Boot, Clinical Psychologist  
Cheshire & Wirral Partnership NHS Foundation Trust
2. Nick Ponsillo, Director  
Centre for Creative Learning, University of Chester
3. Katy Jones, Trainee Clinical Psychologist  
University of Liverpool
4. Dave Hulston, Artist in Education  
Manchester

## Where we started...

Observations over the years of our post-diagnostic groups:

- Are people with dementia able to engage properly?
- Is it too focused on the problems?
- Do we help people's lives moves forward?
- Do we support people connecting with the wider world?

## Usual format....

Weekly sessions (1.5 hrs, 4-12 participants)

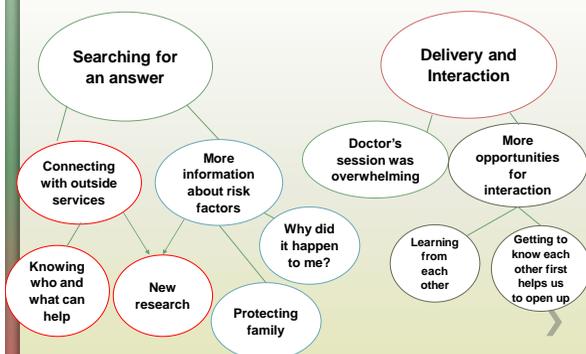
Session 1 – Medical Diagnostic Support

Session 2 - Alzheimer's Society

Session 3 – Independent living skills

Session 4 – Adjusting to a diagnosis of dementia

## Focus Group – Usual group format



## First session was overwhelming

"The doctor's session at the beginning....it was a bit over my head. I learnt a bit but it was a bit intense" (relative).

"It's just like being back at school, writing things on the drawing board and you think, "OK I'll remember that" but you forget all that as soon as you get out of the room" (relative).

## Learning from each other

"If no-one's talking, there's no interacting....I ask a lot of questions because I want the information...but if I hear other people, you can hear how things are, the way things are and you think "oh, I can try that at home" (relative).



## Getting to know each other helps us open up

"I think once you become familiar with people, it's easier" (person with dementia).

"yeah, get more interactive at the beginning because I think you'd be more relaxed then" (relative).



## Creative Health: The Arts for Health and Wellbeing

All-Party Parliamentary Group on Arts, Health and Wellbeing Inquiry Report (July 2017)

For people with dementia artistic languages can:

- > Enable communication and self-expression
- > Facilitate meaningful relationships in the here and now
- > Capitalise on their emotional and social capabilities
- > Engage their creative capacity
- > Facilitate the learning of new skills
- > Energise and inspire them
- > Help people live with it rather than fight against it so it becomes a "manageable disability".



## Creative Health: The Arts for Health and Wellbeing

All-Party Parliamentary Group on Arts, Health and Wellbeing Inquiry Report (July 2017)

Benefits:

- > Protective effect re: developing dementia (Dancing - Bronx Ageing Study, Painting and drawing -Sweden).
- > Art-making has a positive impact on cognitive processes (attention, stimulation of memories and communication)
- > Improves mood, confidence and social engagement.

The report urges NHS England to include the arts in personalised post-diagnostic support for people with dementia.



## Adding artist-led sessions.... (2 hours)

Session 4 – Introducing sketchbooks

Session 5 – Sensory walk, photos, poetry

Session 6 – Group art work

Session 7 – Group art work



## Using sketchbooks

Questions to answer:

- » What do you like to be called?
- » Where are you from?
- » What's your favourite hot drink?
- » What helps you relax?
- » What upsets you?





## Relaxed and friendly atmosphere

“It’s part of relaxing isn’t it, this is what I’ve found, once you get into this atmosphere in here you’re not frightened of saying anything or doing anything, it’s so friendly...”

(person with dementia)



## All of us are in it together

“Everybody mixes in...it’s everybody starting... not just you”.

(person with dementia)



## A shared enjoyment in the process

“It took me on a journey and I saw what you saw...and then to have that then transferred, into something tangible....I really enjoyed that process”. (relative)



## Reflections

- » All equal members of the group.
- » People with dementia had a stronger presence.
- » Better interactions with relatives and staff.
- » More enjoyable for everyone.
- » Person before dementia (stronger sense of identity).
- » Issues came out within other conversations > asking about them directly.
- » Sketchbooks as a tool to connect past and present and communicate with others.



## Updating our groups

- » Getting arts-based activities into the groups
- » Training staff
- » Update the content
  - > Current research
  - > Risk factors
  - > New technology
  - > Dementia-friendly activities and places



## Expanding the work

- » Sharing with a Trust in Manchester.
- » Try different models of introducing arts-based activities into other support groups.
- » Evaluate robustly.
- » Integrate arts and healthcare.
- » Facilitate access to arts activities and organisations.
- » Life continuing to develop with dementia > maintaining quality of life at best.



## Jane's reflections....

