



Age & Opportunity Guidelines for Working with Older People in the Arts:

A Resource for Bealtaine Organisers and Others Involved in the Arts and Older People
by Orla Moloney

bealtainefestival
celebrating creativity in older age


age & opportunity
Challenging attitudes and promoting participation

Age & Opportunity is the Irish national agency working:

- to challenge negative attitudes to ageing and older people, and
- to promote greater participation by older people in society.



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Foreword

Managed by a volunteer Board of older people, Age & Opportunity promotes an ethos of empowerment in relation to ageing issues. We seek equality rather than charity. We view older people as a resource to society with rights of participation, consultation and decision-making and not as passive users of services.

As we get older we have to adapt to change. Many of the messages absorbed about ageing are negative ones – and people in marketing exploit our fears around the issue. However, when you look at the arts and creativity, the perspective can be a positive one, with many of the people who are most venerated in society being our cultural elders, like Seamus Heaney, William Trevor or Patrick Scott – to mention a few.

‘I’m learning something I couldn’t have learned when I was younger – that the spirit doesn’t age’.

Peter Ustinov

It is the individual spirit that is expressed through the arts, something that subsists while our bodies are ageing. Our creative potential can in fact improve with age. Artists report to us how fascinating it is to work with a group of older people and to find them not only enjoying themselves, but engaging passionately with a new art form. This is true even with people who are physically frail, and especially of people who did not get the chance to engage with the arts earlier on. It speaks of a fantastic testament to the human spirit.

The wish to publish Guidelines arises from the experience of Age & Opportunity in working in the arts for more than a decade, particularly as coordinators of the Bealtaine festival. We, our partner organisations, and artists who work with us, are aware that a great deal of experience has been gained, but that documentation of this learning, has not kept pace.

We have come to recognise that individuals can experience a sense of well-being, of confidence, of transformation, even, through participating in the arts. We have also noticed that high-quality arts opportunities available over a sustained period of time seem to offer the most beneficial experience. Through Bealtaine, our aim has been to promote meaningful participation by older people in the arts. However, that begs the question as to what we mean by ‘meaningful’ participation, and in this document, we try to examine this and other related issues, so as to contribute to the development of a shared understanding of the aims of Bealtaine.

Foreword

We recognise that this publication is just a first step. We would have liked to have consulted even more widely in the drawing up of these Guidelines, but time and budgets did not allow this.

There are many things that could flow from the Guidelines – shorter, more practical guidelines for particular groups, for example, or training workshops or information seminars. We hope to be able to take the next steps in future years. Another of our hopes for this publication is that it will start to inform a national policy on the arts and older people.

I'd like to finish by thanking Orla Moloney, the writer of these Guidelines, who contributed much to the development of Bealtaine working as Bealtaine Director within Age & Opportunity for several years. I would also like to acknowledge the contribution of Bealtaine's Steering Group members. The first chair of this group was Helen O'Donoghue, Irish Museum of Modern Art. Its current chair is Ann Davoren, West Cork Arts Centre. The contribution of the Steering Group members continues to be at the heart of our work.

Catherine Rose

Chief Executive Officer,
Age & Opportunity

Bealtaine is the national arts festival celebrating creativity in older age. It takes place annually throughout Ireland for the month of May. Bealtaine includes all artforms such as theatre, writing, painting, film, dance, storytelling, music and more. The organisers of Bealtaine events include national arts institutions, county council arts offices, cultural bodies, arts centres, public libraries, care centres, active retirement groups and other local groups. Age & Opportunity coordinates this unique partnership and promotes the festival through the media. From very small beginnings in its inaugural year of 1996, Bealtaine has grown to a point where, in 2006, there were some 1,000 events organised by over 260 organisers. Today, Bealtaine is the country's largest cooperative arts festival.

bealtainefestival
celebrating creativity in older age

Margaret Nolan of St. Michael's Parish Active Retirement Art Group, Inchicore, Dublin, taking part in the Programme for older people at the Irish Museum of Modern Art.
Photo: Derek Speirs



Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Why do we need Guidelines?

The Guidelines were developed in response to the rapid growth in the number of individuals, groups and organisations that organise arts events with older people at local, regional and national level, and the diversity of backgrounds from which they come. The rapid increase in numbers can be seen in the figures for Bealtaine Festival events over the last few years. In 2001, the festival consisted of 260 events in 22 counties. By 2003, this had risen to over 575 events in 26 counties; in 2005 there were over 800 events, and the upward trend continues in 2006 with some 1000 events. The organisers of these events have come to the festival by different pathways, bringing different motivations, perspectives and skills. The number of Bealtaine organisers

was 262 in 2006. They come from a range of contexts including arts organisations, active retirement groups, local authorities, libraries, care settings, and educational institutions. This diversity is one of the strengths of the festival as it facilitates the participation of ever-increasing numbers of older people in both traditional and non-traditional arts settings. However, it also brings challenges in relation to communication and integration. It is difficult to ensure that ideas, opportunities and experiences are shared between groups, particularly across sectors, and that the festival is developed in such a way that quality is ensured without compromising the creative freedom of the individual organiser.

...diversity is one of the strengths of the festival as it facilitates the participation of ever-increasing numbers of older people...

Age & Opportunity has developed these Guidelines for Bealtaine organisers in order to promote:

- a shared understanding of the aims of the festival
- a shared understanding of the elements that make up a high-quality arts experience
- a shared commitment to the provision of high quality arts experiences for older people.

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*...good practice
can often be
overlooked in work
with older people,
due to unconscious
negativity or low
expectations.*

We are not targeting Bealtaine organisers exclusively. Whether you are a member of a small voluntary group or the head of a large arts organisation, and whether you organise arts events in May or at any other time of the year, we hope you find something thought-provoking and practical to meet your needs. Our aim is to provide material for reflection, as well as some useful tips for reviewing attitudes and organising programmes. You may find that some of the recommendations are based on general principles of good practice, desirable in work with every age group. We feel it is important to stress these elements as well as the recommendations that relate more specifically to older age, as good practice can often be overlooked in work with older people, due to unconscious negativity or low expectations. We see the Guidelines as an overview of the process of working with older people in the arts, not as a training manual. If you do identify areas of weakness in your planning, implementation or evaluation processes, you will need to follow this up by identifying more in-depth research or training in that specific area. Overall, we hope that this document will generate dialogue and debate, and inform both policy and practice at local, regional and national level.

1.2 Who are the Guidelines for?

The Guidelines are for people of all ages who organise arts and cultural events that involve older people as organisers, artists, participants or audience, whether during the Bealtaine Festival or at other times of the year. They are also for anyone who wishes to become involved in organising such events in the future. While we do not work directly in the areas of therapy or formal education, therapists and educationalists may also find something useful in the Guidelines, particularly if involved in the organisation of creative events in the course of their work.

1.3 Who developed them?

These Guidelines have been developed by Age & Opportunity in consultation with a range of individuals who have experience in the area of arts and older people, not just during Bealtaine but throughout the year. Among them are organisers, participants, artists and practitioners with experience in older people's organisations, national arts institutions, local authority arts offices, regional arts centres, libraries and care settings.¹

¹ See Appendix One - Methodology for further details

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1.4 How do the Guidelines relate to policy development?

At Age & Opportunity we are very aware of the need for policy development in order to address the vulnerable status of arts programmes targeting older people at local, regional and national level. Many older people's programmes have been initiated as a result of the singular passion of a particular individual or group of individuals: artists; administrators; members of active retirement groups; members of care staff and others. Through energy and commitment, these individuals have managed to influence key stakeholders and unleash valuable resources such as time, space, imagination, goodwill and funding on a project by project basis. Due to the lack of policy underpinning them and the lack of ongoing funding, many such projects have tended to remain vulnerable no matter how successful they are in terms of artistic, personal and social outcomes. There are few guarantees of sustained support and, consequently, few opportunities to develop and deepen the arts experience over any extended period of time. A change in personnel may have a particularly disastrous effect, as support may be conditional on the presence of just one committed individual and may disappear overnight. This vulnerability cannot be tackled effectively until the

rights of older people to participate in the arts are recognised, acknowledged and supported more comprehensively at policy level, not just in the Arts sector, but also in the areas of health and education.

With these Guidelines, Age & Opportunity hopes to promote and support the development of policy relating to the arts and older people at every level and to see it implemented in practice. We would encourage every group and organisation, whether large or small, to draw up a policy on which to base future development in this area. We hope to dialogue with Bealtaine organisers, and others with similar experience, in the future² and to build on your ideas and experience in order to contribute to a national policy in this area.

1.5 How to ensure a shared understanding of the terms used in the Guidelines?

In order to make these Guidelines as clear and as useful as possible for those involved in organising Bealtaine events or other arts projects involving older people, we have defined a number of commonly used terms as they are used in this document. Where possible, we have included the definition in the text. However, we have also included a full glossary at the end.³

Many older people's programmes have been initiated as a result of the singular passion of a particular individual or group of individuals.

² Subject to funding

³ See *Appendix Two*

Members of
Boyle Active Age,
Roscommon, involved
in the making of a
short film, *On Hallowed
Ground*, in association
with the Irish Film
Institute.

