



Case study of the In Mature Company project

Charlene Martin and Andrea Wigfield

Introduction

In Mature Company (IMC), developed by Yorkshire Dance, is a three year project that delivers creative participatory dance, music and movement sessions to care home residents living with dementia. The project is funded through the Time to Shine (TTS) programme, which aims to reduce social isolation and loneliness amongst older people in Leeds. Time to Shine is supported by the National Lottery Community Fund through the Ageing Better programme, which operates in 14 areas across England. In Mature Company has been using dance, music and touch to reduce the loneliness and social isolation of care home residents living with dementia.

Background

According to Alzheimer's Society (2018), people living with dementia have a higher risk of becoming isolated and lonely than any other social group. Recent findings from the IDEAL (Improving the Experience of Dementia and Enhancing Active Life) study, which explored the impact of loneliness on people living with dementia, found that around one third of people with mild-moderate dementia in their study experienced loneliness, and that social isolation was a key contributing factor (Victor et al, 2020). Loneliness was also identified as one of the key psychological indicators that impact on the ability of people with dementia to 'live well'¹ (Clare et al, 2019).

Living in residential care is also linked to loneliness (The Residents and Relatives Association, 2010), with one research study reporting severe rates of loneliness (22-42%) amongst care home residents (Victor, 2012). Feelings of loneliness can be experienced by care home residents even if they are surrounded by others, and whilst some people with dementia may have frequent visitors, they may not always remember those visits, or perceive they have social contact. The physical barriers of dementia may also cause care home residents to spend time away from others or exclude themselves from socialising within their environment. The increasing pressures on care home staff who work within residential care settings may mean that there is limited time and resources to organise meaningful activities which deliver sufficient levels of social interaction and mental stimulation to residents (Theurer et al, 2015).

In Mature Company (IMC) began in April 2018 and was funded to work with nine residential care homes over three years, delivering a range of sessions using participatory dance and music. The project team

¹ 'Living well' defined as 'the best achievable state of health that encompasses all dimensions of physical, mental and social well-being.'

included six musicians and dance artists who delivered 370 participatory sessions in total over 2.5 years. To evaluate the project, IMC used a research tool called **Dementia Care Mapping™** (DCM) to observe people living with dementia within each care home, and coded their engagement levels during each session (Bradford Dementia Group, 2005). Yorkshire Dance trained two members of existing staff to become 'Mappers' for the project.

Prior to Covid-19, IMC delivered weekly sessions face-to-face, either one-to-one or with groups of residents. The aim of each session was to promote social interaction and connectivity between care home residents, their families, and care home staff. In mid-March 2020, the IMC project was placed on hold due to the increasing risk of Covid-19 in residential care homes during the pandemic (Department of Health & Social Care, 2021). During this time, two members of the artistic team were able to hold socially distanced activities on an informal basis in the outside area of one care home, although the next block of planned face-to-face sessions were placed on hold indefinitely and a one-off outdoor event was held in Summer 2020. Dance sessions were delivered to care home residents via Zoom in Spring 2021, and the IMC project plans to resume outdoor face-to-face sessions in Summer 2021. The project will end in March 2022.

Between April 2018 and September 2020, **312 beneficiaries** were involved in IMC. This included **two younger volunteers** (aged 49 and under) and **16 older volunteers** (50+). Volunteers have given over **189 hours of their time** to support IMC.

Methods

Information was gathered from June to September 2020. The following methods were used to collect data for this case study:

- Four telephone interviews with two artists, one volunteer and one dementia care mapper.
- A review of TTS documents including monitoring returns, case studies and Test and Learn examples.

Key Findings

Using Dementia Care Mapping as an evaluation tool

Unique to the IMC project was the use of **Dementia Care Mapping** (DCM) to evaluate the impact of each session on care home residents. To the best of our knowledge, IMC is one of the first projects to use DCM to evaluate an arts and dance project. DCM was initially developed as a clinical tool by researchers at Bradford University, and involves observing people with dementia at five minute intervals, coding behaviour, mood and engagement as a way to assess the individual's health and wellbeing. A 'map' is then created, which can either be unique to the individual or a group activity. IMC used the maps to measure levels of well-being and ill-being as indicators of the project's effectiveness in reducing loneliness and isolation, as well as incorporating complementary data from the individuals who took part in the sessions.

