

Our Generations

**Report on a three year programme
of intergenerational arts projects
in Tower Hamlets, East London**

April 2006 – June 2009

Our Generations: Report on a three year programme of intergenerational arts projects in Tower Hamlets, East London April 2006 – June 2009

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Preface

Our Generations was a three year programme of intergenerational arts projects which took place in Tower Hamlets, East London from April 2006 to June 2009. The programme was designed and run by Magic Me, one of the UK's leading providers of creative intergenerational work. *Our Generations* involved over 1000 young and older people in 9 projects. A further 679 people attended events.

The programme enabled Magic Me to examine existing, tried and trusted models of intergenerational work and to explore new ones. *Our Generations* also emphasised work with people who are over 75 years of age.

This report is in two parts:

Part One: The Story of the Programme

This is an account by Programme Manager Kathryn Gilfoy of the background, aims and initial setting up of *Our Generations* followed by a breakdown of each of the projects within the programme. The Appendix contains information about those taking part, volunteers, partners and supporters.

Part Two: *Our Generations* External Evaluation Report

A report by Dr Caoimhe McAvinchey, the External Evaluator of *Our Generations*. Beginning with an overview of intergenerational work and its current contexts, the report details observations about the programme as a whole. It outlines the challenges that arise in intergenerational arts practice and, in particular, in the new models of working piloted during *Our Generations*. It then describes learning that resulted, and makes recommendations for Magic Me's future practice and for the development of intergenerational work more generally.

The *Our Generations* Projects

Work with care homes

Projects with schools:

Sense of Occasion

Sense of Adventure

Puppetry. Music. Drama and stories. Primary School pupils visited care home residents to share a rich mix of activities exploring project themes of special occasions and adventures past, present and future. Workshops appealed to all five senses, to include and inspire diverse groups, including people with dementia or sensory impairments.

Project with families:

This Is My Life

Care home residents and their families worked together on this photography and arts project, creating beautiful individual books and artworks. A new model for Magic Me, the project enabled care staff to learn about residents' life stories, preferences and aspirations.

Work with older people based at home

Phone a Friend

A year long pilot creative writing project, pairing volunteers aged 55+ with socially isolated older people at home. Volunteers met for weekly creative writing sessions then shared their activities with their partners by phone, encouraging them to contribute fresh ideas.

Pen Friends

In Year Two the model changed. A writing group aged 25+ linked with the 'At Home' participants by sending them creative writing, phoning and visiting. Both project groups created a book of writing.

Work with Four Generations

Wisdom of All Ages

Stepping Out

Two drama, music and film projects focusing on relationships and learning that can happen between people of four generations from very different cultures: older people, university drama students, Year 4 pupils, a team of artists, care staff, and teachers. Both projects culminated in performances, devised by participants, combining life experiences and creative exploration.

Work with Community Centres

Meet the Neighbours

A summer holiday project to engage and include older people from both the white and African Caribbean communities, and local young people, mostly Bangladeshi, enhancing relationships between them. Video and photography were used to explore, document and celebrate life experiences.

The Media Group

The Media Group, older people and young adults, met weekly over three years in digital photography workshops, documented the *Our Generations* programme and exhibited work across Tower Hamlets. Through *Portraits* the group took family photos at outdoor events to celebrate positive examples of intergenerational life.

The Media Group's photographs appear throughout this report.

The *Our Generations* Project Artists

Polly Beestone

Kulwinder Bhajar

Ali Campbell

Ginny Carvisiglia

Keith Ellis

Liane Harris

Gill Haskey

Bhavesh Hindocha

Sally Knocker

Marysia Lachowicz

Anthony Lam

Sue Mayo

Anita McKenzie

Douglas Nicolson

Miles Openshaw

Leah Thorn

Surya Turner

Julian West

Part One
Our Generations:
The Story of the Programme

Contents

Introduction	10
The Programme	13
Work in Care Homes	
<i>Sense of Occasion</i>	21
<i>Sense of Adventure pilot project</i>	26
<i>Sense of Adventure</i>	28
<i>Sense of...</i>	34
<i>This is My Life</i>	37
Work with older people based at home	
<i>Phone a Friend</i>	45
<i>Pen Friends</i>	50
Work with Four Generations	
<i>Wisdom of All Ages</i>	55
<i>Stepping Out in Stepney</i>	60
Community Centre Work	
<i>Meet the Neighbours</i>	65
<i>The Media Group</i>	71
Conclusion	80
The Future	83
Appendix	86

Introduction

Magic Me

Magic Me specialises in running arts projects which bring together young people aged nine plus and older people 55+, for mutual benefit, learning and enjoyment. Intergenerational groups work with artists from the performing, visual, literary and media arts, on projects which combine high quality arts practice with specific community development and personal development aims.

Magic Me initiatives bring together people of different ages as equals, with a shared creative purpose, voicing their feelings and opinions. Projects provide a secure place in which to explore similarities and differences, and young and older people often find they have much in common, including limited income, lack of political power, a shared fear of crime and a sense of being ignored. In all Magic Me projects, artists strive to ensure that both generations are able to contribute equally to the process. Arts activity is the focus for meeting, and the process through which participants explore and share their ideas and feelings.

With nearly 20 years' experience of running intergenerational arts projects, Magic Me is an established leader in this growing field. The organisation is actively engaged in UK-wide initiatives to define and spread good practice, establish high standards and develop innovative and thoughtful ways of working.

Summary

Our Generations was a three year programme of intergenerational arts work designed and delivered by Magic Me.

Each project targeted different groups within Tower Hamlets, and had its own aims, objectives, theme, structure and planned outcomes. Younger and older people from diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds came together to build positive relationships and alliances, challenging misconceptions and prejudices about their generations.

Some projects used existing models that Magic Me had already piloted: work with people with high levels of physical need in care homes; and cross-cultural work with a community centre used by different generations who never normally meet. Others extended the scope of Magic Me's work, by piloting new models of intergenerational work: with families; and a project to engage with the most socially isolated individuals at home. Meeting the needs of people aged 75+ was a particular focus.

The programme embraced a range of settings and venues, partners and participants. Each project, with its own aims and objectives, developed Magic Me's understanding of the dynamics of intergenerational relationships in a particular context and community. However *Our Generations* was also 'more than the sum of its parts' enabling, over the three years of the programme, a cross-fertilisation of ideas, and a comparison of opinions and outcomes.

Project activities ranged from video to creative writing, puppet making to music, focusing on the particular interests and concerns of the participants. Their talents and ideas were then shared with a wide audience, through exhibitions and performances, the Magic Me website, the media, conferences and other public events. The programme provided new arts opportunities, particularly for older people who cannot access mainstream provision, and was designed specifically to reduce isolation and feelings of uselessness amongst the elderly, particularly those at risk of social exclusion.

The original budget for *Our Generations* was £315,000. Successful applications to the National Lottery Grants for the Arts programme and The Balance Charitable Foundation meant that the programme began in April 2006 with £200,000 already secured. By the end of the work in June 2009 the budget was £300,000 with the outstanding sum raised from trusts, the local authority, corporate sponsors and other sources.

1,001 people participated and a further 679 people came along to events. Others were reached through presentations made about the work. A further estimated 5,000 have attended public exhibitions.