Photo: Derek Speirs



Chapter 2

Ethos

2.1 Age & Opportunity Ethos

Age & Opportunity aims to promote the participation of older people in all areas of life and to challenge negative attitudes towards ageing and older people. Age & Opportunity is managed by a Board whose members are older people. This immediately raises the question of what is meant by the term 'older.' There is no simple numerical answer. For the purposes of the European Union anybody over the age of 50 is considered to be 'older' and in a general sense, people often consider the nominal retirement age of 65 years as the gateway to older age. At Age & Opportunity we do not believe it is useful to put a specific age on the term, as each individual is best placed to define the point at which they feel older for themselves and age is, after all, a relative thing. It is true, however, that the majority of individuals who participate in Age & Opportunity initiatives are, as one U.K writer put it '*coming up to or [having] arrived at pensionable age (whether or not they have spent their lives earning)*'.⁴

There are a number of key principles underpinning our ethos in relation to older people and ageing. First, we believe that older people are a diverse group; we are as different from each other at 80 years of age as we were at 28. Secondly, we believe that a good quality of life is a necessity at all ages and does not become a luxury as we get older, regardless of whether we live independently or in a care setting. We believe that quality of life comes from a recognition of our ongoing potential and is therefore dependent on access to opportunities for physical, social, mental, spiritual and emotional development. We have the potential to learn new things until the day we die as long as the opportunities for learning are not closed down. To deny us access to learning and development on the basis of our age is a denial of our potential for individual self-realisation and an infringement of our human rights.

As we grow older, we continue to have much to contribute to society as well as much to gain from participation. However, we are often limited in this mutual exchange by a range of barriers. Our ability to engage in the arts may be severely curtailed due to a range of physical, social or geographic circumstances, and there are a range of supports that could be put in place to ensure our continued participation. Unfortunately, the prevailing negative attitude towards ageing and older people in our society contributes to a situation where these supports are often disregarded or looked upon as a luxury rather than a necessity. The fact that this negativity is often unconscious makes it all the more difficult to address. Negative attitudes towards ageing and older people are so common in our society that we often absorb them without being aware of it. They are deeply embedded at individual, organisational and

⁴ Frances Fi, (1999), *The Arts and Older People: A Practical Introduction*, Age Concern, UK

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societal level: in the language we use, the images we see, the structures of our organisations, and the policies we make in areas such as health, education and the arts. Negativity towards ageing results in a denial of our potential and a lowering of expectations as we get older. Stereotypes suggest that we are generic in older age, suddenly developing the same tastes, habits and attitudes, no matter how individual we have been all of our lives. Such stereotypes need be challenged at individual, organisational and societal level, in order to create positive changes for the benefit of all.

Besides our key principles relating to ageing and older people, we also have a number of key values underpinning our programmes at Age & Opportunity. Cooperation and partnership are essential ingredients, as are the values of respect, high quality and integrity. We aim to incorporate these into all of our work and to promote their application to all programmes involving older people.

2.2 How does the ethos of Age & Opportunity apply to the arts?

Regardless of our age, we believe it our right to participate in the artistic and cultural life of our country in whatever way we may choose. The form of participation will be

different for each individual. For some, it will be an opportunity to engage directly with an art form: to learn techniques, explore ideas and create new work. For others, it will be an opportunity to engage with the work of others: to watch, listen, enjoy and be challenged by new perspectives and modes of expression. For some, the honing of artistic skills and the satisfaction that derives from finished work will be the most important elements of the experience, while for others, it will be the personal journey undertaken during the creative process, with no product at all. Some may wish to get involved in design, lighting, or costume, while others may wish to tackle elements of administration or organisation. Whatever mode of participation is chosen, we believe that the arts experience on offer should be meaningful and of the highest possible quality. This gives rise to one of the most complex issues dealt with in this document: how to unpack the elements involved in the concept of a *meaningful, high-quality arts experience*.⁵

Cooperation and partnership are central to the work of Age & Opportunity in all areas, including the arts. The Bealtaine Festival has been built on a working partnership with a wide range of groups and organisations around the country. The development of arts programmes with older people depends on the mutual willingness of different individuals, groups and organisations to work together and learn from each other, demonstrating respect and empathy for differences in approach and experience.

⁵ This is explored in detail in Chapter 5

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From the point of view of funders, policy makers and arts organisers, the facilitation of older people's participation in the arts makes sense on many levels:

Ethically - The right to participate in artistic and cultural life is a human rights issue. Article 27 of the Declaration of Human Rights states that '*everyone has the right freely to participate in the cultural life of the community, to enjoy the arts*'. The ethical issue is compounded in the Irish context; many older people grew up in a harsh socio-economic climate where the arts were seen as an inessential luxury. In general, arts education was only available in schools catering for children from privileged backgrounds. Even there, the curriculum and teaching methods tended to be conservative and often led to negative experiences. Citizens of the fledgling Irish State were not encouraged to explore their creative imagination; censorship was the norm and many creative artists fled an atmosphere of repression and disapproval. Apart from a relatively small number of artists and enthusiasts, few emerged from this period with high expectations in relation to the arts. Consequently, many older people in Ireland today do not have a great sense of ownership over our arts institutions and many do not feel that arts opportunities generally are aimed at them. There is an ethical responsibility to redress these missed opportunities and to take a proactive approach to facilitating meaningful participation. Arts programmes need to be planned with diversity in mind and the barriers

that impede older people from taking part should be removed.

Practically⁶ - Older people can contribute to the arts as artists, participants, organisers and audience. While this already happens to a degree, the extent of the contribution could increase considerably if older people were facilitated to participate more fully in new and existing arts programmes. Society is already artistically poorer due to the fact that so many were excluded in the past, but the deficit can be redressed to an extent by encouraging older voices to contribute to the complexity and diversity of our national cultural identity. Older people are potentially a powerful economic and political grouping with the ability to be influential advocates as well as loyal supporters of the arts. Arts organisations that apply for public money also have a responsibility to develop an inclusive approach in their programming, as funders may look for evidence of diverse participation as an indicator of value. We are also an ageing society – older people are an increasing segment of our population. Arts organisations ignore this at their peril!

Legally - Equality legislation states that we may not discriminate against anybody on the basis of age, either in employment (the *Employment Equality Act*, 1998) or in the provision of goods and services (the *Equal Status Act*, 2000). A body of case law is emerging in which people have succeeded in bringing cases against employers and service providers on

Older people are potentially a powerful economic and political grouping...

⁶ The practical benefits of participation for the individual, the arts sector, the health sector and society as a whole are explored in greater detail in Chapter 3

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age grounds. This means that arts organisations have an obligation to ensure that they provide their services in a manner that does not discriminate against anyone because of their age. An individual who feels excluded or treated less favourably because of their age would be entitled to bring a case.

2.3 Age & Opportunity arts participation programmes

Age & Opportunity runs two programmes that directly address the issue of older people's participation in the arts,⁷ the *Bealtaine Festival* and the *Arts in Care* programme. Another programme, *Agewise*, offers Age Equality workshops that are not specifically related to the arts but which are available to arts organisations.

a. The Bealtaine Festival reflects the Age & Opportunity ethos in the context of the arts. It is a month-long national festival that celebrates creativity in older age. It is co-ordinated by Age & Opportunity in partnership with arts organisations, libraries, local authorities, older people's groups, health and social care providers, schools, colleges and others. The overall vision for the Festival is that it will bring about a shift in attitudes and practices that create opportunities for older people to participate fully in the arts.

Through the Bealtaine Festival we aim to:

- i. promote recognition of our capacity to grow and be transformed through creativity in older age and to ensure that this is reflected in policy and practice at all levels of society,
- ii. develop opportunities for older people to participate meaningfully in the arts as artists, organisers, audience and critics,
- iii. contribute to the development of a national policy for the arts in older age through the generation and facilitation of critical thinking.

Throughout the annual festival, hundreds of events featuring a range of art forms take place in a variety of settings across Ireland. We advocate the promotion of high-quality arts experiences whether the event takes place in a community hall, a residential care setting, a regional arts centre or a national arts institution. In recent years, we have seen greater partnerships between older people's groups and arts resource organisations at local, regional and national level and in some cases this has resulted in more ambitious and challenging programming.

The overall vision for the festival is that it will bring about a shift in attitudes and practices that create opportunities for older people to participate fully in the arts.

⁷ Age & Opportunity also runs programmes in other areas, such as physical activity and sport, which are not described in this document. Visit our web site for information about all our work: www.olderinireland.ie

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Over the years a number of fledgling Bealtaine events have grown and developed into comprehensive regional arts programmes aimed at older people during May. In some cases these have produced independent offshoots that offer opportunities for participation at different times or throughout the year.⁸

At national level the festival has developed a number of innovative strands. These include: *Affairs of the Arts*, a cross organisational initiative by the Irish Museum of Modern Art (IMMA), the Abbey Theatre and the Irish Film Institute (IFI); an international poetry residency in partnership with Poetry Ireland; and the commissioning of new work for the festival. We have also facilitated a number of regional networking meetings over the years, bringing event organisers from different sectors together to share information, make links and explore the possibilities for collaboration.

b. The Arts in Care Programme

aims to train care staff to facilitate arts initiatives amongst the people with whom they work. The programme's ultimate aim is to make creativity intrinsic to life in care and to improve quality of life for people living in care. It is delivered in two modules, both of which have been accredited by FETAC (Further Education and Training Awards Council). The training, involving a series of carefully constructed workshops, is unique in that it is specific to those working in care settings with older people and is designed to introduce a sustainable

arts aspect to life in care. Nurses, Care Attendants and Activity Coordinators have completed courses, which enable participants to:

- explore their own creativity, and
- facilitate the arts amongst the people in their care.

Participants gain enhanced facilitation skills, greater empathy with clients, and the ability to put the client at the centre of the creative process, allowing residents to have more choice and to put more of themselves into the process. Arts activities reflect the interests and preferences of clients, thus they engage meaningfully and creatively. Consequently, the care centre becomes a more creative place to live and work. The project was established in 2000 by Age & Opportunity in partnership with the (then) Midland Health Board. In its first phase, nearly 40 staff members from eight care centres in the midlands region participated in the programme, thirteen of them progressing to complete a second, more advanced, module. Courses are currently held at the Irish Museum of Modern Art facilitating participation by health-care workers from outside the midlands. Graduates of the courses meet with the course tutors on a regular basis to share experiences and for mutual support. The programme also includes awareness days for members of staff from participating centres who have not received the training. The aim is to provide these staff members with an insight into the ethos and value of Arts in Care

⁸ See section 2.4

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and the kinds of supports needed by trained staff in order to facilitate the work effectively in their centres.

