

CREATIVE HEALTHY AGEING TOOLKIT



the
performance
ensemble

Leeds
Older
People's
Forum



ABOUT

The Creative Healthy Ageing project is a partnership between Leeds Older People's Forum and The Performance Ensemble, funded by Leeds City Council Public Health. Testing out different ways of delivering Public Health healthy ageing messages, it's based on a 'test, learn, develop' ethos. The aim is to develop tested and effective community-based engagement methods to inform a fresh city-wide approach to Public Health messaging using creative expression.

This toolkit is based on our findings from four workshops, for each of which we applied a different public health message and creative approach. It is intended to provide a guide to applying different methods of creative expression to support public health messaging. Our findings to date are based on feedback from workshop participants and facilitators.

The second and third stages of the project are to award grants to up to eight community organisations over a two-year period to further 'test, learn and develop' approaches to communicating priority public health messages through a creative, healthy ageing approach. As we do so, we will refresh this initial toolkit. For now, it's intended to support you in your work with people 55 and over, based on our first steps in developing an approach. We hope you find it helpful and welcome your feedback in helping us to develop the work.

WHAT WE DID

The workshops were held over a two month period, one online and three in person in venues across the city to provide a wide geographical spread.

For each workshop, we invited a broad range of potential participants, including older people, varied community organisations working in arts and creativity, outdoors, health wellbeing and community, Faith groups, LGBTQ+, and organisations working with Leeds black and ethnic older populations. Workshops were advertised widely via email, social media, leaflets and word of mouth.

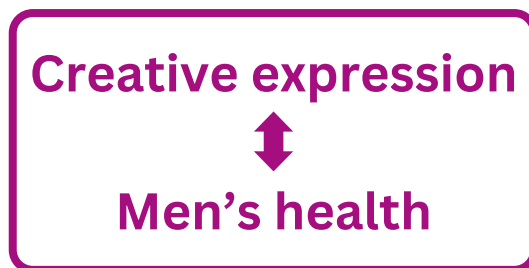
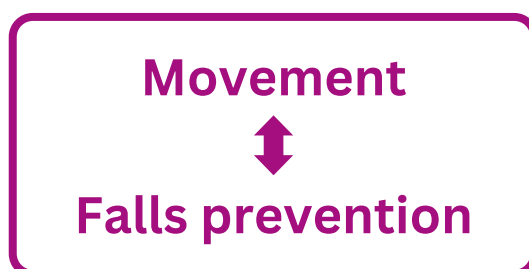
- Healthy Eating and Living
- Falls Prevention
- Mental Health
- Men's Health and wellbeing

We chose these four priority public health messages with Leeds City Council Public Health, to test ways to engage people not normally reached through other public health messaging routes.

Workshops took place in a community based setting, proactively engaging people, 55 and above, in supporting and looking after their physical and mental wellbeing.

HOW WE DID IT

TPE engaged experienced arts practitioners for each workshop using different forms of creative expression including:



The approaches used for each PH message are a starting point and you might want to mix them up or have other approaches you want to test out.



HOW WE DID IT

We chose these four priority public health messages, with Leeds City Council Public Health, to test ways to engage people not normally reached through other public health messaging routes:

- Arrival at the venue with staff and volunteers greeting participants, making them feel welcome and relaxed. Related leaflets and information available for people to read and take away. For people arriving on their own, introductions to other participants, staff and volunteers to create connections.
- Introduction to the topic and the creative approach
- Explanation of the creative approach, setting out intention and what the workshop will involve. For example, the Music practitioner explained that she would play the guitar and sing pre-selected songs, and participants would be invited to engage with no pressure to sing along. This would then be followed by exploring the effects of the music on individuals and the impact of music more widely through writing and group chat.
- Focused exercises, e.g., for movement, were based on the development of a group routine, gently building up through the development of new steps and sharing after each stage of development.
- Feedback on activities from participants using group chat and post it notes
- All group feedback and close
- Time after the meeting for conversations, questions and any support required.
- Lunch and refreshments provided.