Context and need for the work

Tower Hamlet's changing demographic profile means projects linking different generations bring together people from different cultures, communities, and ethnicities. For instance, one school where 95% of the pupils are Bangladeshi Muslim, stands next to sheltered housing where all the residents are white or black. Fear of crime and isolation amongst older people can lead to mistrust and suspicion of young people, especially where the older and younger people are from different ethnicities.

Our Generations grew out of the situation in 2005 in Tower Hamlets. The bombs that were exploded in London on 7 July had stirred up feelings, heightened tensions between communities and increased fear of strangers. Magic Me wanted to explore new ways of working within this changed context and deepen its understanding of what intergenerational practice can offer complex communities.

The Programme

Aims and objectives of *Our Generations*

- To develop and run a series of creative arts projects, ranging from video to creative writing, and drama to puppetry, which inspire and engage young and older people, by focusing on their interests and concerns.
- To showcase the talents and ideas of young and older people to a wide audience, through exhibitions and performances, Magic Me's website, the media and public events.
- To provide new arts opportunities, particularly for older people who cannot access mainstream provision, including people with dementia.
- To enable young and older people to work together to build positive relationships and alliances, and challenge misconceptions and prejudices about their generations.
- To reduce isolation and feelings of uselessness amongst older people, particularly those at risk of social exclusion.
- To generate debate and discussion within the local community about ageing and ageism, and the role of young and older people in society.
- To deepen Magic Me's understanding of the diversity of intergenerational relationships in different contexts and communities.
- To develop Magic Me's own practice and contribute to the understanding of the growing field of intergenerational work.

Partnership working

Our Generations was developed and led by Magic Me in partnership with local agencies working with older and young people, including: nursing homes and resource centres for older people; Age Concern, Tower Hamlets; schools and youth programmes; and community and cultural organisations. The programme embraced work with a range of older people, from the very active, looking for new challenges and learning opportunities, to the isolated frail living in residential care with a high level of need. Younger people ranged from Year 4 primary school children and young men and women in youth settings, to university students, people in part-time employment or currently unemployed, and friends and relatives visiting in a nursing home.

Magic Me is grateful for the dedication of all the core partners:

- Age Concern, Tower Hamlets
- Hawthorn Green Care Home (Sanctuary Care)
- Jewish Care, Stepney Community Centre
- John Scurr Primary School
- Osmani Primary School
- Pat Shaw House (Excelcare)
- Queen Mary, University of London
- Provide Volunteering at Queen Mary, University of London
- St Hilda's East Community Centre
- Silk Court Care Home (Anchor Homes)
- Sonali Gardens Day Centre
- Sundial Centre

Delivery and the artistic team

Our Generations was led by a Programme Manager, a role supported by Magic Me's Director, Susan Langford and the Arts Administrator. Kim Dexter was the Programme Manager from April to September 2006. In November, Kathryn Gilfoy was appointed to this role.

The Programme Manager's role was to:

- lead and manage the programme
- liaise with partner organisations and clearly define roles
- design and agree ways of delivering and evaluating the projects
- contract and manage project artists
- find ways of promoting and celebrating the projects as well as finding ways of linking them.

At any one time, there were at least four projects happening simultaneously with others in the evaluation or planning stages. The role required both long-term and short-term thinking and planning.

18 freelance artists from the Magic Me pool of artists were involved in the development and delivery of the work. Some of the projects were delivered over a long period of time – for example, *The Media Group* and *Phone a Friend/Pen Friends* projects ran for three years – and the artists were key to the ongoing evaluation and development of the programme.

The programme was informed by the project artists and *The Ideas Group*, and an External Evaluator was appointed to track progress. These roles are described below.

The Core Artists Group and Continuing Professional Development

From 2004 to 2006, Magic Me ran a three year Continuing Professional Development programme for its freelance pool and has subsequently run other CPD days. Artists come together at regular intervals to learn about aspects of intergenerational work and share creative ideas and approaches. Thus there was a ready-made pool of prepared artists to draw on for *Our Generations*. Having already developed relationships and a mutual understanding of intergenerational work during the CPD, these artists brought to the projects shared ways of working with each other. A further five artists, mostly photographers, were recruited to join the Magic Me pool in Summer 2006; three worked on *Our Generations*.

The initial plan was to appoint a Core Group of six artists with intergenerational expertise to support the Programme Manager, providing an overview and helping to create links between projects. However, an initial meeting revealed that, whilst artists thought it valuable to meet to talk about specific issues, they could not quite see the value of talking about a programme if they were not directly involved. They also, understandably, missed the presence of the whole artists group.

In light of this feedback it was decided instead to bring all the artists together to share findings from *Our Generations* and to consult on wider issues. In July 2008 the Programme Manager and external evaluator led a session for the whole pool. Artists were given an overview of the programme to date and were asked to consider the final outcomes of the programme. The day focused on what makes a good intergenerational activity truly intergenerational and artists explored how they can use their artform specialist skills and techniques within this context. A second session planned for June 2009 will disseminate learning from the whole programme.

The Ideas Group

The programme was informed by an advisory group called *The Ideas Group*. This comprised 12 young and older people from past and current Magic Me projects and local professionals in the field, for example a sheltered housing scheme warden, a Tenants Association manager and an Activity Co-ordinator. The aim was to create a

group which felt relaxed but purposeful, where professionals and participants – both experts in what makes a project successful – would be able to contribute equally.

Each time the group met, a slide show about current projects and a progress report on the *Our Generations* programme were presented. The group then used arts-based activities to examine a particular issue concerning the programme. For example, an early session focused on the Borough, what goes on in it, and how older and younger people are viewed. On a large local map, people stuck post-it notes to indicate places where younger and older people enjoy going. This acted as a starting point for a discussion about shared interests and the best ways of reaching different people to tell them about the programme. By using familiar Magic Me techniques, the group remained informal, inclusive and dynamic.

The group also considered recruitment for projects, advising on draft publicity leaflets and the best methods of getting people involved. One outcome was the name change from the *Phone a Friend* project to *Pen Friends*; the group felt that the phoning element may have put people off.

The programme was also informed by a workshop with 10 young apprentices from the East London Business Alliance's Community Apprenticeship Training Scheme.

Evaluation

Ongoing evaluation and adjustment of project plans are integral to Magic Me's process, and were part of *Our Generations*. At the end of each workshop, participants and partners are asked for their responses to the session. Feedback is usually gathered using an arts-based exercise, for example through people writing a newspaper article or placing themselves on a continuum line of feelings. These responses help artists plan the next session.

Led by the Project Manager, mid-project evaluations with partners and artists determine whether initial goals are being met and provide the chance to agree adjustments for the next stage. Final evaluations with artists, participants and partners facilitate both a sense of achievement and ending to the work and feed into future planning.

Our Generations was an ambitious programme, designed to test new project models and compare different ways of working. To maximise the learning that could take place, Magic Me appointed an External Evaluator. Working alongside Dr Caoimhe McAviney of Goldsmiths College, the organisation could assess each project and apply lessons learnt as the programme progressed, finding and promoting links between projects.

The external evaluation will be shared with a wide audience of professionals, academics, participants and other community members, including the Magic Me pool of artists. It will help Magic Me to develop its own practice, as well as contributing to the understanding of the field.

Changes and challenges

The change in the Programme Manager after six months meant that Kathryn Gilfoy was not involved in the starting point conversations of projects, and a feeling of 'catching up' was present in the first year. The Programme Manager worked hard to overcome this slow start to *Our Generations*.