The Arts in Care programme is managed by Age & Opportunity and administered by consultant Elly McCrea who co-facilitates the workshop sessions with visual artist Gerda Teljeur. Age & Opportunity has also collaborated in the publication of a handbook written by Elly McCrea for use by facilitators of drama in care settings, and by participants in the Arts in Care course.⁹

c. Agewise - Age Equality
Training Workshops are on offer to management, staff, and volunteers who work in areas such as health, housing, social services, education and the arts. They are also available to members of community and voluntary groups. Through the workshops, Age & Opportunity aims to challenge negative attitudes towards ageing and older people by:

- i. providing accurate information about ageing and older people in Ireland today,
- ii. exploring the ways in which stereotypes are formed and the effects they have,
- iii. facilitating participants to identify instances of personal, cultural and structural ageism,
- iv. facilitating participants to identify ways in which ageism may be countered in their community or in their organisation/ workplace.

Age & Opportunity's arts programmes are only part of the overall picture that encompasses arts work with older people. We mention them particularly because they are the programmes for which we are directly responsible. However, we do recognise the valuable work that is taking place in other organisations and among a diversity of groups.

2.4 How do these programmes relate to the wider context of arts and older people?

Over the last ten years we have seen a slow but growing awareness among individuals and organisations working in the arts sector in relation to the needs of older people and the potential resource they represent. We have also witnessed a similar growth in awareness among individuals and organisations in the community and among health sector employees in relation to the value of the arts in their work. As a result, older people's arts programmes are springing up in a wide range of contexts. In some cases, Age & Opportunity is involved in providing information, advice or support, while in others the work is taking place completely independently.

Age & Opportunity's arts programmes are only part of the overall picture that encompasses arts work with older people.

⁹ *Elly's Onion - A Beginners Drama-in-Education Guide for Teachers and Careworkers* was published by IAPCE (the Irish Association of Pastoral Care in Education) in association with Age & Opportunity and the Outreach Department of the Abbey Theatre

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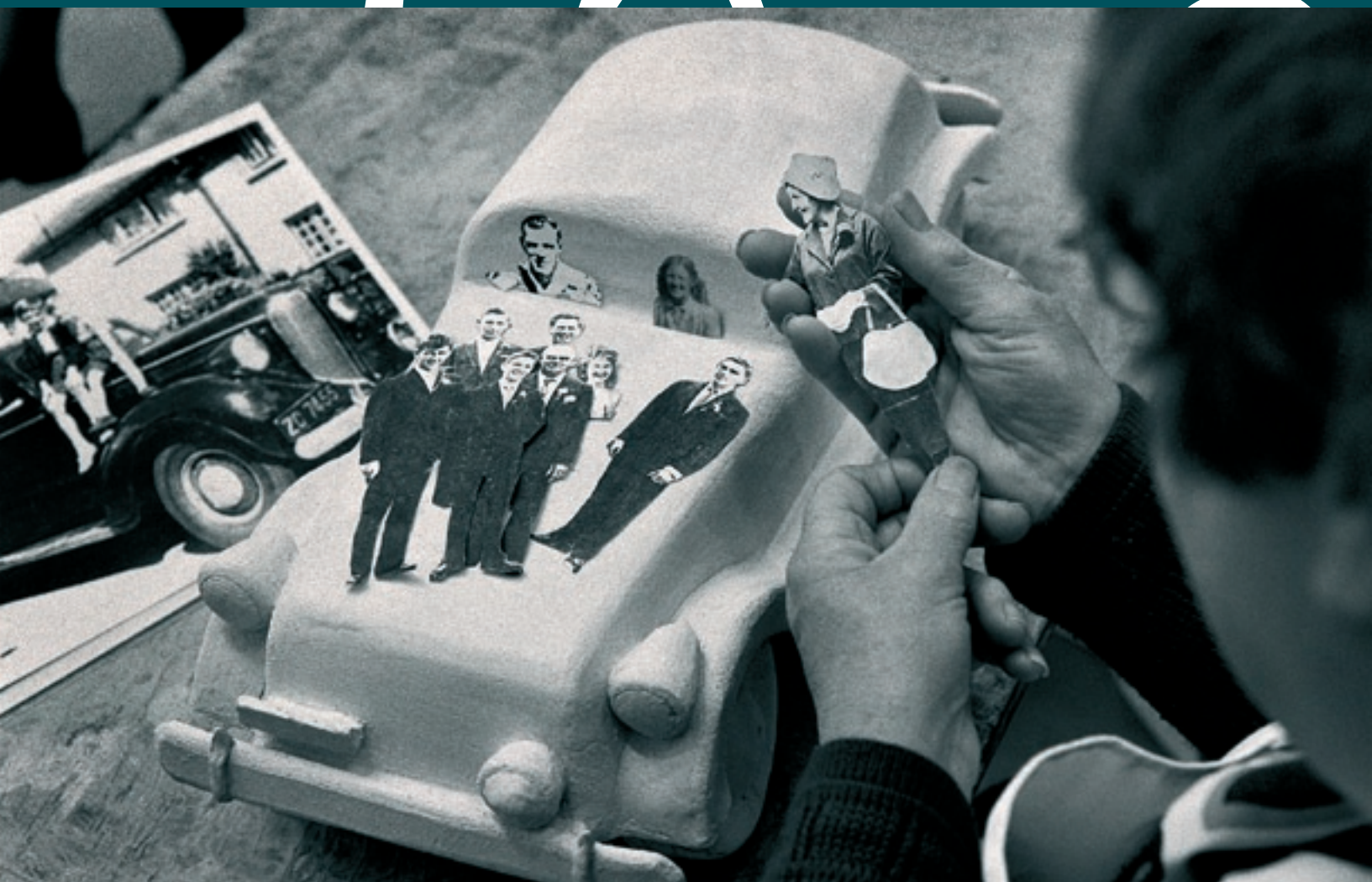
One example of an independent initiative that was developed by an active Bealtaine promoter with some support from Age & Opportunity is the *Artists' Mentoring and Networking Programme* in Mayo. Mayo County Council Arts Office, the organiser of an extensive Bealtaine programme each May, developed the programme in order to build resources and develop good practice in the area of arts and older people in health care settings. The programme was developed with funding from Mayo County Council as well as additional financial support from the Arts Council and the (then) Western Health Board (via Age & Opportunity).

While Age & Opportunity was involved in the initial stages, offering whatever advice and support was possible, the Arts Officer and local artist Deirdre Walsh have gone on to develop an independent regional programme of training and support with five other artists based in care centres around county Mayo. The programme began in January 2004 and during Bealtaine 2005 some of the work done by participants was exhibited on billboards around county Mayo.

Age & Opportunity is always interested in hearing from groups and organisations engaged in the area of arts and older people. Whether you are a Bealtaine organiser or not, we are always happy to share information and explore the possibilities for future networking.

Whether you are a Bealtaine organiser or not, we are always happy to share information and explore the possibilities for future networking.

Jean Brady, St.
Michael's Parish Active
Retirement Art Group,
Inchicore, with her
art work "More than
Happy", taking part
in the Programme for
older people at the Irish
Museum of Modern Art.
Photo: Derek Speirs



Chapter 3

The Benefits of Participation

We can all benefit from the greater inclusion of older voices and perspectives in the arts, whether we are participants, arts workers, health workers or members of the general public. We cannot take these benefits for granted, however; they are dependent on the facilitation of positive, meaningful experiences of the arts. Poorly planned, token events can have negative effects and can leave participants feeling let down or used.

3.1 Benefits for participants

Personal fulfilment - At its most simple, the arts can bring great enjoyment regardless of age. Engagement in an art form provides us with opportunities for creative excitement as well as for reflection and quiet pleasure. The experience can be energising or, conversely, it can have a soothing and a calming effect. It can free us up and put us in touch with impulses that are generally considered inappropriate for adults, such as playfulness. If given the opportunity to challenge ourselves both personally and artistically, we may achieve deep satisfaction from the creative journey we undertake or from the completion of a piece of work.

The creation of meaning -

Engagement in the arts is 'a way of answering life back'. It can put us in touch with our past and help create meaning for the present and the future. The arts offer us a series of alternative languages with which to explore and express our experiences of happiness, disappointment, grief or loss, and help us find ways to adapt to change. Exploration of

an art form can provide a means to construct new meanings for the future, a process that is particularly important in older age when the future is so often forgotten or denied. Regardless of age, we constantly move forward, and the arts can facilitate us to engage with contemporary issues and explore new opportunities.

An opportunity for life-long learning -

We can continue to improve our skills and deepen our understanding of an art form as we get older, even if our physical strength diminishes. This can provide us with a strong motivation to continue to learn and develop skills as we age.

Social linkages -

Participation in an art form can bring us into contact with new people bringing the possibility of new friendships based on trust and mutual interest. Linkages forged through collective creativity can be particularly strong, as collective work generally requires us to recognise the ideas and contributions of others and to focus

Regardless of age, we constantly move forward, and the arts can facilitate us to engage with contemporary issues and explore new opportunities.

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less on our individual egos. Working from personal experience can also create powerful connections among a group as it hastens the building of trust and the sharing of stories.

Celebration - Engagement in the arts is a form of empowerment, inviting us to celebrate aspects of our lives that may have gone unheralded by others. It gives us the power to say what is important for us and creates access to a range of alternative languages with which to communicate. In situations where a person's physical surroundings are bleak and impersonal, or their psychological situation dark and difficult, a meaningful engagement with the arts may prove powerful enough to break through the bleakness and facilitate a renewal, assertion or celebration of the individual spirit.

