

Creative Engagement in Housing & Care: Central & Cecil

Central & Cecil Housing Trust is a social landlord providing housing for over 55's in London. Although it is common for housing associations to offer activities for their residents, we provide a special focus on the arts and the benefits they bring in later life. Our Creative Arts service started over 30 years ago and is now overseen by two part-time Creative Arts Coordinators, myself (Rachael Dinnage) for our Sheltered Housing schemes and Alison Teader for Care and Supported Housing.

Across our Sheltered Housing Schemes and Care Homes we provide a range of free creative opportunities. These include regular activities, outings to galleries and museums and one-off projects with arts and cultural organisations.

Our regular activities include creative writing, dance, painting, upholstery, tai chi, aromatherapy, singing, song-writing and a radio drama group. These run across our schemes and homes and are open for all our residents to attend. Museums and galleries across London offer a fantastic range of accessible events including free tickets to previews, tailored workshops and outreach activities. We organise group trips to these, and encourage people to attend of their own accord.

When I asked one of our residents for a contribution to this article, he commented;

"For the many years I and my wife have enjoyed immensely the many opportunities provided to engage in cultural activities. Visits to art galleries, museums, The Royal Albert Hall for tours and music performances and tea dances etc. have been made available by C&C, and it seems that there is always something upcoming. I personally have taken up painting at the weekly art classes and have joined an art discussion group which holds monthly meetings at Tate Britain"

We have also worked collaboratively on larger scale projects which have seen our residents perform at the Royal Albert Hall and Royal Opera House – occasions they still speak about today. Green Candle Dance have also delivered a moving intergenerational dance project at one of our care homes.

It's amazing to see the infectious nature of the arts. One activity often leads to the next and before you know it people are asking when their next exhibition or performance is going to be. It's unusual to have arts roles within a housing association but the social value the arts can bring to older communities shouldn't be underestimated. Organisations such as housing trusts are in a perfect position to help bridge the gap many older people face in accessing the arts.

We are always looking to work with new organisations so if you have a project or idea then please do get in touch.

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