In a three year programme of work, there will be many changes and circumstances along the way that alter the original plan. During *Our Generations* these were many.

Projects were developed in partnership, however, when time came to deliver them, key people had sometimes moved on, or were absent with long-term illness. Staff tasked with taking up the work did not necessarily have the same skills or interests as those with whom the projects had been devised.

Sometimes the intended participant groups had changed or were unavailable. In one project, Bengali older people using a day centre, a core group in the plans, had moved to another site. Issues with separation between white and Bengali older people were replaced with issues between white and African Caribbean older people.

Planned venues sometimes fell through. Relocating one project from the Jewish community centre to the local university obviously altered the nature of the work, albeit in a positive way. In the same project, it proved impossible to timetable work with a secondary school, which led to working instead with Year 4 children at a primary school. This necessitated adapting the project to make it work for younger children.

On projects that lasted two or three years, there was inevitably some turnover of artists. Each adjustment required closing activities with the artist to whom the group were saying goodbye and briefing of the new artists team to ensure continuity for the participants. Whilst disruptive, changes also provided a chance for fresh ideas and input.

Magic Me had not moved over to digital photography before *Our Generations* and the amount of work involved in downloading and storing images had not been anticipated. This led to the development of a 'two day a week' volunteer placement attached to *The*

Media Group who were documenting all the *Our Generations* projects. Larger storage for the computer system to cope with the volume of images was also required.

The high standard of *The Media Group's* work led to the development of an exhibition programme that was not envisaged in the original proposal; this has formed the backbone of celebrations for the end of the programme.

The *Our Generations* Projects

Projects were divided into five areas:

- work in care homes
- work with older people at home
- work with four generations
- work in a community centre
- *The Media Group*, a specific intergenerational project to document the whole *Our Generations* programme.

Structures, systems and policies

Magic Me's existing policies and practices provided a framework for setting up and managing the projects. Policies were further developed in response to lessons learned during the programme.

For each project, the following tasks were undertaken:

- Aims and objectives for project participants confirmed with partners.
- Letter of agreement of roles and responsibilities for each of the partner organisations drafted and redrafted until everyone was happy, then signed.
- Staff members at each partner organisation confirmed and briefed.
- In some cases, training sessions for staff were run by project artists.
- Magic Me artists selected, briefed and contracted.
- Planning sessions with artists and partners.
- Recruitment plans made to find appropriate participants; publicity materials written and circulated; outreach work to find likely people; work with local press.
- Risk Assessments undertaken and agreed with partners.
- Criminal Records Bureau checks carried out where appropriate.
- Schedule of dates, times etc produced and rooms booked.
- Contact sheets circulated to partners and artists.

- Monitoring and photo permission forms adapted to collect data about participants to suit funders' requirements, and suit new models of projects.
- Monitoring and evaluation structures devised and milestones agreed.
- Advance work with separate groups to prepare them for working together to ensure positive interactions of equal status.
- Ongoing evaluation and reflection to shape the project and ensure that lessons are learnt for future projects.
- Celebration of the work to compound feelings of achievement, increased self-esteem and a sense of worth.
- Promotion of the work to local audiences to aid future recruitment and awareness of the programme.

What the programme achieved

Our Generations created and provided:

- 416 workshops
- 14 training sessions
- 18 events
- A further 7 events for the end of programme celebrations
- 12 exhibitions of artwork; presentations of artwork at events including two Magic Me AGMs; exhibitions at partner venues; the creation of three DVDs; a permanent artwork, books, cushions and posters, a set of postcards and greetings cards
- Four performances were created each including original songs
- 29 Magic Me events were documented by *The Media Group*
- Participants visited the National Portrait Gallery, the Guardian Newsroom, Tate Modern, the Museum of Childhood and London Transport Museum.

Reports on the projects

The next section of this report describes in detail the *Our Generations* projects. The original aims and objectives are included, then details of how the programme developed and responded to internal and external influences. The report highlights achievements of the participants and groups, and the lessons learned by Magic Me.

Observations and descriptions of some sessions by Caoimhe McAvinchey can also be found in Part Two of this report.

Work in Care homes

Sense of Occasion

Dates: Weekly workshops Autumn 06 – Spring 07

Partners: Hawthorn Green Care Home (Sanctuary Care) and Osmani Primary School

Art forms: Visual arts and music

Artists: Polly Beestone, puppeteer; Julian West, musician; support artist Gill Haskey, visual artist

Those involved: 10 residents and 10 year 5 pupils

Training: 9 Hawthorn Green staff

Audience at event: 21

Project outline: Primary School pupils visited care home residents to share a rich mix of activities exploring the project theme of special occasions. Workshops appealed to all five senses, to include and inspire diverse groups, including people with dementia or sensory impairments.

Aims and objectives

- To design and run a series of intergenerational arts projects, which offer older care home residents opportunities to take part in creative activities, and to be active members of the wider community, supporting local school pupils' education.
- To cater for a very diverse group of older people including those who are physically or mentally frail, have dementia, or have lost their confidence, using a broad range of artforms and stimuli, to engage all the senses and thus meet each individual's needs.
- To enable participants of all ages to gain new insight into each other's lives and experiences, challenging stereotypes relating to age, gender, ethnicity and disability.
- To work with home managers to maximise the impact of projects for example, training sessions for care staff; recording and building awareness of positive outcomes for residents.

Training care staff

As is usual for this type of Magic Me project, two half-day training sessions for care home staff were held before the start of the project, led by the artists. Sessions

involved care workers, care assistants, the Deputy Manager, Activities Organiser and Assistant Activities Organiser. The aim was to introduce the home to Magic Me's approach, build relationships with the staff, and consider with them the practicalities of the workshops and how they might support older people's participation. Staff from the home experienced for themselves activities similar to those that the group would undertake, in this case improvising with percussion and making a dragon from paper in ten minutes. Staff then worked with artists to agree the best ways to document any feedback or observations from participating residents about the workshops.

Choosing and preparing participants

The pupils were chosen by the school as those needing more help in developing social skills; half the group were on the Gifted and Talented register. Many of the residents had various levels of dementia, and most used wheelchairs or were highly immobile and non-dextrous. The children were all of Bengali origin. The older people were mainly white with one African-Caribbean woman and one Asian man.

It was important to prepare these two groups to meet and work together. The artists worked with the two groups separately for four sessions. Curiosity was aroused by exchanging snapshots of both groups.

The children considered how to remind someone who is quite forgetful that the workshop is going to happen that day. They took photos of themselves and made decorated place setting name cards for the care home staff to place on the breakfast tables to help remind their partners that the Magic Me session would be that afternoon. In turn the adults made puppets of themselves to introduce themselves to the children. This preparation also provided a chance for stereotypes to be examined and myths about the generations debunked.

Using the theme of the project

In weekly intergenerational sessions the artists led the group in a wide range of creative activities on the theme of celebrations. Given the diversity of needs amongst both the younger and older participants, sessions were planned to appeal to all the senses to keep participants focused and stimulated. Some of the adults were hearing or visually impaired, so activities that appealed to the sense of smell or touch could create a resonance where, for example, audio or visual stimulation might have limited success. The children were actively engaged in thinking about how activities might work for their individual partners.

Generally, the multi-sensory nature of the sessions made them vivid and appealing to all involved. The smell of cloves and oranges during a pomander making session triggered residents' memories and Christmas stories. Shadow puppet work combined light and shade, music and sound.

