

Nature-based project which involves people living with dementia

Observations in Nature is a photography and book-making project for people living with dementia and their carers in the community in Cornwall. It has been designed as a celebration of Sensory Trust's five dementia-friendly nature-based activity clubs which have been created as part of our Creative Spaces in the Community project, funded by the Big Lottery. The project will be starting in March 2018 and has been funded by the Arts Council.

The project was designed by Ellie Robinson-Carter as part of her MA in Illustration in 2016, when it was undertaken by our dementia-friendly walking group in St. Austell: The Happy Wanderers. The group passed around a disposable camera and were asked to take photographs on their walks, with a particular theme or constraint in mind. The themes provide a focus, another form of cognitive stimulation and a shared topic of conversation: the group become the illustrators of their own narrative. They span a variety of ideas, such as senses, personal experiences and times of year.



The images were developed and put into an A5 book per walk, displaying the images in the order they were taken. There are 17 books so far, and their titles include: Texture at Treverbyn, Sound at Goss Moor and Green at Luxulyan. Some have little books inside of them, which expand further on the theme: for example, in Shadows at Wheal Martyn the movement of the sun is captured and in The First Signs of Spring at Lostwithiel a collection of drawings are presented.

Ellie will now be delivering this project to our other four activity groups in Cornwall. This will celebrate the groups at this stage of their development, providing an opportunity for deeper engagement with their surroundings and shared experiences. It will also teach them a host of new skills whilst fostering old ones: the groups will engage in photography lessons and book-making sessions, learning different ways of using the camera and creating the A6 books to go inside the larger A5 photo books. The groups will be encouraged to be experimental and creative with their project, fostering a sense of ownership and authorship.

These books will then be uploaded on to an online platform, beginning the development of an online book-archive which illustrates people living with dementia engaging in nature. We hope to roll this project out to other groups, nurturing a community of people who use nature to enhance the lives of people living with dementia.

This project is a fantastic example of mind and landscape coming together: it is a psycho-geographical project which allows the people to document their experiences in the landscape, whilst nurturing and sharing their

inner landscapes. It also creates visual prompts which can allow them to revisit their shared memories, and is extremely important in providing the individuals with self-evidence that living with dementia can still mean that they can form new connections, both with people and landscape.

If you would like to find out more about the project, or have your own nature-based project which involves people living with dementia, please get in touch. Contact Ellie on 01726 222900 or at erobinsoncarter@sensorytrust.org.uk.