

Murmuration Arts: Inspiring communities

I started working with verbatim memories in my final year degree show at Brighton University. I never met my maternal grandmother and based my show on other people's memories of her life. I spent the summer before my final year in Ireland meeting and interviewing people who knew my grandmother, gathering recordings and images. When I graduated I joined a theatre company called Ragroof and our first funded show was based on older people's memories of War Time England, we went to people's homes and used button tins as a starting point for reminiscence sessions, which informed the writing and imagery in our first production, titled Make Do and Mend.

At Murmuration Arts, our amazing team have been working within older people's care settings for the last 14 years (formerly working together as part of Ragroof), visiting day centres, residential care homes, as well as individuals in their homes.

Last Summer our creative team collaborated with [South East Dance](#), delivering workshops as part of 'The Welcome Project' in a number of residential care homes in Brighton, including Brooke Mead Extra Care Housing Scheme for tenants with dementia. There is mounting evidence on the benefit of dance for all people, including and particularly older people at risk of developing dementia. Arts Council Wales chairman Phil George said funding could alleviate strain on the NHS in the long term.

"We can see an impact in these projects that might reduce the return of older people to hospital, that can reduce the prescription of antidepressants to people with mental health difficulties in communities, and that can improve health through social connection."



Murmuration Arts Dance Party

Our approach to working in these settings is first and foremost to remember that the people we meet are the experts of their own lives and the space they are living in. We thank them for welcoming us in to their homes; we approach gently as we would visitors in any new space and take the time to get to know people, their needs and interests.

The work that Murmuration Arts delivers is a vehicle for social inclusion; we use many different tools to bring people together to enjoy a shared experience. We believe that through our work we can break down social stereotypes. Dance steps are one of these tools, the beauty of dance is that anyone can do it and you don't need to be able to speak the same verbal language as one another. Partner dance in particular is a powerful physical exchange for people who maybe missing physical touch in their daily lives. Being in ballroom hold, or what we might call a ballroom hug can be a very emotive moment for a person. I remember dancing with a 91 year old man at Alnwick Gardens,

the gentleman told me he hadn't held a woman in his arms since his wife had died 30 years previously.



Murmuration Arts Dance Project

Dance is immediate and draws the participant into the present moment; this can be good for people with dementia as this activity doesn't rely on recalling memories. Additionally for some older people who have dementia, dance, rather like the songs they are dancing to seem to be accessible to their memories. I believe this is to do with how different memories are recalled and often dance and songs are remembered more like a habit. There is a lightness to our approach of dance, we aren't so focused on the precise steps, more the whole social aspect and sharing of a moment. Dance can combat loneliness; it's a great way to introduce new people to a social group, to find connections, to laugh at mistakes, and most importantly to bring people together. I believe that by opening the artistic process to collaborate with and encourage creative input from all those involved, individuals and communities feel better empowered and feel an improved sense of self-esteem through the process of co-creation. We set up Murmuration Arts to move towards the co-creation method; collaborating with communities and to explore different ways of doing this with the people we work with.

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About Us - Murmuration Arts

Murmuration Arts is a participatory arts organisation with over 14 years experience delivering community engagement projects. We focus on projects which adopt a co-creation approach – we create collaboratively with communities. We connect with and build community through street theatre, site-responsive performance, participatory dance, music, reminiscence sessions, intergenerational workshops, cooking together, sharing stories, oral history projects and craft activities... and we love playing games!

Marion Duggan Biography –

Marion is an artist, performer and the Artistic Director of Murmuration Arts. Often her work involves in-depth research with communities, focusing on building and maintaining relationships. She has researched and developed oral history and reminiscence interview

techniques, and using verbatim text in the devising processes. Marion is passionate about the shared experience of partner dancing and its preservation, and working together collaboratively with communities to produce great arts events.