“There’s all the context around it as well, asking care staff how that person is feeling, if they’ve had a bad night’s sleep or something that could completely affect their mood and engagement that day. So there is lots of context that goes alongside the coding and data.” (Dementia Care Mapper)

The findings from the *maps* were then reported back to the artistic teams at the end of each block of sessions. A typical mapping session lasted between 1-2 hours. The measures for each mapping session were:

1. Individual and group levels of well-being and ill-being throughout a creative session
2. Care staff and artist interactions which either promote or undermine person-centred care and wellbeing

Using touch to reduce feelings of loneliness

One of IMC’s main aims was to use touch-based work (emotional and functional touch) to reduce feelings of loneliness. The benefits of human touch for socio-emotional wellbeing and psychological development is well documented in the literature (Field, 2010), but there has been little research into the relationship between touch and loneliness. One recent study found that when individuals received physical contact they felt significantly less neglected (Tejada, Dunbar and Montero, 2020). In their control maps, the Dementia Care Mappers found that the majority of ‘touch’ received by residents within the care home was generally practical, such as helping the residents into a wheelchair or feeding them.

“It was all about the care, which is understandably what the care staff are there for, to provide that care. But what we wanted to see was a different kind of touch.” (Dementia Care Mapper)

The artists used touch in a number of ways during the sessions. This included holding hands, mirroring one another, and use of props. The Dementia Care Mappers found that ‘touch’ moments occurred more frequently when artists interacted one-to-one with residents, such as cupping a hand or placing palms together with residents. These moments were effective in building relationships, and non-verbal communication. The Mappers also found that touch increased well-being levels.

“What we found was that particularly for the residents that found it harder to engage (the ones that needed more one-to-one support from the artist), touch was used a lot more as a way of engaging that person. So it was almost reactive, that the artists were seeing this person’s mood and engagement were low and using touch to engage them.” (Dementia Care Mapper)

The Mapping Report from Year 1 showed that the creative sessions were having a positive impact on residents, and that the artists were consistently engaging with approximately 80% of residents through expressive activities, and verbal or non-verbal communications.

What has worked well?

Creating opportunities for meaningful connection within the care home

The National Institute for Care Excellence (NICE) quality standard for care homes states that residents should be offered opportunities to participate in meaningful activities that provide emotional, creative, intellectual and spiritual stimulation, appropriate to their needs and preferences (NICE, 2013). Planning meaningful activities can be a challenge for care home staff who often prioritise practical tasks as part of their role. Many care homes in the public sector can often be under-resourced, busy, high pressured environments.

“Some people might think that a resident living in a care home is surrounded by people, and therefore they might not be very lonely, but that’s absolutely not the case. People can feel very lonely and isolated even when they are living with people.” (Dementia Care Mapper)

One of the offers from IMC was to bring a high quality arts programme into care homes, using experimental sound and vibration. One example of this was that rather than using traditional instruments such as tambourines, the team brought in different unusual props to encourage creativity and expression amongst the residents. The artists described their vision to create opportunities for creativity that did not meet the stereotype of **“dance in the community.”**

“It’s important that there is some real artistry and quality of art that is happening in these spaces. It doesn’t need to be any less just because it’s in the community.” (Artist)

Carving out time and space was important for both the artists and residents

The artists and musicians emphasised the need for time and space to ‘Test and Learn,’ and anticipate the level of planning needed before beginning a new block of sessions in each care home. The notion of **“slowing down time”** was also important. The artists described how the care homes operated on a slower time frame, and that residents needed more time for communication. The artists acknowledged that this ran in parallel with the team of care staff within the home, who were working under constant time pressures, fulfilling a great deal of work in a short amount of time.