The theme of celebrations created its own momentum, and both calendar related celebrations (for example, Christmas) or group participant related celebrations (for example, birthdays) were incorporated. This created a sense of calendar for the older participants. Equally, the theme appealed to the children, providing them with a focus for conversation with the older people. The artists adopted a flexible approach to their art forms in order to deliver what the group needed. For example, at a suggestion from the group, they planted bulbs that would come up in the spring, decorating their pots with wishes for the New Year.

Meeting the needs of the partners

The pupils had to walk a fair distance to get to the home and were sometimes restless on arrival. Therefore, the support artist led a session to both calm them down and focus them for meeting the adults, in a separate room.

The project was devised in partnership with the Activity Co-ordinator at Hawthorn Green who had been involved in previous Magic Me projects. Unfortunately, she left after the second joint session in the home, followed by her Support Worker. Concerned by the impact that this might have on the project, the Programme Manager met with the home's manager to look at what the project needed to keep going. Some interim measures were established, including supporting the two interim activities staff. There were various issues to deal with – for instance, at one session there were no care staff and the wrong participants were brought to the room far too early.

Luckily, the home was able to recruit two new members of staff. The new Activity Co-ordinator was, by chance, a young woman who had enjoyed taking part in a Magic Me project when she was herself at school, and the Support Worker had been a Care Worker in the home, which ensured some continuity.

Trip to the Museum of Childhood

During the sessions at the home, the participants used the puppets they had made in the preparation sessions, and performed shadow work using household implements and other objects. The Museum of Childhood was running a series of workshops on

Thai shadow puppets and, in consultation with Magic Me, were able to adapt a session to work for this group. For logistical reasons, the group was split in two, with equal numbers of older and younger people, and two trips were made so that enough care staff could accompany them. After a puppet session with museum staff, the older and younger people worked in pairs on a quiz based on the museum's puppet displays. When the children left, the adults stayed on to look round the museum.

Celebration and reflection

The activity room where the group met was quite small so the end of project celebration was held at a nearby community centre. Everyone dressed up and there was a real sense of occasion. Guests were invited to try out various activities that the group had undertaken together. There was a short presentation by the group of their creative work including a dragon dance and a song which they had written.

Artwork was displayed at the home for a month then moved to the school. Photo albums were made for both school and home to keep. Participants were given photographs of their time together, and later sent copies of the Annual Report in which they featured.

Impact

The schoolteacher felt he saw a real difference in the children and their ability to respect and think of others. Specifically, the school was having to deal with a child being ostracised. The teacher observed that the project gave this boy confidence and improved his ability to communicate with the adults and his peers.

The end of the project evaluation session with the group took place after a two week break for Easter. The participants looked at photos together and chose their favourites, which helped them to remember the project and all its phases.

One of the residents passed away before this group evaluation session. Everyone agreed that they were glad he had been able to be involved right up to the last minute, and remembered what fun he had had. For another resident who had been involved in several Magic Me projects, this reaction was very important. Though most of the time her speech was very indistinct due to a stroke, she then said very clearly, *"I will be gone soon but I know that you will remember me, and I will be looking after you."*

Talking to pupils a year later, the Programme Manager was impressed by how much of the project they remembered, and how warmly they spoke of their adult friends.

"It is very exciting and unbelievable and all the elderly people are enthusiastic and they are fun people to work with. One of the residents said to me he really enjoyed working with me and the other children. This project was the best ever."

Osmani Primary School pupil

"I am very grateful to be here, and it was a good joyous occasion"

Hawthorn Green resident

Additional benefits

- The staff and residents were supported through the phase of not having an Activity Co-ordinator or Support Worker.
- A resident who spoke Urdu and very little English was able to communicate with the children who knew some of his language. This was very important in terms of him coming out of his shell in the home as he had become socially isolated.

Sense of Adventure pilot project

Dates: Four weeks in Spring 07

Partners: Pat Shaw House, Queen Mary University of London Provide volunteering scheme

Art forms: Drama and visual arts

Artists: Kathryn Gilfoy, Programme Manager and arts practitioner

Those involved: 8 residents and 8 student volunteers

Project outline: One-off taster sessions drawing on a variety of art forms were run for care home residents, supported by student volunteers.

Aims and objectives

- To run an arts project bringing older residents in a care home together with young people in creative activities to help them to gain insight into each other's lives, thus challenging stereotypes and breaking down barriers, and increasing confidence and a sense of worth.
- To determine the viability of a longer-term project with the home and a local school.

The Programme Manager planned the second care homes project to be within a home and school new to Magic Me. Carol Wallson, the Activity Co-ordinator at Pat Shaw House, had attended a Magic Me training event in 2005 for professionals interested in taking part in intergenerational work. A Magic Me artist was the designated Arts Co-ordinator Governor for nearby John Scurr Primary School and was keen to get Magic Me involved at the school. Neither venue had hosted Magic Me style intergenerational work, although children from John Scurr had previously gone to sing at the home.

A pilot was planned in the home to find out more about the residents, their interests and how the home operated. During the development phase, it was discovered that students from Queen Mary, University of London's volunteering scheme Provide were going along to the home to chat to the residents but without much support the students were not attending beyond a couple of sessions.

A four-week project was proposed comprising two sessions with volunteers to prepare them for working with the residents and plan what they were going to do, followed by two sessions with the older people. In the first intergenerational session, the group made a large poster about everyone's likes, dislikes, interests and hobbies which was displayed in the lounge. For the second, they made decorated photo frames for all the participants in which to put photos they had taken in the first session.

The activities generated much interest and engagement amongst residents. The Activity Co-ordinator and Programme Manager were able to make realistic plans for a longer, more substantial project with John Scurr Primary School later in the year.

Additional benefits

- All of the volunteers said they felt comfortable with using creative ways to engage the residents on future visits.
- One of the volunteers went on to play his guitar and sing to the residents when he visited, bringing fellow musicians who had not been involved in the project for support.

Sense of Adventure

Dates: Autumn term 07 and Spring term 08, plus two follow-up events

Partners: Pat Shaw House, John Scurr Primary School

Art forms: Drama and visual arts

Artists: Ginny Carvisiglia, visual artist; Sally Knocker, drama practitioner; support artist, Kulwinder Bhajar, visual artist (autumn term); support artist, Miles Openshaw, drama facilitator (spring term)

Those involved: 10 residents and 10 year 5 pupils

Project outline: Two terms of visual arts and drama workshops appealing to all the senses, on the theme of adventure, for residents of a care home and local primary school pupils.

Aims and objectives

- To run an arts project bringing older residents in a care home together with young people in creative activities, aiming to help them gain insight into each other's lives, thus challenging stereotypes and breaking down barriers, and increasing confidence and a sense of worth.
- To build on lessons learned in Year One's *Sense of Occasion* project.
- To build into the project follow-up events and ways to maintain the relationship between the school and home, when weekly activities ended.

Using the adventure theme

Participants met in weekly workshops at Pat Shaw House and enjoyed the scope that the adventure theme gave them for activities.

Together, they explored adventure-related objects, using them to create short scenes. In pairs, they created fantastical creatures, collages of different animals' body parts. As a group, they acted out the story of the snail and the whale from a popular children's book, creating animal shaped postcards to send from the faraway places the characters had visited. 'Stamps' were put on these and they were 'delivered' in the next session by one of the artists in role, which helped remind the group what they had been doing last time they were together.