Communication - The arts offer us the freedom to express ourselves in a range of alternative ways and through a range of alternative languages, an option that is particularly valuable to those with difficulties in verbal communication. Engagement in the arts can also impact on the content of what we wish to convey; in the same way that spoken language contributes to our thought processes, the arts give rise to new ideas as well as to new forms of expression.

Dignity and self-esteem - Engagement in the arts can provide us with an opportunity to be seen and valued for our creative selves and can boost our feelings of dignity and self-worth. Self-esteem

is important at any age, but may be of particular value for some of us as we get older and are made to feel increasingly redundant by a society fixated on youth and physical ability.

Empowerment - The sense of empowerment we get from engaging in creative activity can have a transformational effect on our lives. We may become more confident and assertive, not just in our artistic practice, but also in everyday situations with those around us. In certain institutionalised situations where we may no longer have autonomy over personal space or time, engagement in the arts may help to restore our sense of individuality, enabling us to take possession of our own imaginative world and assert our ability to make creative decisions for ourselves.

Maintaining and improving health

- The benefits listed above all contribute significantly to improved mental and physical health. This is discussed further in Section 3.3.

3.2 Benefits for the arts sector

Alternative perspectives – As we get older, we bring the richness and diversity of life experience to the arts as well as a range of creative capabilities. If facilitated to participate, we can add layers and shades to existing artistic and cultural discourse and practice. Any art form that fails to reflect the experiences of people of different backgrounds and ages will ultimately

Engagement in the arts is a form of empowerment...

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fail to be interesting, challenging or provocative in the long term. Many arts organisations appear to recognise the value of cultivating younger voices as a means of broadening their perspective, but fail to recognise the value of older voices. On the other hand, those that have embraced the inclusion of older people as an integral part of their programming, report positive developments not only in the diversity of their audience, but in the contribution to the art form and the scope and quality of arts practice.¹⁰

Older artists - Many older professional artists continue to grow in creativity and contribute to the development of their chosen art form throughout their lives. While a number remain to the fore, others find themselves sidelined or forgotten in the contemporary rush to promote new talent. This is particularly the case in art forms traditionally linked to youth and physical strength such as dance, although individual dancers and companies are increasingly inclined to challenge such assumptions. Older artists across all art forms constitute a valuable resource to be tapped.

Other skills - As diverse as any other group in society, older people include among their numbers retired arts administrators, managers, woodworkers, dress-makers, accountants, designers, and lawyers, as well as many others who could contribute ideas and skills towards the development of the local arts scene, if invited to do so.

New audiences - Contact with groups of older people living independently or in care settings, can give rise to new audiences for artists in all art forms. In 2002 the proportion of Ireland's population aged 65 years and over was 11.1%. This proportion is projected to rise to between 14.8% and 15.3% by 2021.¹¹ Older people are rapidly expanding as a group and many have more time to invest in creative interests than those still engaged in full-time paid employment. Whether or not we choose to prioritise the arts as we get older will very much depend on the quality of the experience on offer and its relevance to our lives. Aside from numbers, older people have the potential to provide honest feedback as an audience being less likely to care whether a particular work or artist is considered fashionable or not.

Economic and political benefits

- Older people are emerging as a powerful economic and political grouping, a valuable resource that can be harnessed on behalf of the arts. Some may have money and time available for areas of particular interest, while others may offer valuable experience in advocating for change at political level. Those without a sense of individual economic or political power are also important and funding agencies tend to look for evidence of diverse participation in publicly funded programmes.

¹⁰ See Chapter 6, specifically publications relating to IMMA and Mayo County Council

¹¹ National Council on Ageing and Older People (2005), *An Age Friendly Society – A Position Statement*

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3.3 Benefits for the health sector

Health benefits for older people

- The arts can contribute significantly to health promotion among older people. While we have already looked at anecdotal evidence of increased well-being among participants in the arts, a small number of studies are available that have employed quantitative research techniques.

One such study from the U.S.¹² is examining the general and mental health, and social functioning of a group of older people engaged in ongoing arts and cultural programmes with professional artists and comparing their health with that of a second group who do not participate in such programmes. The research involves three hundred subjects whose average age is 80. When the research began in 2001, all of the people taking part were living independently in the community. Those who moved into residential care during the course of the research continued to take part in the study. Early results from the research indicate that the people who participated in arts and cultural events experienced significantly better health than their peers, with:

- fewer visits to doctors
- fewer falls
- less hip damage

- slower growth in medication use
- less deterioration of vision
- lower levels of depression
- less loneliness
- better morale
- increased levels of activity

In an Editorial in the British Medical Journal in 2002, Richard Smith argued that the diversion of 0.5% of the British healthcare budget to the arts could improve the health of people in Britain.¹³ Acknowledging that there is more to health than physical completeness and the absence of pain, he points to The World Health Organization's definition of health, which aspires to '*complete physical, mental and social wellbeing*'. In his opinion, '*Health has to do with adaptation and acceptance*' and the arts are well placed to support people in this process.

Quality of life for staff - When older clients are engaged in arts work, the quality of life for health care staff can also improve. Points of 'real' communication are developed between staff and clients, with the creative work of the individual providing an alternative focus away from issues of care. The presence of an artist can energise the working environment and make it more positive for staff, especially in situations where they witness clients moving from passivity to activity in spite of physical frailty. The presentation or exhibition of work in any art form can also brighten

¹² Cohen G.D. (2004), *Creativity and Ageing Study: The Impact of Professionally Conducted Cultural Programs on Older Adults*, National Endowment for the Arts with George Washington University, (Early results only published)

¹³ Smith R., (2002) 'Spend (slightly) less on Health and More on the Arts,' *British Medical Journal* 2002;325:1432-1433.

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surroundings. Some arts initiatives offer opportunities for staff to explore their personal creativity in order to promote a greater understanding of the creative process.

Retention of staff - Improved quality of life can lead to greater retention of health care staff in hospitals and centres that promote participation in the arts. Research conducted in the Chelsea Westminster Hospital in London, found that the existence of visual arts and music programmes in the hospital reduced staff stress and improved staff retention at the hospital.¹⁴

Points of communication for visitors to care settings -

Engagement in the arts can also facilitate improved communication between people and their visitors in care settings. It is a source of conversation and can provide an insight into the past and present life of the person in care. The artworks highlight the abilities and not the frailties of that person and can be a source of great surprise and pride for visitors who gain access to the creative imagination of an older relative.

Greater integration in the community

- The presence of an artist in a care setting is an immediate link with the wider community and can facilitate health professionals and clients to look beyond the walls of the hospital or centre. Artists bring with them alternative systems of seeing, expressing and valuing the world. They can open up possibilities for two-way connections with other artists and arts organisations. Such interchange can help to break down feelings of isolation within a care setting and increase a sense of integration with the broader community. This is in keeping with the Age & Opportunity vision that sees care settings at the centre of their communities, not isolated from them.

3.4 Benefits for society as a whole

Alternative perspectives - Similar to the way in which the arts sector requires diversity of perspective in order to remain healthy, so too does society. Apart from the small number who hold positions of power in society, the voices of older people are not often heard. The media is influenced by fashion, and fashion favours the young, the novel and the trendy. In this way, older people are marginalised and society is made poorer by the limited way in

Engagement in the arts can also facilitate improved communication between people and their visitors in care settings.

¹⁴ Mick Hamer, 'The Art of Healing', *New Scientist*, Vol 174, issue 2348, 22 June 2002, p.38. While we have no comparable quantitative research in Ireland, feedback from care staff in the Midlands (OCS Consulting, (2004), *Evaluation of the Arts in Care Settings Project*, Age & Opportunity, Dublin) and from Mayo (Moloney, O.,(2004), *Evaluation of Mayo County Council's Artists Mentoring and Networking Programme*) suggests that arts participation impacts positively on working life in care centres.

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which we see and hear the world. Expression through an art form is a powerful way of communicating experience; it has the potential to expand and challenge our understanding of our collective past, present and future when it includes a diversity of stories and view-points.

Intergenerational understanding

- The arts provide an excellent vehicle through which younger people and older people can share experiences and learn about each other's lives. It opens up the potential for communication on a deeper more personal level and offers opportunities for trust and friendship. It is important, however, that intergenerational work is planned with particular care, as a poorly conceived programme can lead to negative experiences for all involved.

The arts provide an excellent vehicle through which younger people and older people can share experiences...

Chapter 4

Questions of Attitude

4.1 A question of attitude

We pick up negative messages about getting older from a very early age. Stereotypes abound and an 'us' and 'them' situation is often experienced. Generally, we don't see ourselves as 'older people', no matter what age we are. We don't recognise ourselves in the stereotypes we encounter. 'They' are always somebody else. In practical terms, our prejudice feeds into the way we behave towards older people and can lead to discriminatory situations. This can happen in the arts as in any other area of life. If you are an organiser of an arts programme, no matter what age, you may find that you choose to include or exclude people based on assumptions that take no account of the individuals behind the age. For example, you may devise safe, unchallenging programmes for older people, assuming a lack of interest in anything contemporary or contentious. When a group of older individuals come knocking on your door, you may assume that you know what they want, what they can achieve and what they may or may not bring to an arts programme. More often than not, like the rest of us, you will be operating from unconscious prejudices and will not be aware of it. Constant awareness of our own prejudices is needed if we are to see each group as a group of individuals with separate life histories; each of whom is still on a journey and capable of learning and growing.

