



Amplifying the Voices of our Oxfordshire Elders

By Helen Fountain, February 2023

Lived experience, co-production, co-creation have become part of the language of arts and culture of late, and quite rightly so, but what do they really mean in practice for the positive ageing movement and age friendly creativity? It's been my privilege to have some first-hand experience as we develop our Oxfordshire Age Friendly Ambassadors (AFCA) programme, the learning and enrichment we have gained from our elders has been phenomenal.

The AFCA programme was born out of a lockdown creative heritage engagement project as the group didn't want to disband (and we didn't want to lose touch with everyone). The AFCA group have been incredibly helpful to us in shaping our own creative offer, advising on the design of our websites and project concepts, coming up with ideas for our Creative Windows for the Jubilee project for example. We have also been able to work with cultural partners to enable them to shape their age friendly creative offer, with the AFCAs visiting Abingdon Abbey for a site visit and being consulted by Abingdon and Witney College regarding their creative course offer for older people. As a group, the AFCAs come up with ideas and suggestions that we could never have even dreamt of and are fast becoming the go-to group for constructive feedback and sensible solutions. Feedback we have from AFCA group members is positive and they reflect that they feel valued and derive a sense of purpose from what is fast emerging as age friendly activism.

The project spoke to our desire to showcase the talents of our creative elders in Oxfordshire so we also began sharing their stories in our newsletters and in the Age UK magazine EngAGE. Numerous articles have now been included which showcase the talents of our Oxfordshire Creative Elders, from Poetry to Gaming, from Weaving to Painting- you name it and the AFCAs can do it (or they know someone who can). One of our group members makes his own Gramophone Record Players and following on the double page spread with showcasing his talents another Gramophone and wireless enthusiast made contact and now we have linked them up!

For anyone thinking of setting up a Lived Experience group we can heartily recommend it as a highly rewarding and incredibly useful endeavour- if you would like to draw on our lived experience please do take a look at our work [oafcn \(ageuk.org.uk\)](https://oafcn.ageuk.org.uk) or get in touch.

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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