

Co-creative Arts  
and  
Relational Care

How creativity can  
support relationships  
and wellbeing for  
people living in care  
settings

## Introduction

Care home residents, community partners, artists and academic researchers have come together to share insights about how relational and creative care can rebuild relationships in care homes following the Covid-19 pandemic.

This resource is designed to share learning from this project and to give inspiration and ideas for offering truly relational and creative care.

## What is Relational Care?

There is growing research about the positive impact of arts and creative activities to support meaningful connections and wellbeing.

Relational Care promotes the importance of **positive and supportive relationships** in care settings, both for those receiving care and those providing it. It moves beyond the focus on meeting individual needs advocated by person-centred care, to recognising **the value of human connection and interdependence**.

This approach promotes an environment of respect, trust and inclusivity, where everyone can contribute and feel a sense of belonging.



## What are the principles of Relational Care?

Relational care focuses on 'doing with,' positive risk taking and sharing time together, which can be summarised as:

**Co-operative communication:** Actively communicating between those present, all can contribute.

**Co-operative action:** People working together to collectively achieve something.

**Co-operative care:** Networks of caring relationships, rather than one person caring for another who is a passive recipient of that care.

These can be achieved through attentiveness and empathy, trust building, offering choice, responding to needs, focusing on what people can do, not what they can't, and shared responsibility.

“Music, art, gardening, we use anything to reach older people and enable them to be able to share their stories, their history and their passions, and also to keep learning and experiencing more.” *Isobel Jones, CEO of Alive*



## Connection through creative arts

Residents in care homes can feel a sense of being disconnected from friends and family and their wider community. Building new relationships and maintaining important connections outside of the care environment can help to mend this feeling of disconnection.

Relationality can be supported by acknowledging important people from their lives. Activities such as reading, collage making, storytelling or singing might echo these relationships and how they made participants feel. For example, being loved by a parent or giving care to a child. This may give a sense of self-continuity and a greater meaning in life, but caution should be used for people living with dementia who can't remember former relationships.

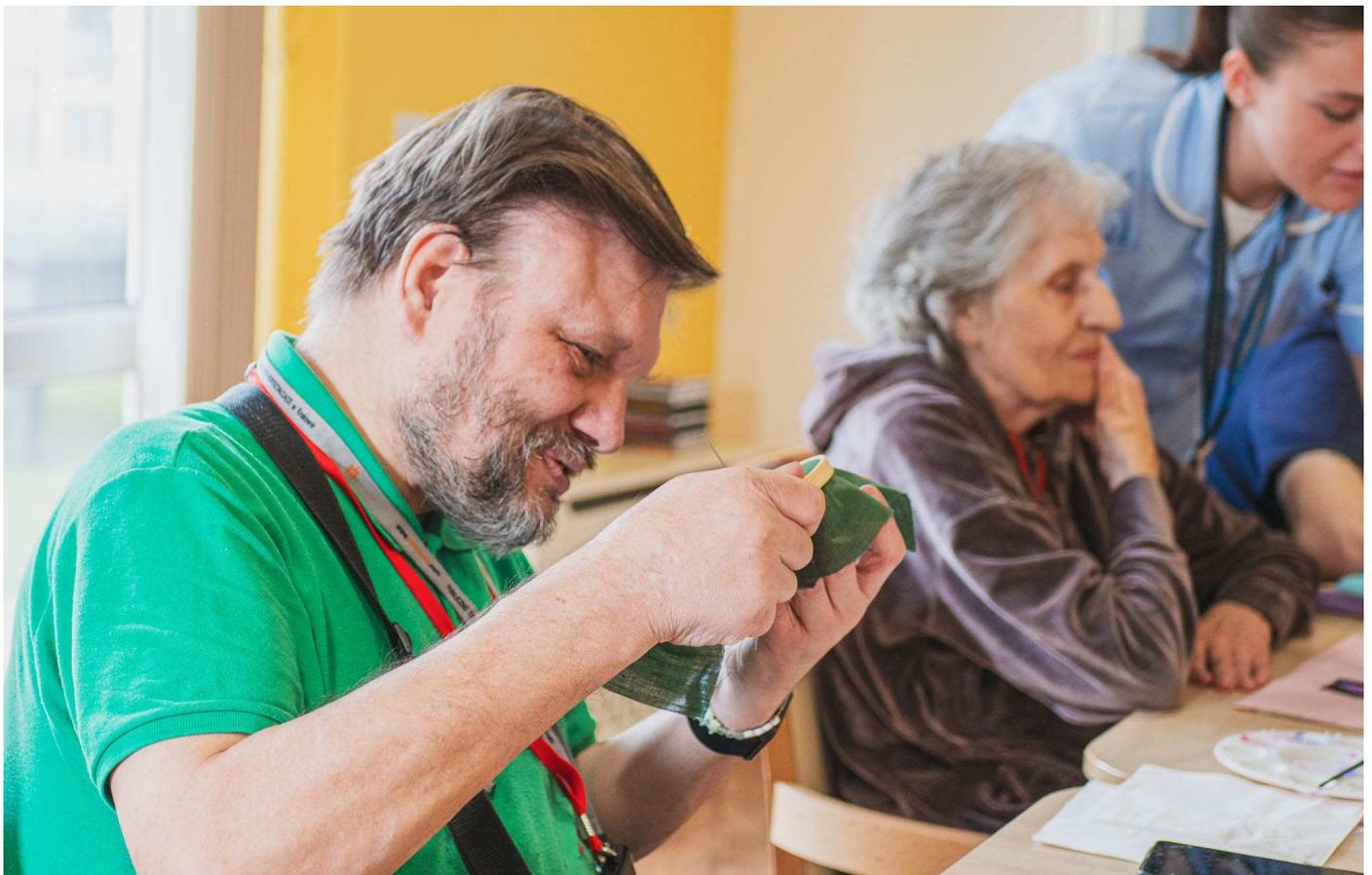
Creative activities can bring people together and help build these connections. Sharing time and engaging in an activity which allows people to express themselves in a low pressure, interactive space can improve wellbeing for residents, staff and family.

