



Why am I still making the case to the age sector about the value of creativity? by Farrell Renowden, July 2023

Having recently become the new Director of CADA ([Creative Ageing Development Agency](#)) after eight years of working across Age UK, I've been thinking a lot about the role of creativity in the age sector and the role of older people in the cultural sector. There are many different perspectives and provocations to explore as our newly established charity identifies a new strategic plan, but for the purposes of this blog, I want to focus on one question that genuinely does keep me up a night:

Why am I still making the case to the age sector about the value of creativity?

Now, that's not because I'm stepping away from my role at Age UK entirely, but because I've been reflecting on the last eight years and how far we have come. The fact is, we have come a long way and the sector is opening to the idea of creativity being integral to the age sector, but despite the gains, I am still, after all these years, making the case for culture to colleagues on a regular basis. Even yesterday, I was justifying why older people deserve greater access to creativity when resources are scarce and the need for the fundamentals have never been greater. And it got me thinking about how outdated ideas of the "hierarchy of need" and the concept of "charity" prevents people from listening to what older people themselves say is important.

Now, I'm not saying that someone needs a ticket to the theatre more than food in their mouths but is the age sector not there to challenge this outdated approach and strive for older people to "live their best life", not just avoid a crisis? I realise that we need to use our resources wisely, but by limiting our aspirations for the age sector, we are limiting our ambitions for older people, and if the age sector needs to be convinced of the value of creativity and given "permission" to offer it as part of their delivery, then no wonder older people need the same convincing and sense of permission to access it. Creativity is undoubtably "good for you", and there's evidence aplenty to affirm this, but that's not the point – it is a fundamental human right that extends to everyone, of all ages.

[The Index of Wellbeing in Later Life](#) report was published in 2017 and it shows that older people value creative and cultural participation as the number one determinant of wellbeing. It also clearly states that it is not simply about "social participation", because that ranked eighth on the list of determinants, with "level of financial wealth" ranking even lower and "satisfaction with public transport" being at the bottom of the table. Yet, I am still faced with people who insist that when we talk about creativity, it isn't "creativity" that matters to older people. They believe creativity is simply a "by-product" of social participation, which can be achieved without creativity, so we should spend more time focussing on practical issues. Still, after all these years, the voices of older people are not being heard and we need to keep advocating and amplifying what **they** say **they** value and what **they** need... So, my question is not **should** I ever stop, but when **can** I stop making the case to the age sector, because the perspective of older people speaks for itself.

Sadly, there is no silver bullet to solve this, but I would love to hear your reflections and suggestions for positive action. And please send this blog, along with the research, to anyone you know who needs to hear it.

CADA is committed to challenging the narrative of Creative Ageing. To hear more regular Creative Ageing perspectives and provocations read CADA's latest enews and sign up directly: <https://mailchi.mp/cadaengland.org/creative-ageing-news-and-provocations-from-cada-9388672>

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