The language and images used relating to ageing and older people are often derisory and feed into the negative stereotypes we carry in our sub-conscious. While there is no need to go into the more offensive terms in common usage for the purposes of this report, it is interesting to look at frequently used terms such as '*old people*' and '*the elderly*'. The first of these eliminates the obvious relativity of the concept 'old', which means such different things to different people. No cut-off point actually exists where we go from being 'not old' to 'old'. How we define ourselves is dependent on a range of factors that can include history, outlook, social networks, values, and physical and mental health. Nobody else can define our older age for us. There is a similar problem with the term, '*the elderly*', but here the difficulty is exacerbated by the use of the definite article, which relegates people to a faceless, impersonal group, sharing a generic make-up that denies individual identities. Age & Opportunity is managed by a Board made up of older people who find these terms inaccurate and inappropriate and who have chosen to use the terms '*older person/ older people*,' which promote the notion of age as a relative thing and are used by agencies across Europe working in the field of ageing. In Ireland it is generally accepted that, where a general term is required, '*older people*' or '*senior citizen*'

How we define ourselves is dependent on a range of factors that can include history, outlook, social networks, values, and physical and mental health.

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are the two preferred terms to use when referring to people aged over 60. This is based on Europe-wide surveys carried out by the European Commission.¹⁵

4.2 Checking attitudes

For this reason it is useful to start with a checklist of our own attitudes, then to broaden it out to examine the way in which our group or organisation operates. Stereotypes are so deeply entrenched that we continue to be affected by them even as we get older ourselves. An attitude check can be useful for us all regardless of our age or the type of group or organisation with which we work.

Reflect on the following generalisations and to ask whether, at heart, you believe they are true:

- Older people are cranky and rigid in their thinking
- Older people dislike a lot of excitement
- Older people are sweet
- Older people prefer the past and everything to do with the past.
- 'You can't teach an old dog new tricks'
- Older people envy younger people and wish they were young again
- Older people don't understand younger people and generally disapprove of them

- Older people are a burden on the health care system with large numbers in residential care

It is important to stress that individual older people may indeed be cranky, prefer the past etc, in the same way that individuals of any age may demonstrate these characteristics. The problem with generalisations like those above is that they lead us to make automatic linkages between a particular age group and a particular characteristic, regardless of the individual person involved. Stereotypes are so deeply entrenched in our sub-conscious that straight information is unlikely to be sufficient to dislodge them; however, it may be a start. Reflect on the following facts and figures and ask yourself whether you find them surprising, and why:

- only 5% of people over 65 live in residential care, with the other 95% living in the community
- over 75% of those living in the community are self sufficient in performing the tasks of daily living like shopping, bathing, cooking, etc.
- only around 5% of people over 65 suffer from dementia
- 80% of Irish people over 65 rated their quality of life as good or very good.¹⁶

¹⁵ Commission of the European Communities (1993), *Age and Attitudes: Main Results from a Eurobarometer Survey*

¹⁶ Figures are taken from Agewise, the Age & Opportunity Age Equality Training pack, and originated from the National Council on Ageing and Older People *Factfiles* 1 and 8, and the HeSSOP Report, page 16 (Garavan, R., Winder, R., and McGee, H., (2001), *Health and Social Services for Older People (HeSSOP)*, National Council on Ageing and Older People, Dublin)

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Once you have asked yourself the questions above, ask the other members of staff or members of your group to do the same exercise. It is important to be non-judgemental and to acknowledge that we all carry negative stereotypes with us.

4.3 Checking Structures

Having looked at attitudes, it is time to look at the structure of your group or organisation and check for levels of participation. Check to what extent older people are involved in your group or organisation:

- on the Board
- as members of staff
- among participating artists/practitioners
- in the audience
- in the education, community and outreach programmes
- in feedback groups
- in public consultation processes

Start with the numbers then look more closely at the quality of the involvement. If older people are involved in areas of your organisation, is their participation a token gesture or do they have real power in the area of decision making? Are older people always seen as end users or do they have a voice in the planning and implementation of programmes?

**Members of Westgate
Performing Arts Group,
Ballincollig, Cork.**

Photo: Derek Speirs



Chapter 5

A Question of Practice - Facilitating a Meaningful, High Quality Arts Experience¹⁷

5.1 What does it entail?

To begin with, there is the matter of what we actually mean by a 'meaningful' arts experience. The first thing to emphasise here is choice. Not everybody will want to engage in the arts, and even among those that do, there needs to be an acknowledgement that some will not wish to go beyond an introductory level. A meaningful, high-quality experience is predicated on choice. However, we can only make real choices in relation to the arts if we have been presented with a range of options.

The first thing to emphasise here is choice.

No art form automatically excludes older people from participation and many of us will encounter a number of different art forms in the course of our lives. Regardless of age, we each need time and space to experiment with art forms and see what suits our individual interests and abilities. Once we have decided on the art form we wish to pursue, we need an invitation to become involved at every stage and to the best of our abilities. Since one person's ability will be different to that of another, it is important that levels of participation are not compared as though the stage were level for all. One person may choose to participate fully in the planning, implementation and evaluation of a programme, while another may not have any choice in the matter due to a range of physical, geographical or other barriers. The experiences may be equally meaningful, however, as long as both participants have been

consulted and involved to the best of their ability, and had their individual contributions valued.

The principle of meaningful arts participation goes a step further than the notion of optimising active engagement in the planning, implementation and evaluation of a programme. It suggests a more inward engagement with personal experience and the possibility of taking a creative journey at a personal or group level, with opportunities for reflection, self-expression, learning and change. A number of key elements make up a meaningful, quality arts experience, but before we explore them, it is useful to say a word about process and product.

¹⁷ As mentioned earlier, arts experiences are varied and older people may participate as makers of art or as audiences. Some of the points outlined are more appropriate to the former but can be applied to the latter.

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5.2 Process and product

A Process is a series of actions that produces a change or development. In the arts this generally relates to a creative exploration of the building blocks within an art form (for example, words, sound, paint, clay, movement, images, etc), putting them together in different ways without being confined to a pre-determined outcome. It is a journey that can be towards a final product or an end in itself. Amongst Bealtaine organisers, we have found that many individuals and groups assume that product is required at all costs regardless of the quality of the experience on offer. But this is not the aim of the festival. Process needs to be carefully considered and given at least equal value with product. The freedom to focus on process alone is important and should be made explicit to group members particularly where people are new to an art form. Many of us carry negative judgements about our ability to create art and feel intimidated by any pressure to 'perform' artistically. It may be that the freedom to explore and experiment within an art form will bring about a more positive creative experience.

A Product is something produced as a result of a process of some kind. In the arts, the product generally refers to the finished product in a particular art form (a painting, musical composition, play, dance performance, short story,

etc). Product may be important to some participants who choose to become involved in a programme specifically because they wish to create a finished work and may wish to perform or exhibit it. If this is the case, it is essential that they be facilitated to perform or exhibit work of which they can be proud. Token events, where the product is considered 'good enough' by virtue of happening at all significantly underestimate the potential of older participants, regardless of levels of physical independence or ability. If we are to create work that reflects our creative potential, we need opportunities to challenge and extend our arts practice, learn new skills, develop a critical approach and consider the experience from the audience point of view.

The type of product likely to produce a positive experience for both participant and audience, is one which:

- has been carefully planned and discussed with the participants at every stage
- shows evidence of stimulating ideas and ways of working¹⁸
- has been allocated sufficient time for development
- is created from quality artistic materials
- is honed down or edited so that the most essential elements are presented
- is created and presented in an appropriate space

¹⁸ Incessant repetition can be the death of creativity especially in circumstances where it is employed without consultation, discussion or an agreed purpose. However, in some circumstances, repetition may be required in order to explore an art form at a deeper level and to develop work in progress

If we are to create work that reflects our creative potential, we need opportunities to challenge and extend our arts practice...

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5.3 Elements of meaningful participation

The following elements of meaningful participation are not intended as a prescriptive list. Each group needs to discuss their own preferred way of working. However, the following have been identified as key ingredients in the planning, implementation and evaluation phases of previous successful projects.¹⁹

5.3.1 The Planning Phase

There are three important elements in the planning phase of any programme that seeks to promote meaningful participation: the initial consultation process, ongoing dialogue, and the promotion of mutual learning.

i. The initial consultation process:

Whether you are initiating a new programme in a library, a hospital or nursing home, an educational institution, a local community centre or an arts venue, you will need to start by consulting with the people you are targeting. It may be more effective if you have a team of people to help you, so it is worth considering the establishment of a steering committee that includes older representatives at the outset.

If you do not have a specific group in mind, you will need to find out who is out there and who is interested in getting

involved. Make contact with active retirement groups, older people's organisations or care settings in your area. While it is more difficult to make contact with older individuals who are not part of a group, you could try advertising through libraries, community centres, churches or local press.

Once you have identified a group, you will need to get together to discuss and clarify a number of basic questions, including:

- the reasons why you wish to engage with the group
- whether the project is open-ended or whether you have a particular outcome in mind
- what the group needs and wants from an arts project
- whether you have the ability to meet the needs expressed by the group
- whether your needs and interests are compatible with those of the group

It may be that flexibility is required from all sides in order to find the best way forward, or it may be that you decide not to work together at that particular time as your needs are not compatible. Either way, the important thing at this early stage is clarity.

It is important that you are clear whether there is potential for an ongoing relationship between your organisation and the group or whether the collaboration is a once-off deal. For example, if you are an arts promoter looking to bring an older audience into your venue, it is important to clarify

¹⁹ The elements have been divided up into three phases for the purposes of the Guidelines, though in practice there is more fluidity across the phases

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We each carry ideas of what constitutes meaningful in our lives and this concept needs to be discussed and acted on in the development of a new arts programme.

whether your interest is limited to getting 'bums on seats' or whether you see it as a first step in an evolving relationship. It may transpire that the former suits the needs of the group perfectly but clear communication is needed from the beginning in order to establish this.