The teacher brought his guitar into the sessions to use in the stories. This prompted the group to write the Adventure Song together. Singing it in each session at a relevant moment helped to shape the sessions and create a feeling of continuity and shared

frame of reference. The children began to arrive singing a song and doing actions as they walked into the room, which the adults would pick up and join in. This major shift of energy for the adults was excellent in marking the start of the session.

Building on the adults' own adventures

For the adults, the land of fantasy and make-believe could sometimes confuse. On occasions, it felt that although the adults were happy to join the children in playing, they were not contributing to the ideas of the session as much.

To bring the work back to the adults' experience, the children interviewed them to find out about adventures they had had in their lives. For one adult in particular, recalling tales of dressing up in high heels for a night out really cheered her up, and she bonded extremely well with her young partner who also loved to talk about going out.

Meeting specific needs

The children's journey from the school to the home was much shorter than in the previous project. The children arrived calmer, which was fortunate, as the home did not have a separate room for a preparation session. Planning with the children was done in school, and through informal conversations between artists and children on the walk to the home.

The project theme and range of activity afforded individual work with specific needs in the group. A resident with a learning disability was paired with a boy who dominated in the group and could easily change the mood for everyone. The boy's grandfather however had had dementia, and the special skill he had developed in talking to him was put to use, which both gave the boy status in the group and also fully occupied him. Another adult was very shy – her daughter told the artists she was never one to join in things, but Magic Me was one thing that she really looked forward to, and she came out of herself during her time on the project.

One boy was very distracted and found talking with his partner for any length of time very challenging. The teacher supported him in particular, knowing the difficulties he was experiencing in his life outside school. With careful work on behalf of his partner, who rose to the challenge, he was gradually able to really calm down and enjoy being in the moment. He went on to make a presentation in a whole school assembly about what he felt he had got out of the project.

Trip and celebration

The group went to the Transport Museum together, again in two mixed groups, and looked at transport through the ages. Working in pairs, the participants had a checklist of things to look for in the museum, which involved the adults telling the children what they remembered about trams, buses and trolley buses. The group enacted an improvisation on one of the museum's tube trains and later they created improvisations about transport back in the home which were used in the celebration event.

This event was held at the school, enabling the adults to see the children's home territory and the children to be hosts. Audience members were invited to sit at cafe style tables and decorate the table cloths, led by a younger and older participant who had done the activity together during a session. There was a formal sharing of the work with a scene at a bus stop developed in response to the Transport Museum trip, for which props and costumes were made. The audience were invited to join in with the Adventure Song, and view artwork displayed around the room.

The school continued to display the artwork and photographs around the school, and a further assembly took place, where the children talked about what the project meant to them. The Activity Co-ordinator put photographs up at the home. A care worker said that, since the project, there had been a buzz which had extended to all residents. She felt that going out to the museum and school were key to this.

Working with new partners

The project was successful, not least because the teacher and Activity Co-ordinator involved were very positive and worked really hard to make it a good experience for the participants. Not everything went according to plan – two adults became ill during the project and did not return to the sessions. This was a particular loss to their young partners who had to pair up with another child and adult. A meeting between the school and home, and an open meeting for parents before work started, were not able to happen due to late timetabling of classes and teachers within the school. The home wanted the work to be part of their professional development for care staff but the reality for them was that it was hard to get staff to meetings about the work due to work commitments and also to have consistent staff supporting sessions. It is clear that each home and school Magic Me works with has to go through a major learning curve about supporting an intergenerational project, what is required from them and also the benefits that it will bring.

Impact

Both home and school felt that they received enormous benefits from the work, and were keen to continue the relationship. As planned, the artists enabled the children to return to the home for a one-off summer session with a holiday theme, and the school invited the older people to their very own concert. The children from the rest of the year group joined in and finally got to meet the adults they had heard about in assemblies and seen in photo displays around the school. One adult was ill and unable to attend, so her partner visited her after the concert with the artist, taking her favourite icecream.

The work brought the adults out of the home and into their local community, both figuratively during the sessions and literally at the celebration and school concert. On her first visit, one resident remembered that she had attended the school when it first opened and was a secondary school, which impressed and delighted the pupils and staff.

'I like Magic Me because it is a really good place where you can learn and feel how people's lives are. After you do Magic Me you feel calm'
John Scurr Primary School pupil

"I was noticing everything and I really enjoyed it"
Pat Shaw House resident after the trip

"It was the most important experience of my teaching career – the uniqueness and fulfilment it offered, particularly the universality of learning to appreciate relationships – it is the best way of getting that message across with dignity. Not every project would offer that sense of common identity across diverse groups"
Mick Kelly, Teacher, John Scurr Primary School

Added benefits

- One of the artists, Sally Knocker, for whom this was a first Magic Me project, developed the confidence to run a two-week intergenerational project in her local school as a taster and they are now inviting older people to events in the school.
- Carol Wallson was nominated for Activity Co-ordinator of the month for the NAPA (National Association for Providers of Activities for older people) magazine.
- The bus stop continues to be used by the school during supervised play.

How learning from Year One informed Year Two

Evaluations with the *Sense of Occasions* artists, home and school resulted in a number of ideas and adjustments being carried forward to *Sense of Adventure*. Detailed notes on how evaluation affected future planning are produced below as an example of the impact of ongoing evaluation in projects across the programme.

Project and session planning

- The 'Sense of...' title was carried through to the next project. Rich in possibilities, it meant that artists stayed aware of appealing to all senses. Also, in an evaluation session, one of the children said that the project was "like going on an adventure".
- Workshop plans had less content to reflect the feeling that, in the first year, too much was planned for each session.
- The performance was led by one of the artists and clearly introduced for the audience.
- Once again, guests were given the chance to join in an activity that the group had undertaken together.

Ways of Communicating

- A document on the relative roles of partners and artists was produced.
- New ways to try to record outcomes with care staff were developed.
- A letter was sent out at the start of the project to all parents of the children and relatives of the adults, giving the date of the performance, and then a project newsletter was sent halfway through the project containing photos to whet their appetite for coming to the final event.

Work with partners

- A notice board in the care home was used to update staff about the project. It had photos of the artists and notes about things that had happened in the workshops. The use of the notice board was further developed in *This Is My Life*.
- The Programme Manager met with the children's class teachers to maximise the impact of the project and discuss how it might be extended to the rest of the class or school. This resulted in class presentations and whole school assemblies where the children presented the work they were doing with Magic Me.
- The class teachers were offered the chance to visit the home and meet the adults and care staff before the project.

- Artists ensured that the Activity Co-ordinator knew what the activities might involve so she could help set up the room accordingly.
- The care staff were invited as guests rather than carers to the performance at the school, and several were able to attend.

Work with participants

- The children were told about the nature of each workshop session and their role.
- It was made possible for the two groups to arrive and leave the Transport Museum at different times. This enabled the adults to enjoy the exhibition at a more leisurely pace.
- The celebration was held at the school so that the adults could see the children's space, and this once again provided a sense of occasion.
- It was built into the project plan and budget that the school would be supported by Magic Me to return to the home or invite them to the school again after the arts project had ended, for example, for harvest festival or summer picnic events, to maintain the link. Both school and home are currently keen to do this.
- The idea that pupils from the Year One school should visit the Year Two school to tell children about working with older people was rejected; it felt more appropriate that pupils made their own discoveries. However, this process was later used within Osmani School with pupils who already knew one another. Children from each year's project gave a presentation about their experiences to subsequent participants, to whet their appetites for Magic Me.

