

# **MEMORY FOUND- PILOT ART PROJECT FOR PATIENTS WITH DEMENTIA AND THEIR CARERS**

## **REPORT ON FUNDING UNDER THE ADELAIDE SOCIETY NEW INITIATIVES SCHEME 2010**

### **Introduction**

The National Centre for Arts and Health, in collaboration with the Age Related Health Care Unit, has piloted a new, nationally innovative, art service for patients with dementia.

### **Actions completed:**

- **Established a weekly art group for patients** with dementia in the Charlie O'Toole Day Hospital. This takes place on Monday mornings run by Lucia Barnes, Artist. She is using a number of art processes to experiment artistically with patients
- **Research by artist.** Lucia Barnes has spent much time reading, researching and investigating how best to work with this patient group using art. This project aimed to provide a lens for looking at the impact of the diagnosis of dementia and to bring greater understanding of patients' experience of this illness.
- **Developed an art group for family Carers**, in conjunction with the Carers Association. This is, as far as we know, the first group of its kind. This group is running from Feb – April 2011 and we aim to feedback learning from this project and recommendations for future work.
- **The final exhibition** (to be held mid – late 2011) will celebrate the achievements of patients and carers and their artwork created during this project, but will also give a wider understanding of dementia and a celebration of the talents of patients with dementia. This will be held in Rua Red Arts Centre in October 2011.

### **Context**

The National Centre for Arts and Health at the Adelaide and Meath Hospital currently runs a busy programme in the hospital, including sixteen art groups a week on wards and clinical areas, a monthly music programme in the atrium, design projects and exhibitions. This includes projects within the rheumatology, oncology, neurology, age related, psychiatry, renal dialysis and paediatric services. The hospital has a strong reputation for national innovation in the area of arts and health (see Annual Report 2010 attached for more information). Patients with dementia currently have little access to the arts programme at the hospital so this has been a huge development.

### **We believe this new initiative has achieved the following:**

1. Offered patients with dementia access to a specifically tailored art group while in hospital.
2. Explored and learned more about dementia and its emotional and social impact on patients and carers using an artistic medium. This is being fed back to other artists through national arts and health conferences, artists training in the hospital and regional arts networks.
3. Used artistic interpretation as a tool for learning and understanding about dementia with medical staff, patients and carers.
4. A public exhibition of the work by the patients and carers to broaden the wider

public's knowledge of dementia and its impact on patients and carers.

## **Evaluation**

A simple evaluation form was developed to ask for brief feedback from staff, patients and carers. This was given to 4 patients, 4 staff members and 4 carers. We asked people one broad question: Has attending this art group been of benefit to you? If so how?

The evaluation was very simple because patients have dementia and carers are facing huge emotional difficulties and stress. We did not want to burden them with long questionnaires and we wanted a very open question to allow for their response, whatever it was.

## **Results of Evaluation**

### ***Patient responses***

The four patients interviewed all answered that they benefited from attending the art session. They all seem very intrigued to be working with their own brain scans and trying to make something from it. They mentioned the fascination they experienced by dealing with their scans. Patient comments:

*"I didn't know what they were initially but when I started making something in the group I started enjoying it .....I didn't even think I was good at drawing but I managed to make a face.."*

*"....from looking at the brain scan, I saw different pictures in them. I used to like drawing when I was young and I felt I was doing something I liked..."*

The patients also mentioned that they relaxed while doing art. One of them wrote *"I enjoyed peace and quiet every week and a chance to do art"*

Another wrote *"....this exercise gave me the excuse to enjoy myself for about an hour every week. I enjoyed talking to the group at the table....."*

They also mentioned that they learnt a skill and good tips for activities and painting.

*"I've learnt some art tips that I can do with the grandchildren".*

While one was learning new tips another appreciated learning new skills and had this to say *"I learnt how to use pastels and the charcoal to draw leaves and also how to start a drawing like fruits and vegetables"* One of the patients was particularly glad to participate and said she would definitely try art again and actually more often.

### ***Staff responses***

Staff members responded positively regarding the benefits of attending the art sessions. They all agreed there was a benefit for patients. The clinical staff members particularly noted the benefits to the patients of exploring the unknown by using their own brain scans by attempting to make sense of a very scary situation.

One of the staff members mentioned the way the patients relaxed during the session, saying *".....it takes their minds off their health issues and relaxes them ..... giving them encouragement to get involved in other activities...."*

There was also mention of how the art sessions stimulated the patients' minds (for example trying to remember what image they had seen, or imagining what the end result would look like) and also motivated them to interact with people with the same health issues as them. One of the staff members said " ....once they all got involved they got great enjoyment and interaction with the unknown areas and their own unknown creative skills....".