“I felt that what we were able to offer was a space where we could slow down time.” (Artist)

Carving out space and time was also pivotal for developing relationships between the artists and residents. Substantial time was needed for the Dementia Care Mappers to map the residents from baseline, their levels of engagement, and track the progression of residents as they engaged with the artists.

Having **“space to connect”** was also important for both the artists and residents. The Test and Learn case studies captured by the artists described many examples of connection between residents and their visiting relatives; some of whom were connecting for the first time.

“The moments where they would be in the middle of the room, swaying together was a moment not only for her, but something for him as well, and that was what our goals ended up being.”
(Artist)

“Bringing the outside in”

The IMC project was curated around the overarching theme of **“bringing the outside in,”** with some examples including playing birdsong, projections of the countryside and bringing in props from the outside world.

Prior to starting each new block of sessions, the artistic team would send letters to the family members of residents, inviting them to attend and join the sessions. The idea was that this would offer the opportunity for residents to engage with their visitors and connect with them during the activities if they wished to participate. The artists noticed that some of the residents’ family members would schedule their visits around when the sessions were running, and they would encourage family members to join in the activities, just as much as the residents. Towards the end of IMC’s time in each care home, celebration and learning events were held, offering another opportunity for relatives to join in with the sessions.

Barriers and Challenges

Logistics around physical space

It is well recognised in the literature that physical environment is important for people living with dementia (Fleming, Crookes and Sum, 2008), and one of the key aims of IMC was to create an environment for increased social interaction. The artists described each space as having its own personality and **“way of being.”** The artists were not included in the selection of care homes, which meant working within the confines of the physical space offered, and tailoring each session to the care home.

Some of the logistical barriers included the layout and space of room available. Some rooms had a through-way, meaning that other residents would pass through the room where the sessions were taking place to reach other rooms. Chairs with wing-back designs could also be impractical, as their design would obstruct the view of residents sitting side by side, and inhibit interaction with the person next to them. Having a limited amount of physical space also impacted on how many volunteers could be involved in the sessions. IMC had an initial target of four volunteers in each care home but since found that having two volunteers worked better within the limited space.

To overcome some of these barriers, the artists described working together with care staff to adapt the physical space to increase the potential for interaction and relationship building within the creative sessions. Some examples included changing the chairs used, the positioning of seats from a circle to face-

to-face in smaller groups, and exploring activities that brought people closer together (such as passing around props).

Involving care staff in the sessions and activities

Involving care home staff in the sessions was challenging. The Dementia Care Mapper noted that in their initial maps of what 'normal life' was like in the care home, the interactions between care staff were more functional, rather than conversational.

**“We did a couple of control maps at one of the care homes, and went in before the project started. We didn’t know who any of the residents were, and we mapped what normal life was like in the care home. We found there were barely any interactions between any of the residents at all. We only saw a couple examples of people speaking to the person next to them.”
(Dementia Care Mapper)**

Some of these challenges centered around the segregation of roles within the care home, particularly relating to the responsibilities of care home staff and activity coordinators. They described how some activity coordinators were supportive of IMC’s work, but there were issues involved in gaining permission for the care staff to join the sessions due to time pressures. The artists described how this particular challenge was encountered consistently across each care home.

“We’re trying to offer something in the current structure that care homes run, and we’re able to offer that as an outside party, rather than demand or expect anymore of care workers than they’re currently doing.”

To address this, the artistic team held conversations and discussions early on with care home staff and activity coordinators to talk through the support needed for the programme to work, such as help with signposting residents into the sessions. The artists found that by establishing a single point of contact within each care home, this helped to complete forms on time, support residents to make their way to the sessions, set-up the room, and improve the organization of events (such as the end of programme celebration). Having a point of contact also helped to build engagement within the care home, and ensure that staff were aware of the Mappers and what to expect. The artists found that this worked best in Year One, where they developed a strong relationship with a single point of contact from the care home, who also attended the session each week. In Year Two, this learning was written into the agreement between IMC and each care home.