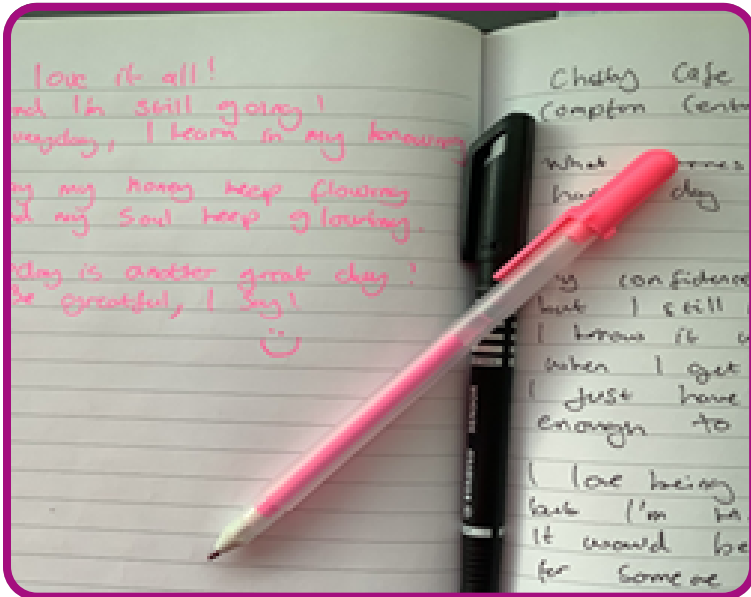
HOW WE DID IT

For each workshop, an experienced creative practitioner was engaged to deliver the workshop. They pre-planned the outline of the creative aspect of each workshop and the exercises to be used to engage participants. For example, for the online Storytelling and creative expression workshop on Healthy Eating, the practitioner used a storytelling approach - 'A day in the life of' - to support participants in thinking about what a healthy and well life looks like on a daily basis, using pen and paper and/or the online chat function.

For the toolkit, we have gathered learning from each workshop, looking at participants' experiences and reflections and what worked for them. Based on feedback, we also share some of the drawbacks or things to be cautious of in using creative approaches.

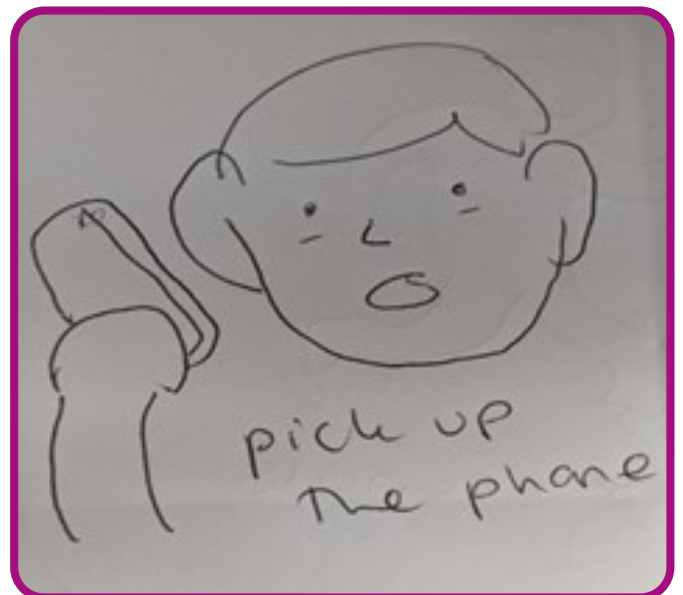


STORYTELLING AND HEALTHY LIVING



Participants were invited to imagine a day in the life of a happy, well person over 50 and what they do in their day that helps them to remain happy and well. What might be the barriers or considerations to achieving this?

People enjoyed 'being in the moment' and liked being given permission to use their own experience or imagination. Creatively, people produced poems, drawings, diary entries, and diagrams, with most sharing what they'd produced.



For the facilitator, who wasn't used to running sessions online, not being able to see all participants was anxiety-provoking. This is something to think about if you're planning to run any online sessions.

MOVEMENT AND FALLS PREVENTION

The facilitator opened the session by talking about the benefits of increasing activity for physical fitness and maintaining mental agility through coordinated movement from walking to dancing.

Participants were brought into a round, standing, and invited to introduce themselves with a movement inspired by the syllables in their first name, with a demonstration. People were then asked to pair up and explore their own posture and that of their partner whilst standing to begin to prepare for movement. Then it moved on to bringing in music and beginning to move the legs and then the arms, still working in pairs. The movement gradually built up in intensity to a full routine, with plenty of time to rest, feedback and develop movement.



People enjoyed the combination of music and movement and commented on the positive experience of group motivation, beating loneliness, and keeping the brain active. The group was culturally diverse, which led to conversations about cultural differences in dance and reminiscing about their dance experiences.

MOVEMENT AND FALLS PREVENTION

Communicating with others as people developed their routines together and as a group was well-liked and inspired the motivation to engage. People enjoyed being able to participate standing or sitting 'I was with you mentally'. People liked that the routine was gradually built up and feedback that the repetition of steps and movements was good for the memory.

When running this type of activity, things to think about are ensuring that people feel relaxed, as some may be wary of getting it wrong. For some, unused to coordinating their hands and legs and unused to dancing, it took time, so things needed to be built at the pace of all participants.

'I was a ballroom dancer, so used to music and movement.'

'It got me up and moving'

'I feel able to be aware of my barriers and move anyway'

MUSIC AND MENTAL HEALTH

Nicky, with her guitar, led the session using song over two different activities, giving participants the opportunity to connect with music in different ways: one more passive, the other more active and enabling self-expression.

The first activity played clips from two songs, 'My Boy Lollipop' and 'What A Wonderful World,' followed by the question:

'How did listening to that make you feel?'

This invited responses in words, poems, drawings or songs. Follow-up questions prompted:

'What was it about each song that made you feel that way?'

