

Journal

of AGING (ife CARE™

Promoting Resilience through Creative Engagement



FALL 2015

Resilience

Promoting Resilience through Creative Engagement[i]

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Over the past 15 years we have collaborated on the research and development of programs for people with dementia that use creative engagement as a means of shifting the paradigm of care from managing behaviors to engaging individuals and building community.

Engaging in creative activities – storytelling, painting songwriting, dance, drama – enables people with memory loss to express their strengths. These activities not only reflect resilience; they may also reinforce it, biologically, psychologically, and socially. After all, the brain is a social organ and we have based our research and interventions on the belief that resilience and creative engagement are nurtured best in supportive, accepting communities.

Research demonstrates that this approach improves the lives of persons with dementia. (Fritsch, et al., Feb. 2009)

By “creative engagement” we mean programs designed for older persons aimed at encouraging individual expression and strengthening social connections. We distinguish these programs from art, music, or dance therapy because the goal is not to ameliorate psychological or physical symptoms, nor do these programs rely on the presence of a professional therapist. Resilience in broad terms includes the recognition that we cannot control all aspects of our life; a feeling of commitment to people important to us and to our ideas; believing we can manage our life and have some close and positive relationships with other people; having a sense of purpose; not giving up or becoming overly discouraged in the face of failure; and the ability to feel some pride in our achievements.

In developing and working with a wide range of programs aimed at creative engagement (Table 1), we have found that focusing on people’s ability to thrive and flourish, rather than on their pathology or negative behaviors, provides a broader way to think about the complexity of human behavior. We have seen severely impaired individuals participate in complex creative activities that their caregivers did not believe they would be able to manage.

In addition, we have focused our work on helping individuals to maintain their sense of their own selfhood, which is formed and flourishes in relationship with other people. One foundational concept of our creative engagement programming is that it occurs in a social context, one-on-one or in a group. This is supported by research that shows there is a strong connection between meaningful relationship in a diverse social network

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Anne Basting, PhD., (anne@timeslips.org) is Professor of Theatre at University of Wisconsin Milwaukee’s Peck School of the Arts. She is founder and President of TimeSlips Creative Storytelling, and author of three books, including *Forget Memory: Creating Better Lives for People with Dementia*.

Susan H. McFadden, Ph.D., (susan.h.mcfadden@gmail.com) is Professor Emerita of Psychology, University of Wisconsin Oshkosh, where she taught a variety of courses for undergraduate and graduate students, including several seminars on dementia studies. Susan retired from the University in June, 2012, now works as a research consultant for the Fox Valley Memory Project (www.foxvalleymemoryproject.org) which aims to create a “dementia-friendly community” in northeast Wisconsin. She has been a trainer in the TimeSlips storytelling method for persons with dementia for many years and serves on the Board of Directors of TimeSlips, Inc. Currently, she is directing a study of personalized music for people with dementia living at home.

and less cognitive decline in old age, greater resistance to infection, and a better prognosis in the face of life-threatening illnesses.

The mission statement of TimeSlips Creative Storytelling (www.timeslips.org) is “improving the lives of people with memory loss through creative engagement.” It is a multi-sensory, sustainable, evidence-based approach to positively engaging people with dementia which founder Anne Basting began to develop in 1998 (Phillips, Reid-Arndt, & Park, Nov/Dec 2010). The TimeSlips method provides individual and group activities that are teachable, sustainable, low-cost, and allow for individualization. It has been successfully used in facilities to demonstrate what person-centered care feels like for staff and residents and offers a way to creatively envision deeper shifts toward meaningful relationships and person-centered care.

References

[i] See “Health Aging Persons and Their Brains: Promoting Resilience Through Creative Engagement,” *Clinical Geriatric Medicine* 26 (2010), pages 149–161.

Article references

Tables

Table 1: Sampling of Programs for Creative Engagement with People Living with Dementia

IMPROV, DANCE, MUSIC, POETRY

Alzheimer’s Poetry Project

The Alzheimer’s Poetry Project is based on a simple idea, to read classic poems to people living with Alzheimer’s disease that they might have learned as children.

Background: During a period of ten years a new approach to engage participants with Alzheimer’s disease and related dementia in the performative aspects of poetry and to create new poems was developed.

Results: Data indicates that a significant number of people in mid to late stage dementia remember words and lines from poems they learned in childhood. Moreover, the participants show a high level of positive facial expressions, laughter, verbalizing memories, and robust social interactions. Of interest is the use of call and response, where the session leader recites a line from a well-known poem and the group echoes the line. Coupling this performance technique with a simple prompt or opened ended question enables a group poem to be composed, based on the participant’s responses.

Conclusion: The findings led to the development of a training system for artists, family members, and healthcare workers in using poetry with dementia.

Mission: Our goal is to facilitate the creativity of people living with Alzheimer’s disease and related dementia. We strive to advocate for cultural change in the healthcare industry and for the daily inclusion of arts in assisted living and adult day care. Further, we do not set boundaries in our beliefs in what possible for people with memory impairment to create.

By saying to people with dementia, we value you; we are saying we value all members of our community. By working with health care professionals and giving them a tool to have fun with and stimulate the people they serve, we are saying we value your work. By working with family members who have a loved one with dementia, we are saying you are not alone in your struggle to treat your loved one with dignity.

