



The power of Partnerships (and Pantomime!)

Written by Helen Fountain January 2023

Recent activities have reminded me of the value of partnership working and of the power of the arts and culture to support health and wellbeing. We have been working in partnership with Oxford Playhouse for some time now, during the pandemic we supported their lovely [Tea Talks](#) project which enabled some of our most digitally isolated older people to share their stories via phone calls which led to the creation of two radio plays. Following on from that we joined forces to support an academic who was exploring themes of first love for a book linked to the Shakespeare play Romeo and Juliet. Our Age UK Oxfordshire Age Friendly Creative Ambassadors group then became an Oxford Playhouse Community Partner and we were delighted when we were offered some free tickets for the Pantomime.

A number of us ventured out on a damp, depressing January afternoon wondering what we had let ourselves in for. Lifts had been arranged; access challenges had been addressed but we were still left wondering if the Pantomime was really for our age group? We sat down in slight trepidation to a modern take on the Pantomime classic, Cinderella, would it be too loud, would we catch the sweets, would the lights be too bright? In fact it was all of those things, but a magical thing happened, as the lights twinkled and reflected from the glitter ball and the fake snow covered us, we were transformed and transported to our childhood state of awe and wonder. One lady who was struggling to walk and appeared to be in quite a bit of pain when we arrived at the Theatre positively skipped across the foyer at the end of the show, pain diminished and replaced by smiles and laughter- a proper fairy-tale ending. The experience of being in company and being transported to the world of make believe really did seem to have a magical effect on everyone's wellbeing. The wonderful support provided by the Playhouse staff, catching up with old friends and sharing the experience all enhanced the positive impact. Of course, we don't have any scientific evidence to back up what we witnessed but the whole experience really did seem to have a transformative effect on the group, many of whom were in their 80s and 90s.

One of the attendees fed back *"I loved being under the disco ball and seeing all the spinning lights. The music made me want to dance. Best of all was seeing the joy which it brought to the young people who were sitting beside me, especially when sweets came whizzing through the air!"*

A real testament to the power of arts for health and wellbeing.

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