The impact of Covid-19

The Covid-19 pandemic, which struck in March 2020, perhaps provided the biggest challenge to the project and meant that IMC was temporarily placed on hold. This was, in part, due to increased restrictions in residential care homes and social distancing measures, which limited the scope of activities and the opportunity to create space for touch and social contact. One of the artists reflected on how some of the residents may have coped during the pandemic:

“People in these places are very lonely. And their level of loneliness has now increased.” (Artist)

During this time, the artists did run an outdoor session at one care home, which five residents took part in. This adapted some of the elements from what a usual session would look like, but looked very different to how the sessions were run previously.

Learning and Recommendations

The artists found that having a loose structure guided by improvisation worked best. A typical session involved an initial *‘getting to know you’* session, which informed the plan for subsequent sessions. Each session began with a *‘soft start’* where the musicians created sounds based on their perception of the energy in the room. Each session would end with a *“fading away”* at the end, when the artists would leave.

“An important part of the longevity of what we were setting up – to dance, hold hands to the music in a frame that we have set up, but then the residents continue having a conversation after we’ve left the building” (Artist)

The artistic team found that each day within the home was completely different, and often dictated by external factors such as the individual’s mood or what had been going on in the care home that day. This meant that collecting contextual information before the sessions started was important, as it allowed the team to anticipate where the residents were in the structure of their day (for example, if the session was before or after lunch, this could dictate whether residents were feeling sleepy or had low energy levels).

“You absolutely can’t work with a formula, you have to work with where they take you, which might be very different on different days.” (Artist)

Shaping each session also involved listening to the residents about what they wanted and responding to their physical capabilities. Over time, the artists described developing relationships with the residents and increasing their understanding of each resident’s particular traits. This allowed them to adapt sessions specifically for their needs, in a person-centred way.

“Listening to the speed and direction of their bodies; reading the body language of what somebody else is saying to you. Recognizing – ok your body is on a slower timeline, I can slow my body, my questions and my instructions down, and we can meet in a different creative space.” (Artist).

The dementia care mappers have shared learning from the project in TTS action learning sets, networking meetings, and conferences (such as the National Creative Arts and Dementia Conference). The team have also produced a series of podcasts to share their learning from the project.

Sustainability and Legacy

One of the key challenges with sustainability for IMC is that substantial funding is needed to continue the level of quality arts sessions that Yorkshire Dance provide as part of this programme. One of the previous care homes approached the lead dance artist from IMC after the project ended, to commission them as a freelance artist to continue the sessions (although it should be noted that this care home was a private sector care home). The artists suggested there may be potential for care home staff to adapt a version of what IMC have started.

Navigating how the sessions might work in the future, while social distancing and working within infection control guidelines, may be difficult. There is the balance of keeping residents safe, but also being able to deliver meaningful activities and encourage connection between people. This is especially pertinent, following a long period of time where the pandemic has inhibited connection, touch, and visits from family.

“For me, it is important that we do find a way. It might look different, but there has to be some way of doing it. We’re not going to keep our old people locked up in their bedrooms for the next few years, that’s just a horrific idea.” (Artist)

In Mature Company has secured additional funding from The Space (a BBC and Arts Council fund) to create a five part animated film series about IMC, based on a reflection written by one of the lead artists. The films explore loneliness within the care home and the impact of touch and dance as a way of connecting with people living with dementia.

References

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Further Information:

[In Mature Company partner website](#)

[Time to Shine Project page](#)

[Yorkshire Dance presents Dance & Dementia: A Podcast Series](#)

[Dancing the Small Moments: A series of five animations inspired by Yorkshire Dance's work in UK care homes](#)

[Sharing learning: Yorkshire Dance – In Mature Company](#)

[Dementia Care Mapping: Finding Trends & Future Thinking \(In Mature Company, Year 1\)](#)

[Dementia Care Mapping: Evaluating Data & Finding Trends \(In Mature Company, Year 2\)](#)

Report prepared by Charlene Martin, April 2020