It will be difficult for individuals of any age to identify their needs in relation to the arts if they have not had some past experience in the area. You may consider offering a series of taster programmes in order to facilitate the group to explore their interests and abilities.

If you are not an arts facilitator or an artist yourself, you will need to identify somebody to work with the group in order to develop their ideas and introduce them to the artistic media through which they can express themselves. Your local authority arts officer may be able to put you in touch with local artists who have experience in community contexts.²⁰

As an organiser, it is important that you take account of the needs of the artists as well as the participants. Include them in the planning process from as early as possible. You will need to continue this dialogue on an ongoing basis as the needs and interests of the artist and the group are likely to change over the life of a programme.

ii. Ongoing dialogue:

Dialogue lies at the heart of meaningful participation. We each carry ideas of what constitutes *meaningful* in our lives and this concept needs to be discussed and acted on in the development of a new arts programme. No one can prescribe what it means for another. In order to facilitate meaningful participation, you will need to ensure clear, regular communication between yourself, the artists and the participants in order to tease out the ideas, insights, needs and interests of the individuals involved. You will need to:

- check individual interests, perceptions and experience in the group
- check individual needs in relation to mobility, memory, sight and hearing
- ensure that expectations (including your own) are articulated and aims clarified
- take account of the different cultures that may be in the group
- encourage regular feedback
- check periodically whether everybody is still going in the agreed direction; you may find the group has switched course due to emerging needs or interests and this may be working well, but it may need to be articulated in order to avoid frustration or disappointment

²⁰ Other ways of identifying a suitable artist are discussed further on in Section 5.3.2, *iii, (The skills of the Artist)*

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In order for the programme to be effective, practical considerations relating to the timing and location of meetings should be taken into account. Issues that may be of concern to some group members include access to transport, the cut-off time for free travel, or a preference for daytime events or matinees.

You will also need to take note of the language and communication style used within your group or organisation. One of the difficulties in relation to promoting meaningful dialogue is the way in which words can reflect unconscious negative attitudes towards ageing and older people.

If you are organising an arts event with an older group, it is worth considering the following questions:

- Do you speak to the individuals in the group with the same respect as you speak to others (whether they are artists, administrators, librarians, care staff, doctors etc.)?
- Do you use patronising terms when speaking to older people, terms that you would not use with younger individuals?
- Do you assume that participants will consider these to be terms of affection?

While some people might not take offence at the use of terms such as 'dear' or 'love', others will find them inappropriate and off-putting. As an event organiser, you will need to ensure that the language you use is acceptable

to the individuals participating in your programme so they do not feel uncomfortable or undermined.

You will also need to consider the communication strategies within your organisation. When marketing and promoting your events or activities, ask yourself who is being reached and who is being excluded. Ask yourself:

- Do you target older people with your ongoing programme of events, i.e. do you distribute information to older people's groups, libraries, care centres, etc? Is the print used in publications easily legible?
- Do you consider the images and language you use in print or broadcast media; do you use terms that are likely to attract older people and avoid terms that might be off-putting?

Dialogue also needs to take place internally. It may be that one part of your organisation is actively working with older people, while the rest remains only vaguely aware of what is happening.

If you are part of an arts organisation, it is worth asking:

- Do you convey the message that arts work with older people has equal value with other elements of your programme?
- Does this message reach staff in all parts of your organisation, or does it remain exclusively compartmentalised in one area, such as education and outreach?

You will also need to take note of the language and communication style used within your group or organisation.

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If you are in a health organisation, it is worth asking:

- Do you convey the message that the arts can bring important physical and mental benefits to older people?
- Do you ensure that staff are aware of the benefits and are positive about the place of participative arts in the hospital or care setting?

iii. The facilitation of mutual learning:

Older people do not come to any arts experience as empty vessels waiting to be filled, but as contributors to the artistic event or process who have a lot of experience. Traditional patterns can be subverted so that learning takes place not just among participants, but also among organisers, care staff, arts facilitators, artists, etc.

The arts experience should be relevant and have the potential to feed back into people's lives and communities, just as the participants should have the opportunity to feed back their ideas to participating artists and the broader arts community. If you run arts programmes with older people, it is worth considering the following questions:

- Do you assume that you will always be the one to offer services and expertise and that older people will always be the ones in need of such services and expertise?
- Do you ever consider the possibility that older people could provide some of the skills,

services and expertise that your group/ organisation needs?

- Do you ever consider the possibility that older people could contribute to the development of the artists with whom they work, and the development of the art form in which they work?

In brief, when planning an arts initiative with older people...

Do:

- consult from the beginning
- be aware of the language you use when addressing people or when describing people in your promotional material
- design your flyer, posters and other promotional material with a large typeface and easily legible characters for those with impaired vision and ensure it reaches places where older people are likely to access it
- consider the role that a professional artist/ arts facilitator may play in your group and invite such a person to work with you at some point in the programme (or throughout if possible)²¹
- offer taster programmes within an art form or over a range of art forms to those who have not had much experience of participation in the arts
- ensure ongoing dialogue that takes into account individual interests, experiences and needs
- value the input of participants
- acknowledge the possibilities for mutual learning

²¹ This applies even if the group is self-contained (for example, an art class or an active retirement drama group). Contact with an artist is likely to challenge and stretch the engagement with the art form

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Don't:

- exclude any art form without first exploring and discussing the possibilities; skilled artists and practitioners in all art forms can be flexible and can work around a diversity of abilities
- assume anything; a particular programme (or artist) may have worked well for you before but may not be suitable or interesting to a new group
- ignore suggestions or complaints; dialogue must be real, not token
- feel disillusioned if you receive negative feedback; it shows the dialogue is working and may help you to improve the effectiveness of the programme
- assume all responsibility for the organisational, administrative and the artistic elements of the programme; tap into the skills of others

5.3.2 The Implementation Phase

In order to facilitate a high quality and meaningful arts experience, you will need to consider six key elements: environment; trust; the skills of the artist; artistic challenge; personal challenge and the possibilities for transformation.

i. The environment:

It is unlikely that any of us would continue to attend events or workshops if we found the environment unfriendly to our needs. Many older people have negative associations with the arts and may need

to be convinced that it is for them as much as for anyone else. You need to consider the atmosphere as well as the physical environment, ensuring that all participants feel welcomed and valued as well as having their physical access requirements addressed.

Make the venue safe, accessible, comfortable, warm and welcoming. Check elements such as health and safety procedures,²² insurance, heating, lighting, acoustics, ventilation, handrails, wheelchair access, and the suitability of furniture to accommodate different physical conditions. Ask individuals for feedback relating to their specific needs and explore possibilities for:

- adapting furniture for participants with issues relating to mobility, strength or stature
- providing aids for those with poor vision or hearing
- providing mobile furniture, especially if you have a gallery space
- providing seating for older people at public events such as openings

Ensure the venue is appropriate to the particular arts activity planned and the particular group participating. Check elements such as access to water and equipment, storage space, cleanliness, privacy, quietness or freedom to make noise, as appropriate. If there are other activities going on at the same

Ensure the venue is appropriate to the particular arts activity planned...

²² This entails clear written policies, procedures and guidelines in keeping with best practice and including mechanisms relating to the management and reporting of any accidents or incidents that take place

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time as the older people's programme, check whether they are compatible.

If you are based in a venue, particularly an arts venue, consider the following questions:

- Is the reception area intimidating for those unfamiliar with the venue?
- Do the front of house staff take sufficient time to explain things thoroughly?
- Are staff members aware of the possible needs of older people?
- Do staff members need training in this area?
- Do you monitor the prices charged to older people to attend events?
- Do you monitor the prices charged to older people in the café/ restaurant?

ii. Trust building:

Negative stereotypes work both ways. While an artist or organiser may underestimate the potential of older participants, the participants may harbour stereotypical ideas of what an artist is and how one might behave.

Trust building cannot happen instantly. It is essential to allow sufficient time for this process to take place among group members, and between group members and the artist. Participants also need time to become familiar with the art form and to trust the process involved, especially if they have doubts or fears about their lack of ability. Time is especially important if

individuals are planning to tap into their personal experiences as a source for creative work.

Encourage the group to develop ground rules from the beginning so that people feel safe during the trust-building process. Build in procedures that allow participants to opt out of the programme without a loss of dignity and reassure people that they can return at any time.

Encourage the group to get to know each other socially. The inclusion of a tea break creates the time and space for people to develop relationships within the group. Even if you are organising a once-off event, allow some time for the familiarisation process. Facilitate introductions and discussion wherever possible.

iii. The skills of the artist: ²³

This is often the element that makes or breaks a project. You will need to choose an artist who is highly skilled artistically and in terms of communication in order to demonstrate the range and depth of the art form while at the same time allowing space for each participant to find their individual means of expression.

The artist will need to:

- demonstrate flexibility, empathy and consideration
- put their ego to one side to facilitate group members to place themselves at the centre of their own lives and work, and reach their individual potential

Trust building cannot happen instantly. It is essential to allow sufficient time for this process to take place...

²³ By artist, we refer to artists and practitioners across all art forms

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- value each contribution, whether it is the creation of a single sound/mark on a page, or whether it is the exploration of advanced technical skills
- be open to non-linear learning and allow space for participants to move backwards and forwards in their own preferred learning style
- take an open, non-judgemental approach if participants wish to explore different genres, techniques and materials within the art form²⁴ even if this includes elements that do not appeal to the artist aesthetically
- invite participants to explore the process; to be adventurous and try alternative approaches without feeling obliged to come up with a finished piece of work
- affirm and build on existing skills and experience, while at the same time challenging participants to push themselves both personally and artistically

As already mentioned, you can contact your local authority arts officer for help in identifying a suitable artist. If this does not work out, your local arts centre or library may be able to make suggestions. You could also try contacting national organisations with experience in this area. The Age & Opportunity Bealtaine programme has been published each year since 1996 with details of hundreds of arts events and contact details for the organisers. These past programmes may be a useful resource in tracking

down a suitable artist for your project. A number of national arts organisations²⁵ run extensive older people's programmes and may be able to recommend appropriately skilled artists in their particular art form.