Sense of...

Dates: Spring 09

Partners: Pat Shaw House, John Scurr Primary School and Provide volunteering scheme, Queen Mary, University of London

Art forms: Drama and visual arts

Artist: Kathryn Gilfoy, Programme Manager and arts practitioner

Those involved: 10 residents, 8 Year 5 pupils and 7 student volunteers

Project outline: Four-week visual arts and drama project on the theme of gardens for adults with a high level of need alongside student volunteers and year 5 children

Aims and objectives

- To build on the positive links that had developed between Pat Shaw House and John Scurr Primary School.

Planning a new project

The relationship between John Scurr Primary School and Pat Shaw House continued to flourish. Magic Me planned an additional second project, to consolidate their relationship in the final year of *Our Generations*. Unfortunately a funding bid for the work was unsuccessful. However the Programme Manager set up and ran a short project involving three generations. This drew on lessons learned from the previous *Sense of...* projects and the short pilot project with University students. It was also informed by the *Four Generations* projects described later in this report.

Provide advertised for students to join the project and eight came forward. Of these, seven started, although only six were involved throughout due to commitments. At the same time, a new teacher at the school was briefed as the teacher involved in *Sense of Adventure* was unable to be involved.

Making it work in four sessions

The first week, the students met, got to know each other and were prepared for working with the adults and children. In the second week, they ran simple arts activities with the adults using the theme of a garden party. They created a poster with photos of the day on the petals of a large flower to give to the school.

In the third session, the students met the children to prepare them for working with older people, and showed them the poster that the adults had made. The children prepared to teach the adults a song in return, and one child offered to make samosas to take in.

In the fourth week, the students went to the school to meet the children and took them to the home for a joint session. In threes, student, pupil and resident, they made colourful paper flowers incorporating information about all of them, including things they had in common. They decorated a pot to keep them in and gave them to the adults for their rooms.

Equity was important even in such a short project – adults made something for children, children made something for adults. Both these things would help the project to live on past its very short time-span. Refreshments were offered at the home; the samosas the schoolchild had made and brought were handed round at the same time. The children taught the adults a song, and the adults taught the children to make paper flowers which they had learnt to make the week before. Everyone's individuality was celebrated – but so was what they all had in common.

Briefing sessions with the students before each session and debriefing/planning sessions afterwards ensured that the students felt as prepared as possible in the short amount of time available to deliver this objective. Everyone felt that they would have liked the contact time to be much longer – but everyone enjoyed what time they had together and were pleased with what they had achieved.

Reasons for success

It is important to acknowledge that this project worked because the children and older people were primed for intergenerational work. Photos of the residents from the *Sense of Adventure* project were still up on the walls of both school and home. The children had heard a lot about the project through assembly presentations and knew that the adults had twice visited the school. One child's older brother had been in the *Sense of Adventure* project and she had heard it spoken about a lot at home. In fact, the children behaved as though they already knew the adults, which meant that going to meet them for the first time was very relaxed.

In a fifth session, the Programme Manager went back to the school and asked the children to write letters to the residents and students about their time together. The children remembered a great deal about what they had in common and what an impact the meeting had had, given that their time together was so short. When asked

what they would do if they had more time, the answer was mostly celebration-related: for example, “Let’s all have a party in Victoria Park”.

Impact

The project was successful in helping to keep the contact between home and school going. A new teacher was involved, and this created a further advocate for the work. He spoke of how the project afforded him valuable out-of-class time with the students. Having only one artist facilitator meant that a lot of what happened during the joint session could not be followed up and the chance to capitalise on successes in getting to know each other and deepen the relationships was more limited. The ability to keep a conversation going gets more complex as time goes on in a project, and the ‘easy wins’ born from initial curiosity about each other are soon over.

This short project worked because it built on an existing relationship between the partner organisations. Magic Me would not usually recommend undertaking such a short project, preferring to invest more, for longer term benefit.

Added benefits

- The teacher had a chance to work informally with the children. He found out during an activity that one of the boys really likes cricket and invited him to be on the school team.
- The school had an Ofsted inspection just after the project and was able to include the work in the report resulting in positive feedback about their community involvement.

This is My Life

Date: Summer 07 to Autumn 08

Partner: Silk Court Care Home (Anchor Homes)

Art form: Photography

Artist: Marysia Lachowicz, photographer and Kathryn Gilfoy, Programme Manager (for group sessions only)

Those involved: Pilot:12 residents. Phase One: 9 residents and 14 relatives. Phase Two: 10 residents and 20 relatives.

Training: 32 care home staff

Project outline: Eighteen month project using photography as the vehicle to link residents of care homes with their relatives and staff in the home. The aim was to creatively document information and stories about residents and to inform staff about older people's lives and preferences, and thus enhance care.

Aims and objectives

- To work with 'Residents' and 'Friends of' Committees in a care home to design and set up creative ways to support families and other support network members to stay involved in the care of older people when they move in.
- To find creative structures which enable new residents, through working with an artist, to make a personalised family history album with their support network, to share their life-stories, interests, preferences and aspirations with staff.
- To provide a way for support network members to support older people by providing vital information and insight which will enable staff to get to know residents and provide better care.
- To enable staff to use this information in the development of care plans.

Positive work at a time of change

This is My Life was designed to support older people who had recently moved into a care home, and their friends and families. The aim of the project was to ease the transition for both carers and the 'cared for', and pass on information about residents' lives from the family to the staff who would now look after them.

Relatives can experience feelings of loss, guilt and isolation when an older person moves into a care home, which can make maintaining a relationship difficult. Visiting a care home is already challenging if dementia means communication is complex, or residents are no longer very active and have little news to report.

This is My Life provided an activity for residents and visitors to share and enjoy together and a means of documenting residents' experiences, preferences and aspirations. The aim was for artist Marysia Lachowicz to work with each resident, and their friends or family, to create an individual book or artwork based on their shared life-stories. Visitors and staff would be encouraged to use the books as a continuing source of interaction and information.

Silk Court was chosen because it had an unusually high number of new residents who had recently moved from another home. Although there was no 'Relatives' Committee' with whom to work, the manager and Activity Co-ordinator were very supportive of the project. A short and successful pilot phase in summer 2007, enabled more detailed planning. It was also used as evidence to secure funding from London Catalyst, for a longer two-phase project. The first phase, started in Autumn 2007, included some residents already participating in the pilot project. A second phase was planned for Spring 2008, with residents of the new dementia unit which was due to open then. Marysia continued to visit the home whilst Magic Me waited to hear about funding, which helped with continuity for the participants.

Pilot project Summer 2007 and Phase One Autumn 2007

The first task was to get staff involved in the project. One of the issues with life history work is that staff in residential homes are often not from the local area, and are thus less able to pick up on references that residents make. A large workload combined with a lack of confidence in sitting chatting to residents means that this important area of care is often overlooked or left solely to the Activity Co-ordinator.

The artist made presentations and ran workshops at staff meetings to introduce staff to the sort of activities that she would be undertaking with the residents. Activity Co-ordinator Liz O'Connor became actively involved; she was to prove key to the success of the work. She had recently completed a life histories course with Anchor and is a Dignity Champion. She helped to support the recruitment process, broker the project with other members of staff, and became a partner herself for a resident who had no relatives.