Aim for activities that relate to the interests and experiences of participants to help workshops have meaning for those taking part. It is also important to build relationships with the care homes and the communities concerned to understand their needs.



## Getting started

1. The low-cost activity ideas on the next page help strengthen existing relationships through 'in the moment' creative time spent together, sharing experiences.
2. The focus is on co-creation, not having a fixed idea of what might be created but being led by people's ideas and their creativity and imagination.
3. Consider how the space is arranged as this can encourage relationality and creativity. For example, participants being organised into groups rather than being sat around a large table and not placing carers between participants, can help.
4. It is important to ensure that participants are welcomed into the space and that everybody who would like to be included is.
5. It is useful to have time after the activity to reflect and understand what worked and what might be changed for next time.
6. Consider targeting an activity on the needs of wider local community members. This could involve dementia awareness training, for example.



## Co-Creative Activity Ideas

Below are some activity ideas to try. Some may require materials and tools such as scissors or clay and a risk assessment should be carried out before starting the activity. Use your venue's risk assessment template for any new activity.

**Handprint flower** - Using non-toxic paint to paint hands and print it onto paper. These could be cut out individually and made into the petals of a flower.

**Hand massages** - Using beautifully scented massage oils or waxes (checking for allergies) with relaxing music or nature sounds playing.

**Pressed Flowers** - Collecting flowers and plants from the garden that can be pressed and used for bookmarks, artwork and collages.

**Sensory gardening** - Growing and nurturing plants, both outdoors and indoors.

**Pottery and clay** - Clay modelling or pottery using air dry clay can be a relaxing and tactile activity. Use stamps and fabric with rolling pins to press different textures into the clay. Once dry use acrylic paint to decorate.

**Linocut/Potato Prints** - Create simple prints using lino or potatoes, which can be used for making cards or and artwork. If dexterity is an issue you can use softer foamex sheets and pencils to carve out designs.

**Collage** - Use a variety of materials like fabric, paper, and magazine clippings to create unique collages alongside watercolour paints.

**Creating Bird Feeders** - Making bird feeders from natural materials to hang in the care home garden.

**Reading and storytelling** - Reading or being read to continues to be enjoyable for many people. Improvised storytelling can be a great way to start sharing experiences.

**Music and singing** - Sharing music and singing brings a great deal of enjoyment and energy. Creating new songs together using people's ideas as inspiration can be hugely rewarding.



## Get Inspired and Celebrate Creativity

We've included two How-to guides for relational co-creative activities at the end of this guide. Please feel free to use them as a starting point for your activities.

Celebrating the joy of connecting in the here and now is an important part of shared time. Displaying what is produced in creative sessions can also be a lovely way for residents to feel valued and to celebrate their creativity.

To help connect people's creations more widely with others you could:

1. Create an exhibition for artwork in your venue.
2. Gift artwork to family and friends or sell items at summer fairs.
3. If space is limited you could ask residents if they'd like their work displaying in their rooms.
4. Create pieces that can be permanently on display in the garden such as bunting or plant markers.
5. Display framed artwork on the walls instead of using shop-bought posters.
6. Create a creative corner in the foyer to welcome visitors to your venue.



## Addressing Challenges

The research project found constant staff changes can disrupt establishing relationships and staff shortages can challenge the time available to engage in creative activities.

However, relational care will help to build staff morale and improve staff retention, due to the enjoyable nature of time spent sharing creativity.