Artz: Artists for Alzheimer’s & I’m Still Here Foundation

ARTZ has three primary programs:

1. The Artists Network: ARTZ recruits and trains volunteer artists to perform and work side by side with people living with dementia
2. The Museums Network: ARTZ trains museum staff and implements educational museum tours for people living with dementia and their care partners.
3. The Cultural Events Network: ARTZ develops annually recurring community-based programs for people living with dementia and their care partners, which have led to increased accessibility and opportunity.

Kairos Alive (dance and story)

Mission: Our mission is to support the artistic work of Maria Genné and promote her vision of sharing the joy of intergenerational interactive participatory dance and story, and to liberate its power to nurture and heal.

Vision: KAIROS alive! uses dance and storytelling to create a sense of community and well-being in participants of all ages and walks of life.

Work: Our work draws upon modern dance, movement improvisation, folk dance, and oral history traditions from around the world, and the lives of inspiring people. Artistic Director Maria Genné is recognized for her ability to highlight the beauty of human experience through movement and story, skillfully weaving together the gifts of each performer. KAIROS Dance™ is the only intergenerational modern dance company in Minnesota, and one of only a handful in the US.

We are an unusual and unique dance company of all different ages (7–98 years). We have created an award winning program called KAIROS Dancing Heart™ which vitally engages frail elders, including those with mid-to-late stage Alzheimer's, in a weekly dance and storytelling playshop that has shown to positively improve the health of participants. We have won three national awards: The 2011 Rosalinde Gilbert Innovations in Alzheimer's Disease Caregiver Legacy Award, The Archstone Award for Excellence in Program Innovation from The American Public Health Association and the 2008 Mind Alert Award from the American Society on Aging.

Songwriting Works

Songwriting Works™ fulfills its mission to restore joy, hope, health and community by bringing interactive musical adventures, skills building workshops and inclusive events to elders, youth, and families in neighborhoods, care centers, and schools. Also offering training and consulting to health, arts, and social service providers internationally.

TimeSlips Creative Storytelling

TimeSlips offers an elegantly simple revolution in long-term care – a clear shift from “managing behaviors” toward using the arts to engage and build community. In an age when medicine offers few treatments for dementia, TimeSlips provides hope through meaningful communication and connection. While started back in 1998, TimeSlips became an independent non-profit in 2013. Providing:

- Online Certification to Individuals in our improvisational storytelling method
- Training for Organizations on how to building a creative community of care, engaging elders, staff, families, and volunteers
- A Creativity Journal for one-on-one use (available through Attainment Co.). Ideal for families, home care, and hospice
- Online Trainings that support student (high school and higher education) service learning

- FREE online storytelling software that lets you create together and share your stories with others around the world. Come and play today! Start a story!

MUSEUM-BASED

Arts & Minds (New York City)

Arts & Minds is a non-profit organization committed to improving quality of life for people living with Alzheimer's disease and other dementias. Partnering with museums to provide meaningful art-centered activities that create positive cognitive experiences, enhance communication, and reduce isolation. Their programs empower people with dementia, family members, professional caregivers, and educators to strengthen social, emotional, and spiritual bonds by engaging with art.

Meet Me at MOMA (New York City)

The MoMA Alzheimer's Project was a special initiative in the Museum's Department of Education. The initiative took place from 2007 to 2014 and was generously funded by MetLife Foundation. During this time, MoMA staff expanded on the success of the Museum's existing education programs for individuals with Alzheimer's disease and their care partners through the development of training resources intended for use by arts and health professionals on how to make art accessible to people with dementia using MoMA's teaching methodologies and approach.

MoMA remains as committed as ever to providing programming for individuals living with dementia and their care partners and to supporting the development and success of this type of programming around the world. To that end, the Museum will continue to offer engaging programming and resources for this key constituency. For more information on MoMA's ongoing education programs for individuals with Alzheimer's disease or dementia and their care partners, visit the [Programs page](#).

In addition, MoMA staff will continue to provide resources, information, and advice to other organizations and to facilitate training workshops locally, nationally, and abroad. We are poised to maintain our role as a connector in this field– to serve as a hub for conversations on aging and creativity and to provide a vital link for colleagues around the world who are interested in making art accessible to people with dementia. For more information on these continued efforts please write to accessprograms@moma.org.

Spark Alliance (Wisconsin)

Spark brings cultural programming to families with memory loss. The Alliance shares training and scheduling information to act as a resource for the families we serve and other cultural organizations that wish to open themselves to older adults regardless of disability.

Here: Now at the Frye Museum (Seattle)

here:now is an arts-engagement program for individuals living with dementia and their care partners to enjoy a creative and relaxing time together. The only museum-based arts program of its kind in Washington State, here:now offers gallery tours and art-making classes designed for individuals with young-onset or early to mid-stage dementia and their care partners.

Over the next two years the Frye is piloting new program components to serve individuals as their disease progresses. The museum will also convene a professional development conference and workshop on art, creativity and dementia care; establish a student internship in creative aging with a local university; and publish a report and present the results of the program pilot at conferences. An advisory committee of community advocates and leaders in gerontology, neuropsychology, creative aging, and memory care guides the expansion.

Topics: Resilience

2 thoughts on “Promoting Resilience through Creative Engagement”



1. Steve White says:

January 7, 2018 at 3:24 pm

Persons with dementia actually need this type of non-judgemental environment in terms of engagement and expression of mind skills.

Reply



1. Steve White says:

January 7, 2018 at 3:36 pm

Healing of dementia goes well with artistic activities.

Reply