Open art workshops were then organised for family and friends, together with 'their' residents. People were invited, by individual phone calls, to bring along photos and memories. In the workshop they talked in a group around a large map of Tower Hamlets, with participants sharing memories associated with places around the Borough, and recording them on the map. A second activity was creating simple 'sun-prints' by placing beans, feathers, buttons etc on photo-sensitive paper and exposing them to

light, giving an instant result. The workshop provided simple activities for residents and visitors to do together, whilst enabling the artist to get to know people and their levels of ability and interest in the project.

To create further interest Marysia then created and placed postcards around the home. Some showed snippets of information about residents and old photographs with an invitation to guess who was in the pictures; others were images taken from the workshops. It was a new experience for care staff to understand that they as well as the visitors were also participants in this project, so pictures of them also featured on the postcards.

Marysia now visited the home regularly, working with residents and catching visitors who were there, as well as arranging specific meetings. This necessitated a very flexible approach and included working at evenings and weekends. Even so, it took a while to finalise participants – sometimes it took two or three sessions before they really knew whether they wanted to be involved further. Work began with two residents who passed on and one who moved away.

Marysia created invitation cards for all the residential participants to send out to friends and relatives. Copies of the cards were displayed in the foyer to create interest amongst visitors. Thus a list of who would be involved with each resident began to emerge.

Tailor making the artwork

The original plan was for each resident to make a book of images and stories. It became clear that a more individualised approach was needed, and Marysia devised different artworks to suit different people and their situations. With one resident Marysia created a poster combining photos of the lady, her husband and their very good friend, a celebration of their friendship; all three people received a copy of the poster. Another resident had no old photos, but many recent ones of the River Thames. Marysia combined these in one poster, adding associated memories in text.

One resident had no relatives and no photos of his past. His project partner was the Activity Co-ordinator. Having entered the home following a stroke, the man was gradually able to go on walks in the local area by himself, but would say little about them on his return. During the project Liz started to accompany him and together they took photos of what he saw. Following a visit to the nearby Museum of Childhood Marysia tried some simple image manipulation – the man's head superimposed on a Thunderbird puppet as an exhibit in the museum. He then made photos showing himself on billboards at Liverpool Street station with Liz operating a Punch and Judy

show on the concourse. In this way he created his book from scratch.

One lady found it wonderful to see her wedding photos cleaned up digitally, and also much larger than the tiny ones she had been able to afford at the time. Other people loved playing with the past; one resident's parents snapped at the seaside were given a red carpet to walk on. Some books had lots of photographs provided by residents or family members, with shorter titles or stories. When there were fewer photos available there was more writing. Marysia used a mixture of typed and handwritten stories, to avoid a fully 'printed' finish. The hope was this would encourage people to continue adding titles or stories themselves once the project was over.

Phase Two Summer 2008. Work with the dementia unit

By phase two Marysia had built up relationships with staff, residents and their visitors in the rest of the home, a good starting point for the process in the new unit. However the manager of the home had left and been replaced by her deputy, whose energies were inevitably focussed on taking up the running of the home. To mark a new start more presentations in staff meetings were necessary.

For most of the residents with dementia, communication was an issue, so visitors were key to providing information about them. The act of a visitor recounting a tale and sharing a photograph whilst holding the hand of their relative or friend and smiling at them meant that they were involved to some extent. However, wherever appropriate, residents were encouraged to be more involved in the creation of their book. Further art workshops were held using simple hands-on art techniques: 'sun-print' photos again, making tissue paper collages and paper marbling. The papers created were subsequently used in the final books and other artworks.

Involving relatives

Different relatives knew different things about a person; one daughter learnt a lot about her mother from her aunt's contributions. As in phase one, relatives visited the care home at many different times, making it hard for Marysia to meet them. For some relatives the process of coming to terms with moving their loved ones to a residential home, and then visiting, was traumatic. A more successful approach was to phone them at home and ask questions about their relatives and their past lives together. During a conversation away from the home, they were able to relax and talk about their relative. One son was pleased for the opportunity to speak about how his mum

had once been, and glad that it would not only be known whom she had become.

"Mum liked the same music as me, like the Stones, she had good taste! She would put on a record even if I wasn't there. You might not believe it now, but she was quite a modern woman in her day."

A book that told the life story of the individual resident with dementia would be a key tool for care staff to understand their needs and interests, likes and dislikes. Information that was included was as simple as what food they liked, as revealed by a sister who enthused about memories of eating seafood together at Southend. But it could also be less obvious. The same woman told how she and her sister worked together in a bottling factory. At the time protective wear amounted to summer dresses and plastic gloves; bottles frequently exploded leaving scars. This would be relevant information for someone bathing and dressing the resident.

Celebration of the work

A book or other artwork was made with each participating resident. In two books each page was a collage. Images were a mixture of the owner's own, supplied by friends and relatives, images downloaded from the internet and tactile pieces or objects. This approach paid off. For example the book of one resident who had once loved to knit, included a small square of knitting, alongside a picture of Thomas the Tank Engine. At the launch, she was encouraged by her son to touch the wool, then look at the picture and with his help was able to show some memory of the jumper she had knitted in that pattern.

Some residents had very few photos; some families knew very little about their lives. One daughter had had little contact with her father who was at sea during her years growing up. Her mother also had dementia and there was no-one left to ask. From the one image found by his daughter of her wedding, a cushion was made. This was chosen because it was tactile and also it brightened his sparse room; he had come to the home with few personal effects. Cushions were also made for two other residents; all featured digitally printed versions of the marbled paper they had made.

The books, cushions and posters were displayed at the home at a celebration event attended by most of the participants. Two people were too ill to attend and sadly one person passed away the weekend before the event. The level of comradeship between the people involved was very touching and impressive, especially as Marysia had primarily worked with people on an individual basis. The Activity Co-ordinator was critical in facilitating these new relationships. She had invited residents and visitors

from across the home to attend group sessions held in the dementia unit; it is normally kept locked and operates quite separately.

The artworks were subsequently displayed in the foyer of the home for a few weeks, and a printed book with extracts from all the books and artworks was prepared to be on permanent display. The individual pieces remained the personal property of the residents and their families. An exhibition took place at the Whitechapel Idea Store to celebrate the end of *Our Generations*.

Impact

Marysia's visits created huge interest and the project left a buzz in the home. The books were beautiful art works in their own right, and are cherished by their owners. Blank pages were included in the books so that fresh stories could be added. Follow-up activities have shown that the residents have used them since with their visitors, and books have been taken to other family events outside the home. This level of ownership is something very special indeed. A questionnaire with care staff revealed the ways the project had enabled them to get to know the residents better; staff said they also felt they knew the visitors a lot more. Staff, including the dementia specialist attached to the home, have since sat with residents and gone through their books with them, and in this way the work has become part of everyday caring.

"I got to know the families far more. The residents talk with each other more now and so do the relatives"

Liz O'Connor, Activities Co-ordinator, Silk Court Care Home

"Marysia has been so sweet; everyone knows her 'cos she has taken the time to talk to them and get to know them...When we were little we looked at photos with Auntie every Saturday – this is our chance to re-remember."

Sandra, niece of resident

"It was clear to see how much it means to Peggy and it was very moving for my family and I to hear how much Peggy enjoyed working with Marysia on the project. It was lovely to see the positive effect which your work is having on local people, and how it keeps them engaged and connected by remembering the experiences of their lives."