### **Carer's responses**

Only two carers completed the evaluation forms. They both stated that the project had been beneficial to them. These are their comments:

*I was anxious over never having experienced this before. Lucia made you feel so comfortable and at ease, it was enjoyable and convenient. I didn't want the art classes to end. The action of painting a picture, discussion regarding dementia, remembering stories and listening to other peoples' stories was of benefit to me. I liked visiting the library and getting art and drawing books and I purchased pads, pencils and paints. I try to carry on what we've done in class at home, would love to do another session. Am so grateful and thankful to Lucia.*

*I am very glad to have had the opportunity of attending the art sessions with you in Blanchardstown. I live alone in a large house and cared for my husband who had dementia. I do not get out that much and I find that meeting others at these sessions has a therapeutic effect which I am very grateful for. Thank you very much for allowing me to attend these sessions.*

### **Artist's Report (Lucia Barnes)**

Since October 2010, on a weekly basis, I have been providing art sessions, as part of a pilot art project for patients with dementia at the Charlie O'Toole Day Hospital. Over an eight week period I am also facilitating art sessions with carers of dementia patients, at The Blanchardstown and Clondalkin Carers Association Centres. One of the main aims of this project was, through an artistic process, to gain a greater insight around the subject of dementia, and the devastating effects, both emotional and social, on patients, carers and their families. The work arising out of these creative engagements will be collated and arranged as collages/ artworks for exhibition to a wider audience.

Through my research I was aware of the importance of the familiar, when working with patients with dementia, because of the lapses in their short term memory. Also, knowing the sensory and physical limitations possible with the group, I structured the sessions accordingly. Week by week we built on the familiar and tried to gain a sense of themselves. I took photographs to use for self portraits. Through informal conversation and the use of images, photographs, photocopied outlines, we discussed subject matter ranging from their homes, favourite chair, place to sit, special cup or mug, particular fashions/style, and food, in order to spark interest and initiate art activity. Patients participated on different levels from carefully considered creations to clusters of scattered lines and shapes. I experimented with randomly selected brain scans to use as inspiration and examine images within them. One week I brought in an array of colourful fruit and vegetables. There is a power in colour- the aesthetic immediacy. We looked at the organic similarities of half a cauliflower and one of the hemispheres of the brain. Comments and anecdotes were recorded and will be transcribed as independent texts within the work. There was an average of four to six participants and not everyone attended suffered with dementia.

During the art sessions with the carers, I was given an insight into the heartbreaking and sometimes frustrating experience, felt by these people looking after individuals

with this progressively debilitating disease. I believe the experiential creative sessions provided both a sense of relief, and indulgence, with the freedom of expression through artistic exploration of colour, line and form through paint, in a group camaraderie setting. I also gave the opportunity to discover a new interest that could be pursued at home as a creative outlet from their challenging work in caring for the dementia patient.

I have found that participating in this art project has been a very enriching experience, both for my own personal, as well as professional development.

### **Successes and learning from his project:**

#### **Successes**

- Team work approach between the Age Related Health Care staff and the team from the National Centre for Arts and Health. Arts project for patients only work when the clinical team are totally supportive and engaged.
- Carers group – Support and advice from specialist agency The Carers Association
- Artist expertise – an experienced artist with sensitivity to patients is of paramount importance when working with a vulnerable group such as this

#### **Learning**

- Patients have a serious illness and were vulnerable regarding giving consent for participation in art group and exhibition. Our original idea included using brain scans as inspiration for art work. The artist needed to build trust with this group before introducing this activity and needed to be flexible to meet the needs of patients
- It was difficult to work with Carers as they cannot leave the person they are caring for. In the end, we developed a group for Carers and their relative with dementia, so they could attend the art group together. We would recommend continued supports, using arts. Art or music therapy groups may be appropriate in these settings.
- The Day Hospital offered a very supportive venue for art sessions. However, we would recommend a group specifically for people with dementia as there was a mixture of people in the age related group and it might benefit those with dementia to have a specific group. Also we recommend a room for arts in the hospital so that patients can attend an art group in a dedicated safe space without interruptions.

#### **Future benefit**

As a result of this pilot we have developed, with the Age Related Health Care Unit, a proposal for a larger project of art for patients with dementia and have applied to several funders to develop this project further. We have also increased the volunteer artists working in the Age Related Unit so that patients can continue to benefit from this sort of work.

Finally, we have planned an exhibition for October 2011 at Rua Red Arts Centre to display and celebrate the work by patients and carers and to bring the experiences of people with dementia to public audiences through art.

**Thank you to The Adelaide Society for funding this project and the support of staff in the Age Related Day Hospital at the hospital, especially Ms Teresa Quinn. Thanks also to the Carers Association for partnership and support.**

**For more information please contact:**

**Hilary Moss, Director of Arts and Health,  
AMNCH.  
Tel: 01 414 2076  
Email: [hilary.moss@amnch.ie](mailto:hilary.moss@amnch.ie).**