If you hear of an artist, you may want to ask them to supply you with a CV or documentation from their previous work with older people. It may be helpful to meet with them to discuss their approach to their work or to arrange a taster session with the group in order to see how comfortable they are working together.

Once the artist has started working with the group, it is important that you stay in regular communication with them and with the participants, eliciting feedback and communicating developments across your organisation. Programmes that take place in isolation run the risk of being marginalised and undervalued.

iv. Artistic challenge:

While it is valuable to mine past experience, there is no reason why all artistic programmes aimed at older people should be solely focused on the past. Nor is there any reason to assume that participants will only be interested in art that is conservative or conventional. Artistic quality becomes no less important as we get older

²⁴ As one member of the consultative group commented in relation to music, there should be freedom to move across genres, *'from James Last to the Resurrection Symphony.'*

²⁵ In 2004, for example, Bealtaine arts events were organised by the Abbey Theatre, the Irish Chamber Orchestra, the Irish Film Institute, the Irish Museum of Modern Art, the National Gallery of Ireland, Poetry Ireland, and the National Museum of Ireland

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The nature of the artistic challenge will depend on the individuals involved and the art form being explored.

and many of us will continue to crave artistic challenge. Artistic challenge should be incorporated into all arts programmes whether they are based in arts venues, community halls, libraries, schools, or care settings. The nature of the artistic challenge will depend on the individuals involved and the art form being explored. Some types of challenge will be exciting for one person but wholly inappropriate for another. Depending on individual circumstances, participants may be open to challenge in relation to their:

- artistic interests
- artistic expectations (assumptions about what can be explored or achieved within an art form)
- preconceptions about the necessity to produce a finished piece of work at the end of an arts experience (a painting, play, piece of music, etc).
- personal defence mechanisms that may block creativity

If you run artistic/ arts education programmes with older people, it may be useful to consider the following questions:

- Do you assume the focus will be on 'entertainment' rather than challenge?
- Do you assume that the participants will only be interested in exploring the past?
- Do you encourage critical discussion?
- Do you take time to explain arts terminology or do you avoid using it altogether?

- Do you assume that older people will be grateful for any arts experience, regardless of quality?
- If older participants contribute opinions, suggestions and criticisms of the artistic programme, do you value them as much as the opinions of other members of the general public?

v. Personal challenge:

Most of us underestimate our abilities and, for some of us, this is likely to become more pronounced as we get older due to the negative messages we absorb about our own ageing. A meaningful engagement in the arts can help us to reassess our identity and re-evaluate our ability to contribute to our families, communities and the world at large. Again, depending on the individuals involved, participants may be open to personal challenge in relation to:

- engaging with individual experience in a way that is artistically honest even if it exposes some personal vulnerability
- getting lost in imaginative worlds
- opening new doors and trying new experiences
- disputing the idea that 'older age' or 'retirement' represents an end rather than a new beginning
- defying age related limitations imposed by society and the self
- identifying ways to overcome personal, physical, and social obstacles

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vi. The potential for transformation:

When we place ourselves creatively at the centre of our lives and acknowledge that our experience is important and our stories valuable, our perspectives can shift and possibilities for change may emerge. Whether this process is private or shared, it has the potential to transform elements of our lives. We may develop a new way of looking at the world or ourselves, an alternative way of valuing things, and a new awareness of future possibilities. This may lead to outcomes such as:

- increased artistic and personal confidence
- greater appetite for new things
- increased capacity to take on new roles
- a sense of deep personal satisfaction

New perceptions and insights may come with an initial encounter with an art form, but time is needed if we are to foster and develop our initial excitement. We need to be facilitated to dig deeper, make new discoveries and find ways in which to articulate these discoveries, whether we are creating new work or responding to the work of others.

We are not suggesting that every older person who engages in the arts automatically experiences a transformation in a life-changing way. Rather, we are advocating that a well planned arts experience that builds on

personal reflection and group discussion can offer this potential, especially if participants are given sufficient time to develop their individual artistic voices. Such programmes offer participants the freedom to respond at whatever level and in whatever way they feel is appropriate.

In brief, when implementing an arts programme with older people...

Do:

- check that the venue can meet the individual needs within the group
- check that the facilities are suitable for the facilitation of the chosen art form
- check whether venue staff are aware of the possible needs of older people
- look for a skilled artist to facilitate participants to challenge themselves appropriately, both personally and artistically
- ensure there is sufficient time to build trust
- encourage people to explore their own experiences in the context of the art form
- encourage people to explore the processes involved in the art form
- respect all contributions
- acknowledge the potential for transformation through the arts, and create the time and space needed to foster and articulate it

...it has the potential to transform elements of our lives.

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...you might include an exploration of the artistic impact of the programme.

Don't:

- look at venue modifications as a luxury; they will benefit the community as a whole, not just those of us who are older
- make assumptions about interests or creative abilities on the basis of age or physical capacity
- choose an artist with a teaching approach more suitable for children than for adults
- invite participants to make themselves vulnerable if you cannot provide the time and space to build trusting relationships; you may leave people feeling unsafe and used
- assume that the artistic programme has to be nostalgic or easy
- patronise or pity participants
- underestimate the potential for learning and change regardless of age

5.3.3 The Monitoring and Evaluation Phase

Although we are treating the monitoring and evaluation phase separately for the purposes of these Guidelines, an evaluation strategy should be planned and incorporated into your programme from the beginning as a framework for measuring progress and as a contribution to future planning. This will enable you to review the experiences of different stakeholders, identify the impact of the programme, and identify areas that need to be changed or developed.

i. What does it involve?

An evaluation will:

- review the aims and objectives of a programme
- highlight the achievements from a range of perspectives
- pinpoint areas of difficulty
- present recommendations for future development.

In the area of arts and older people, it has been more common to highlight the personal and social benefits of participation than to describe the artistic outcomes or the impact on the artist involved. If you are planning an evaluation, it is worth considering ways in which you might include an exploration of the artistic impact of the programme.

It is important to distinguish between documentation and evaluation. While documentation is part of the evaluation process, it is not evaluation in itself. Evaluation requires an element of analysis. When planning your evaluation, consider which aspects of the programme you wish to document (planning meetings, feedback, creative processes, creative works produced etc.) and which methods would be most useful for your purposes (reports, videos, photographs etc.).

ii. Planning an evaluation

It is important to involve stakeholders as much as possible in the planning of the evaluation process so that it is seen as a positive, helpful process and

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not a form of criticism or rebuke. Discuss and agree the criteria for measuring success in advance.

You will need to consider the ethics of evaluation. Be sensitive to the rights of all involved; older participants may not wish their engagement with the arts to be evaluated in terms of a social experiment.

If you are planning an evaluation, the first thing to clarify is why you are evaluating and what you wish to evaluate. If you wish to demonstrate certain areas of progress to an outside funder, you are likely to choose different methods and a different form of presentation than if you are evaluating internally for the purposes of future planning. In some cases it may be practical to bring in an outside evaluator but in general it is important to engage in ongoing evaluation as an integral part of the programme.

iii. Collecting information

Once the purpose and the parameters of the evaluation have been clarified and agreed, information can be collected and analysed. This can be done in a number of ways:

- a review of all documents, reports and related data
- design and distribution of questionnaires (including open ended questions or 'closed' questions, i.e. multiple choice answers, as appropriate)
- observation

- feedback from stakeholders (participants, artists, staff, managers, etc.)
- interviews (these can be with groups or with individuals)
- review meetings

Again, you will need to be sensitive in your approach to collecting data; this applies to evaluation with every age group, not just older people. Explore the options with the participants and avoid making assumptions about people's ability to fill in questionnaires, or participate in group-discussions.

Always make sure that participants are aware of the way in which their contributions will be used in the final evaluation and clarify whether people wish to be identified or to remain anonymous.

iv. Using the findings

The way in which you present your findings will depend on your reason for conducting the evaluation in the first place. If it is for funders, for example, it is likely you will present it in a written report. On the other hand, if your aim is to publicise the impact of your programme at conferences and other gatherings, you may choose to present your findings on a video or DVD. It is always worth considering whether your evaluation could be a resource for others planning a similar programme. If so, make sure you consider ways in which to disseminate your findings effectively.

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Most importantly, continue the process. Evaluation is like a series of spirals; the feedback from one phase informs and alters the direction of the next (no matter how subtly) in an ever-repeating pattern throughout the life of the programme. In this way, the evaluation process can keep your programme flexible, fresh and open to change.

In brief, when conducting an evaluation of older people's arts programmes...

Do:

- incorporate the evaluation process from the beginning
- involve older people at all stages, where possible
- consider the views of all stakeholders
- choose your information gathering methods with sensitivity
- ask permission before recording contributions
- consider artistic outcomes as well as social and personal outcomes
- consider the impact on the artist as well as on the participants
- celebrate achievements
- make the final evaluation available to those who participated
- feed back the findings on an ongoing basis in order to develop the programme

Don't:

- impose the evaluation process without discussion; if people are not clear about the purpose they may fear they are being judged or criticised
- assume that everybody will be able to read and fill out a questionnaire
- assume that everybody can hear and contribute equally in an oral feedback session
- feel threatened by difficulties that emerge; acknowledging them is the first step to addressing them
- focus exclusively on the negative aspects
- relegate the evaluation to the top shelf to gather dust; use it as a tool for further development

Chapter 6

Researching Good Practice in Ireland and Elsewhere

6.1 Making connections

You can contact Age & Opportunity if you are looking for general advice and information on the area of older people and the arts. We work in partnership with national and local arts organisations, local authorities, public libraries, older people's groups and care settings around the country, and we will put you in contact with resource people from these organisations, if possible.