Management and peer supervision become even more important when supporting relational care, due to the use of empathy required and the potential for staff to develop compassion fatigue.

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**Focus:** To explore and introduce people to different arts materials through mark making. This activity looks at colour, texture and shape. It is great for getting the hands moving and opens the door to further discussions within a group.

This can be a one-off activity for 1.5 - 2 hours or the art work can be continued each week.

**Group size:** 4 to 10 people.

## You will need:

1. A roll of plain paper (or a roll of lining paper used for walls).
2. A selection of paints, pastels and mixed media such as felt, wool and fabric.
3. A collection of different sized paint brushes.
4. Other things to paint with such as sticks, feathers and sponges.
5. Paper plates to mix the paint on or pallets.
6. Images to work with (such as pictures of different flowers, crockery, gardens).
7. Physical objects to take inspiration from such as feathers, eggs and leaves.
8. A sheet of card with a square or rectangle cut out of it to form a frame.
9. Water to wash the brushes in.



<b>Step 1</b>	Begin by sitting around a large table and setting out the supplies. Ask everyone to say their name and answer a question such as what is their favourite smell or taste.
<b>Step 2</b>	Give everyone a picture of a flower or one of the real plants for inspiration. Invite conversation around the colours and different types of plants. Introduce the activity, ask how everyone feels about it and if there are any problems to overcome such as movement or holding equipment.
<b>Step 3</b>	Do your best to overcome these problems. Pushing a tennis ball down over the handle of a paint brush can make it easy to hold.
<b>Step 4</b>	Begin mixing paints and supply everyone with the tools and equipment they are interested in using, pass around the paper.
<b>Step 5</b>	Show examples of how to use the paints, pastels or fabric and how far you can take things by observing the marks in the leaves or petals.
<b>Step 6</b>	Encourage participants to be open and free. Explain it is all about expression and it can be as abstract or detailed as they like.
<b>Step 7</b>	It is often nice to have some background noise while the creativity is happening, either music, singing or bird song rather than the TV or radio.
<b>Step 8</b>	Take a break for refreshments if required.
<b>Step 9</b>	Bring the workshop to a close with discussions about the work created, have they enjoyed the session, what would they like to do next? Use the cardboard frames to layover people's work and show how it can look from a distance.

**Focus:** Many writers overhear snippets of conversation or see something to prompt a story. This activity aims to support people to share ideas and explore their imaginations to create stories. Roll a dice to pick a jotting at random from each section, or choose your own, and then link the four sentences in whatever order and however you wish to give the structure of a story that you can add to. You could use a sentence more than once or spend time as a group turning them into a poem, a story or a script.

**Group size:** 4 to 8 people.

## You will need:

1. Pens or pencils for writing.
2. Some dice.
3. Sheets of blank paper or pieces of card cut out in a shape linked to your theme (such as an ice cream if your theme is holidays).

## Section 1

1. A girl drinking coffee in the rain.
2. A farmer in a public bar.
3. A dog chasing a push bike.
4. A Small child in an empty livestock market.
5. A fat man walking a small dog.

## Section 3

1. Being uncomfortably aware of the lady knitting in the corner of the room, who seems to be watching everything closely.
2. Trying not to look at the person opposite.
3. Pretending to read a book.
4. Staring in the shop window.
5. Hearing a voice when there is no one there.

## Section 2

1. A body tumbling out of the opened boot of a car.
2. A fist slamming down on the table.
3. A brick being thrown.
4. A hat being trampled on.
5. A hand scrunching up paper.

## Section 4

1. "If only I could make you see what I see."
2. "It wasn't like that."
3. "What do you mean? I wasn't there."
4. "I never said he kissed his wife."
5. "Of course I love you."

Step 1	Arrange the seating ready for the group. Have in the centre of tables any items and objects that will inspire ideas and conversations, You could have postcards, scarves, fruit or seaside objects.
Step 2	Starting with Section 1, roll the dice to see what will be a participant's first sentence. They could write it out on their own piece of paper or card, or cut out and stick the sentence into place.  You could decide to use one large piece of paper that everyone can jot their ideas down onto.
Step 3	Continue rolling the dice to select a sentence from Section 2, 3 and 4 adding them after the first sentence. Use these sentences as the bones of a story or poem that can be added to.
Step 4	Once completed the fragment poems can be read aloud.  Instead of writing or sticking them down, you could record people reading aloud each sentence.
Step 5	Support the group in a discussion to select a new theme. This could be inspired by objects on the table. It could be holidays, music, fashion, tattoos, pets, weather and so on. Together generate ideas for the five sentences in Sections 1, 2, 3 and 4.
Step 6	Start the process again, rolling the dice to select the sentences in each person's poem.

