



The Power of Stories by Farrell Renowden, May 2023

Sharing stories is part of being human, from the beginning of civilisation to today's social media, stories are all around us and shape our lives and our communities. So why are they seen as a “soft” option for evaluating impact? Why do we buy into the medicalisation of value, when personal experience – no matter how you measure it – is subjective?

For the last year, the Creative Team at Age UK Oxfordshire has been exploring stories, as a tool for capturing the impact of creativity on the lives of older people. “Creativity” is hard to define and “older people”, as a group, are heterogeneous, so we know that whatever measurement tool we use will be biased in some way. Is measuring wellbeing, loneliness, or heart rates more conclusive than collecting the story of someone's lived experience?

Based on the “Meaningful Measurement” approach developed by [Old Fire Station](#), our Storytelling Project captures the personal impact of creativity on older people who have been marginalised by the creative and cultural sector. We have chosen to focus on creativity in its widest sense, from the perspective of the individual, from times when creativity felt out of reach, to moments when leaning into the creative process was revolutionary.

This does not rely on a “balanced” approach to recording impact. We actively encourage participants to focus on their positive experiences: what it was about the **creative** process that generated the positivity? The rigour emerges from the diversity of the voices of experience rather than a clinical approach.

I can honestly say that this project has been a personal and professional awakening, hearing how creativity “found me when I needed it most”, “changed the world from black and white to vivid colour” and “changed me as a person in every way conceivable”. Reading these quotes as part of a “story” rather than in isolation, has been profound.

I challenge anyone to read our stories and think, “I just wish I knew how many wellbeing points this amounted to” or “what is the cost-benefit of engaging in creativity?”. This is not about one intervention, designed to focus on reducing or increasing a specific measure, rather it is a lesson in how we can enable or disable people from accessing the power of creativity and the holistic impact it can have. I'm not suggesting that we all ditch the numbers, but “meaningful measurement” is the key, these stories are part of the narrative.

The Storytelling Project we are working on is in development and the outcome will be shared in the Autumn. To find out more about this methodology see these [resources for inspiration](#).

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