



From Lockdown to Lived Experience

Written by Helen Fountain, November 2022

Like so many good ideas, we didn't really see the Oxford Age Friendly Creative Ambassadors coming, it evolved out of our creative lockdown projects which were designed to keep us in contact with our older audiences during a very frightening and isolating time when we were all told to "stay at home".

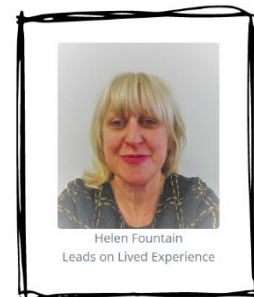
Age UK Oxfordshire's Framing Oxford project (see project outcome film [here](#)) had been conceived before the Covid 19 pandemic. We planned to deliver a local history heritage engagement project in the time-honoured fashion of getting together in a room, sharing memories, photographs and enjoying tea and cake. How could this happen if we couldn't meet in person? Digital and postal services came to our rescue as we found ourselves encouraging our older people to write letters, contact us on the telephone, embrace Zoom, turn off mute and share their thoughts and ideas.

When Framing Oxford (and two other lockdown projects) ended we all wanted to keep in touch and continue breaking new ground – the taste for innovation had been addictive! Thus was born the Oxfordshire Age Friendly Creative Ambassadors (AFCAs), a diverse mix of older people, ages ranging from mid-fifties to mid-nineties, the digitally connected and the non-digitally connected, who were on a mission to change the accepted perceptions of ageing and share the message about the power of age friendly creativity to change lives!

The AFCA numbers have grown to thirty-five with more joining along the way. We continue to meet on Zoom but we are now also meeting in person, with site visits (and Age Friendly Audits) to Abingdon Abbey, Farmoor Reservoir, the Mill Arts Centre, Banbury Museum.... The AFCA's have provided feedback on project design, website accessibility and helped us to understand the barriers created by ageism. The groups provide useful and constructive feedback drawing on their collective wisdom and lived experience, they are invaluable to our mission to make Oxfordshire a more age friendly creative place to grow old.

It is hard to imagine life without this group now and we are now joining forces with other age friendly creative groups around the country to form a Creative Ageing Lived Experience Network. We are incredibly proud of our AFCAs and delighted that they have been shortlisted for a Fantastic for Families Award in the Age Friendly Outreach category. We are looking forward to the Awards ceremony on 16th November and keeping our fingers crossed for success!

Helen is part of the [Team](#) the Age of Creativity project, is the Age Friendly Creative Manager for Age UK Oxfordshire supporting the [Oxfordshire Age Friendly Creative Network](#) and leading on Lived Experience.



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