



How older people inspire our work by Kate Castleden, August 2023

As we look towards the [UN's International Day of Older Persons](#) and [Silver Sunday](#) on 1st October, it's a time to both reflect and celebrate. The reason we work in the field of creative ageing is the joy we share when someone experiences creativity in an uplifting way or when a new creative / cultural opportunity provides the respite / freedom / friendship that the participant has been craving.

We know that listening to older people is the first step to making a real difference. When we heard the story of a local resident, let's call him John, we realised that we needed to take action. John is a regular at one of our county's Community Support Centres. He's a voracious reader, and would regularly devour multiple library books each week. Both his mobility and hearing are limited, and he needs support borrowing the books. He's a sociable and chatty chap, but there was no opportunity for him to share his love of books and reading with others.

Step in [TeaBooks](#). Over a year later, John remains a founding member of the TeaBooks group which we set up at his Community Support Centre, to provide a regular forum for him to meet with others to discuss books in a social and relaxed environment.

Last year we were contacted by another local resident, let's call her Joan. Another avid reader wanting the opportunity to meet with others and discuss the books she had been reading. Joan's hearing loss has been a great challenge for her in recent years, and she was concerned that she wouldn't be able to join in with a group activity which involves group conversations. This time there wasn't an obvious venue for the group to meet, so numerous enquiries and obstacles later we secured a local Community Centre, who kindly provided a space for the monthly meetings free of charge.

Joan is now getting to know the other group members, who are mindful of speaking clearly and one at a time during their discussions, so Joan is included. We are now in touch with the local Hearing Impairment Team too, to explore other ways to help Joan participate.

Both these TeaBooks members are real inspirations. It takes confidence to consider trying a new activity, and courage to actually turn up. Joining a group of strangers in a new room for an hour is a daunting prospect. However, giving it a go is the first step to a regular slot of joy in the calendar.

It is now two years since the TeaBooks project moved from Bookfeast to Age UK Oxfordshire, and it continues to thrive. So long as we keep being inspired by older people, and listen to what they want, we'll stay on the right track.

Kate is the Age Friendly Creative Facilitator in Age UK Oxfordshire's [Creative Team](#), where she manages the TeaBooks project and leads on communication for Age of Creativity.

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