Increasingly Bealtaine, which is unique in the world, is also stimulating interest from abroad, and some initiatives are now starting up, particularly in the UK, based on the Bealtaine model, and with input from Age & Opportunity.

*Increasingly
Bealtaine, which is
unique in the world,
is stimulating interest
from abroad...*

6.2 Documentation

You may wish to consult the following articles, reports and publications, all of which have been consulted in the process of putting together these Guidelines.

The Arts Council (2003), *The Arts & Health Handbook: A Practical Guide*, Ireland

Frances Fi (1999) *The Arts and Older People: A Practical Introduction*, Age Concern, UK

Yorkshire Arts (2001), *The Arts and Older People in Yorkshire and the Humber*

Cohen G.D. (2001), *The Creative Age – Awakening Potential in the Second Half of Life*

Cohen G.D. (2004), *Creativity and Ageing Study: The Impact of Professionally Conducted Cultural Programs on Older Adults*, National Endowment for the Arts with George Washington University (Early results only published)

Mayo County Council (2002), *Creative Reverie - Meeting the Person as Artist*

Arts Council of England (2003) *Disability Access; A Good Practice Guide for the Arts*

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Evaluation Reports on three Music Network Projects:

- O'Keefe (1999), *Concerts in Healthcare Environments*;
- Wilkinson (2000), *Music in Healthcare*; and
- McCrea (2003), *Music Network Music in Healthcare Project: Phase 3*

Fleming T and Gallagher A., Centre for Adult and Community Education
NUI, Maynooth (2000), *Even Her Nudes were Lovely – Towards Connected
Self Reliance at the Irish Museum of Modern Art*, Irish Museum of Modern Art,
Dublin

Sligo County Council (2002), *Unwrapping Creativity, The Maugherow Project*

Dempsey, A., (2003) *Opportunities in Retirement – New Challenges in Older
Age*, Age & Opportunity, Dublin

Smith R., (2002), 'Spend (slightly) less on Health and More on the Arts,' *British
Medical Journal* 2002;325:1432-1433

**Photographs taken by Derek Speirs for the Bealtaine Photographic
Exhibition, Celebrating Creativity in Older Age, which was
commissioned by Age & Opportunity and exhibited in 2002 with
support from the Arts Council and the Northern Area Health Board.**

Appendix One

Methodology

i. Background documentation

For a list of the books, reports, and studies consulted in the course of this research, see Section 6.2

ii. Parameters of the enquiry

The parameters of the project were discussed and agreed with staff at Age & Opportunity who worked in consultation with the Bealtaine Steering Group. Key issues were identified and a structure for the research was agreed in advance. Key stakeholders included:

- Representatives of both Board and staff at Age & Opportunity
- The Bealtaine Steering Group (made up of Bealtaine organisers and participants)
- Artists with experience in the area of Arts and Older People in a range of contexts, including Arts in Care

iii. Meetings

Two group meetings were organised in the summer of 2004. The first of these took place in June in the Marino Institute of Education, and involved representatives of Age & Opportunity's Board and staff. The meeting focused on Age & Opportunity's ethos in relation to the arts, the impact of negative attitudes on older people who wish to participate in the arts, and issues of good practice. Attending this meeting were:

- Mamo McDonald, Honorary President of Age & Opportunity, Board Member and regular participant in the Bealtaine Festival

- Catherine Rose, Chief Executive
- Ann Leahy, Director of Communications
- Paul Maher, Education and Training Co-ordinator

The second meeting took place in IMMA and involved Bealtaine organisers and artists. This group also looked at issues of ethos and attitudes but focused more closely on the area of good practice. Attending this meeting were:

- Ann Davoren, Director, West Cork Arts Centre
- Simona Lecce, IMMA
- Anne McCarthy, Arts Officer, Mayo County Council
- Johanne Mullan, IMMA
- Helen Norton, Actor
- Helen O'Donoghue, Senior Curator of Education and Community Programmes, IMMA
- Jean O'Dwyer, Director of Education and Outreach Programmes, The Abbey
- Terry O'Farrell, Visual Artist
- Deirdre Walsh, Visual Artist

There was ongoing consultation with Age & Opportunity and a draft report was distributed to all stakeholders, including those members of the Bealtaine Steering Group who could not attend the meetings. A final meeting of stakeholders took place in IMMA, in order to check the draft document for errors, omissions, etc.

**Members of the Living
Scenes Programme,
which is an NUI, Galway,
intergenerational
collaborative learning
initiative, involving
secondary school
students and older
people.**

Photo: Derek Speirs



Appendix Two

Glossary of terms used in relation to Arts and Older People

Amateur: A person who engages in an art form as a hobby rather than professionally or for gain.

Art: The term 'art' refers to works created by people as opposed to those created by nature. The term carries with it an implication of 'excellence or aesthetic merit' although this may describe the process of engagement as much as any end product that might be produced. It is commonly used to denote visual arts, particularly painting. However, the term can be used in respect of any art form (known collectively as 'the arts'). It applies to the application of imaginative skill to representations of interior and exterior worlds, or figments of the imagination.

Artist/ practitioner: A person who practises or is skilled in an art form and demonstrates qualities such as sensibility and imagination. These terms are generally used to denote a professional. However they may be used in context when discussing participants actively engaging with an art form.

Arts Events: Arts events involve people in an engagement with one or a number of art forms. These generally include **visual arts** such as painting, sculpture and photography; **performance arts** such as dance, drama, theatre, music, song and opera; **literary art forms** such as poetry, fiction, literary non-fiction and drama; and **broadcast/media arts** such as film, radio and electronic arts. Arts events can include an engagement with the built environment around us, where practical engineering skills may merge with artistic vision. Arts events can also take place within the natural environment, but require a human intervention involving imagination and creativity in order to become an 'arts event' (see *creativity* below).

Arts Classes: Arts classes generally focus on the acquisition of a particular element of technical or academic learning in an art form. For example, how to apply perspective in a drawing/ how to read music/ a general introduction to Restoration Comedies..... Typically, the skill or the information is taught to participants by an **Art Teacher** or **Tutor**.

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Arts Workshops: These are distinguished from Arts Classes in terms of focus, process and product. The focus is usually on creative individual expression as opposed to the acquisition of technical excellence, although the two are by no means mutually exclusive. The creative process is likely to be emphasised in a workshop and the quality of the creative experience is as important as the quality of any end product. In many workshops, the process is central and there is no end product. Due to this difference in approach, we tend to refer to the artists and practitioners who offer workshops as **Arts Facilitators**.

Art therapy: This is where the practice of an art form is integrated with 'the theories and practice of psychology, psychotherapy and psychiatry as a unique form of therapeutic intervention.'²⁶ It is generally differentiated from **Creative arts in health settings** where arts practices that focus on 'artistic processes and artistic outcomes for their own sake' are introduced into health settings.

Bealtaine: The Irish national arts festival celebrating creativity in older age, which takes place each May. See page 5 for a description.

Bealtaine event: Bealtaine events are a mixture of arts and cultural events that involve older people as artists, audience, organisers or critics. While these events may include people of all ages, older people are at the centre, and this should, where possible, be reflected in the planning, promotion and management of the event.

Creativity/ Creative Events: Creativity is characterised by originality of thought and application of the imagination. It is also characterised by the bending of rules or conventions. Creativity refuses to take anything for granted or to accept anything as 'normal'. Instead it takes a fresh look at the world and questions surface appearances. Creativity is central to Bealtaine events whether they are artistic or cultural events.

Critical Thinking: This is the application of creativity to the process of reflection. In the context of Bealtaine, it usually refers to an event that encourages participants to look creatively at an arts work, event or process and to challenge any preconceptions they might hold about it.

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Cultural Events: These events explore the basis of our inherited ideas, beliefs, values and knowledge - how they are expressed, transmitted and reinforced (through fashion, architecture, storytelling, customs, laws etc), and how they shape the society in which we live. They also may explore similar issues in relation to other groups and societies from a particular period or place.

Meaningful participation (or meaningful engagement): For a full discussion of this concept, see Section 5.1, page 29

Models of good (or 'best') practice. In the context of this report, these are projects or programmes of work that demonstrate positive ways of working with older people that might be explored and adapted by other organisations.

Participant: This term is more often used than artist/ practitioner when describing an individual who is actively engaging in an arts programme/ workshop in a non-professional capacity. It is also used at times to describe audience members at a performance or at an exhibition, as an acknowledgement of the potential for active participation in this role.

Policy: This is a plan of action formally adopted or pursued by an organisation, network or government. It provides direction and focus. While a small number of organisations have developed specific arts policies in relation to older people, there is no Irish national policy specific to older people to provide overall direction.

Practice: This is the usual or customary way in which things are done. In relation to the arts and older people, it refers to the way in which an artist/ practitioner works within their chosen art form, the way they work with older people in exploring that art form, or the way in which an organisation/ company plans and manages its arts events with older people.

Process and Product: For a full discussion of these concepts, see Chapter 5.

Age & Opportunity is the Irish national agency working:

- to challenge negative attitudes to ageing and older people, and
 - to promote greater participation by older people in society.
-

Thursday Day Care
Group celebrating St.
Patrick's Day at St.
Mary's Day Care Centre,
Mullingar, as part of Age
& Opportunity's Arts in
Care Settings Project.
Photo: Derek Speirs







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