They might comment on style, tempo, instruments, vocals, and lyrics) and:

'What did the songs make you think of?'

They might comment on memories/associations evoked.

The second activity, using the song 'Sweet Caroline,' invited participants to sing along with Nicky, and the lyrics were provided.

The sessions evoked a broad range of feelings, memories and responses. On hearing 'My Boy Lollipop' one woman shared:

'Millie Small, the woman singing, was from Jamaica and became a star from this hit record. I felt happy to hear this music from my home country.'

MUSIC AND MENTAL HEALTH

For many participants, listening to and participating provoked a good mood, cheerful feelings, and happy memories:

‘Great memories—listening to LPs [record] of 60s music when I was a child. It was very danceable. I couldn't listen without moving around.’

Some reported a reduction in anxiety and feeling more motivated, while others reported feeling calmer and more relaxed, as well as cheerful and happy.

A shared group activity and the connection that resulted from it made people feel good even when they didn't want to sing.

“I didn't like the idea of being asked to sing but enjoyed taking part. Music always lifts my mood. It also made people feel like connecting with friends.”

Inevitably, the music provoked memories:

‘Lovely song. Reminded me of my mom, whose name was Caroline. After her death, her first granddaughter was named after her.’



MEN'S HEALTH AND WELLBEING

The session was divided into three activities: the first used Blackout poetry, and the second engaged individuals in using words, pictures, and poetry to describe three qualities in a man they admire. Finally, as a group, they explored the challenges of practising the qualities they'd written about in exercise two.

Blackout poetry uses words from existing poetry to create new art. In this instance, participants were invited to take words from provided texts to create something new. The aim of the exercise being to focus on creative expression through exploring words and poems. This led to the second exercise, where people were asked to write more directly from their experiences.

For the latter many participants chose their Father as a focus. "Kind, everyone said 'he was a kind man' funny, mostly good, not half bad, caring that's my Dad'. As well as writing of the strengths they admired, people also wrote about frailty, growing up in care and 'old school' attitudes.

The final group activity led to a general exploration which touched on treatment from others and ways to develop resilience, e.g. with supportive networks, talking therapy, and knowing yourself. Mood and circumstances and the impact on being who you want to be versus who you might be in a moment, followed by meeting basic needs and health and mobility.

People valued the shared group activity and invitation to stop. The opportunity to explore interests and shared activity was welcome. As a whole, the activities were viewed as being fine as a starter to engage, noting that the exercise depended on literacy, language skills and confidence. The second exercise brought back memories for some who had been recently bereaved.

One person who was unable to attend the sessions shared a poem after the event:

MEN'S HEALTH AND WELLBEING

'Tis a very good idea
This here Hen
To have a Forum
Concerning
Creative Healthy Ageing For Older Men
Oft' times some do not have a clue
On what to do
With their now plentiful time once suddenly
Retired and free secularly!
Sit in a chair all day?
Drinking endless cups of tea?
No! ...not for me!
And most would not choose
Take to booze?
Rather...
Keep active - your
Body and Mind
Associate with others
Young and older than yourself
Young 'Uns
Can help you keep a young attitude - give
Tech savvy help too!
What's number one
Not a clue!!
In the 80's I knew
Top Of The Pops so well
Oh hell!
But Gaga I do like now!

GENERAL PRINCIPLES

1. **Experienced creative arts facilitators** were important - people who have the knowledge and experience of using creative approaches and working with older people.
2. **Reminding people you don't have to be an expert!** - You don't have to be "good" at the activity, e.g. singing or dancing. Build the session so that people feel relaxed and fully enabled to take part in (or take breaks from) creative expression.
3. **Build group rapport** - Doing this at the start helps to provide a supportive environment. Find ways to break the ice and allow people to engage as much or as little as they'd like to.
4. **Diverse representation** - Our workshops had people from a wide age range (50+), which should be taken into account when planning a creative-based approach.
5. **Digital and hybrid offers** - This can work well for participants using online meetings, but there can be challenges, too (e.g. using the chat function). In our online storytelling workshop participants found they enjoyed learning about this aspect of being online and chose the chat function to engage. Benefits may include more people being able to join remotely, being able to participate with their cameras off, and creating a safe space for LGBTQ+ people to engage.
6. **Transport** - community venues need to be accessible via public transport and/or transport offered to participants.
7. **Create a relaxed, friendly and welcoming space for the session** - Have information available about the topic you are covering and related activities people might want to take part in following on from the session as it may have piqued interest and reminded people of forgotten interests and skills. We found that the movement workshop in particular led to people wanting to attend dance groups.
8. **If you're hiring a venue, ensure the toilets are accessible.**

THANKYOU

Leeds Older People's Forum would like to thank:

Facilitators:

- Natalie Tharreleos
- Vilmore James
- Nicky
- Wise Guy's at Highland Print Studio
- Mens' Sheds Association
- Man About Town

Leeds City Council Public Health

The Performance Ensemble and all organisations and individuals who participated and contributed to the four sessions.

Funded by Leeds City Council Public Health.