Darren Harvey, nephew of resident

"Looking at the photos makes it all flash back in your mind"

Joe Lowe, resident

Added benefits

- Though Marysia was mainly working in small groups with just one resident and their visitors, visitors got to know each other through the shared experience of the project and talking to each other.
- One visitor to the dementia unit offered her services to support a cookery session in the home.
- One resident has since taken up photography as a hobby, takes photos on local walks and shares them with other residents.
- Several residents realised that they knew each other from the past; two discovered that they were related.
- One resident's book was shown in the local paper to mark her 104th birthday celebrations.
- A printed book featuring work from each resident's project is displayed in the home's foyer, and is used by Magic Me to showcase the work.

Work with older people based at home

Phone a Friend

Dates: October 06 - August 07

Partner: Age Concern, Tower Hamlets

Art form: Creative writing

Artist: Surya Turner, storyteller and writer

Support Worker: Michael Needham

Those involved: 8 'At Home' participants and 8 group participants

Audience at event: 23

Project outline: A weekly creative writing group for active older people ages 55+. Members teamed up with isolated older individuals at home, who were unable to attend a group through phone calls. The aim was to share what had come out of the sessions and elicit further creative writing.

Aims and objectives

- To explore and establish a new cost-effective and sustainable model of providing social contact and access to interesting, worthwhile activity for isolated individuals, unable or unwilling at present to participate in a group activity outside their homes.
- To cater for isolated older people who find going out too tiring, complicated or worrying but who nevertheless wish to be socially engaged and active.
- To compile a book of poetry and creative writing with contributions from all members of a creative writing group including the At Home members.
- To build on and extend Age Concern Tower Hamlets' (ACTH) existing Befriending Services including personal visits and telephone befriending by volunteers, which sometimes break down due to lack of shared interests, or not enough to talk about.
- To establish the group from the outset to become self-sustaining but able to call on support from the Age Concern staff.

Setting up the project

This project built on a previous Magic Me project with Age Concern Tower Hamlets, where an artist and a volunteer befriender worked with individual older people in their

homes. This proved highly successful but expensive. The new project aimed to work more cost effectively with a group of volunteers and one artist, involving older people at home, by phone. This seemingly simple idea was in fact very complex, compounded by circumstances in the partner organisation.

The plan was to build on Age Concern's telephone befriending scheme, however by the time Phone a Friend began this pilot had closed. At the same time much of Age Concern's energy was absorbed in setting up LinkAge, a new government initiative, being piloted in Tower Hamlets, to create joined-up services for older people. In the crucial initial development stage of the project the Age Concern manager was away on long-term sick leave, and the Magic Me Programme Manager post was vacant.

Recruitment

The freelance Support Worker employed by Age Concern was therefore left isolated. He began recruitment for both the At Home people and the creative writing group with little support, and without clear enough recruitment criteria.

Though he managed to recruit group members, using his own networks, many had a high level of support needs. Once the group began meeting and working together they found it hard to build links with isolated elderly people. For example one member was very hard of hearing so could not use the phone. Another had unclear speech following a stroke. One woman had no phone at home. Though loaned a mobile phone for the project, it became clear that she was unfamiliar and uncomfortable with that form of communication.

Criminal Record Bureau checks were undertaken for each group member, as people would be coming into contact with vulnerable older people and potentially going into their homes. This further complicated the process of matching group and At Home members.

Responding to challenges

When the new *Our Generations* Programme Manager was in post a meeting was held to discuss the best way forward. Weekly writing sessions had started, and the artist, Surya Turner, was working hard to establish a supportive group dynamic. It was clear that group members would find it difficult to phone At Home people individually, between sessions, as originally planned. It was agreed that this phone contact should take place during the sessions, so that the artist and Support Worker could encourage and work

with participants. This was reasonably successful and regular contact was established. The group made Christmas cards for their partners, incorporating creative writing, and the artist began sending samples of writing done by the group to the At Home people.

It was clear that most of the group did not have the skills to visit the At Home participants. Many had mobility issues, and one person required one-to-one support to participate in the sessions.

Compiling a book of creative writing

By the time two terms had passed it was clear a different approach was needed to complete the first year's project. The group continued to meet weekly and edited the work they had developed over the year to make a book of creative writing. Meanwhile the artist, Programme Manager and Support Worker visited the At Home participants individually. During each visit the participants were played recordings of the group's writing (chosen and read by them), and asked to respond with stories of their own. These responses were recorded and transcribed by volunteers from Reuters, secured through East London Business Alliance.

The artist, Surya, then edited the transcripts, which were included in the book. *Touching the Sky* was illustrated by photographs that the group supplied themselves supplemented with photographs taken by members of *The Media Group*, who had visited the project twice.

Book launch

A book launch was held at the Idea Store in Whitechapel in June 2007. It was attended by: key staff in housing, social services and older people's services; group members' friends; and others including Media Group members. Books were given to all those who attended, plus the funders. Copies were given to each of the writing group and At Home participants. The Programme Manager visited one group member who was ill in hospital to present her book and read aloud extracts which the lady greatly enjoyed. News of the project was also given to her niece who was visiting her. She was pleased to hear her aunt had been involved, particularly as the lady died not long afterwards.

"I am now a man of 71, who never succeeded at anything, until now!"

Writing group member

“For thousands of people like me in our isolation, a phone call, a visit, a humane approach brings us back to life. Gives us strength to face the difficult tasks and make us productive once more”

At Home participant

Added benefits

- Magic Me supported Age Concern in an application for funding to install amplification systems to their phone network.
- Age Concern supported individual older people to get enhanced phones at home from BT.
- One group member had recently moved into sheltered housing. During the project her confidence increased, she joined other groups and started to volunteer for Age Concern.

Summer action research project

In July 2007 Magic Me managers met with the Director of Age Concern to review the work to date. It was becoming increasingly difficult for Age Concern to contribute to the project as the initial point of contact was once again seriously ill. It was agreed that Magic Me would run an action research project over the summer with the At Home people to clarify how best to run the project in Year Two.

This research fulfilled several aims. Magic Me was able to offer the At Home participants more time to participate in the project and work with the artist to record their stories. Some of these were subsequently used as a starting point for the second year’s writing group. At the same time a variety of techniques for engagement were tried which proved useful for the second year. A checklist and protocol for recruiting and visiting At Home people was produced.

Planning for Year Two

It was also agreed with Age Concern that Magic Me would run the second year’s project independently, though with Age Concern still supporting the recruitment of participants. The network for recruitment was widened to include other befriending groups in the Borough and the now established LinkAge. Surya Turner, the project artist in Year One, continued to work in Year Two. A new Support Worker was recruited,

contracted and managed by Magic Me, giving more direct and simpler management of the project. Phoning the At Home people between sessions and visiting them once a term became part of the contract for both the Project Artist and Support Worker.

Following discussion with *The Ideas Group* the name of the project was changed to *Pen Friends* so that people might not be put off by the idea of phoning strangers. The age for the writing group was lowered to 25 with the aim of increasing the number of those who potentially might get involved. The venue was also changed from an older people's centre, to the Idea Store, a place of books and learning.

Pen Friends

Dates: October 07 – ongoing

Partners: (Informally) LinkAge teams, Age Concern Tower Hamlets befriending and volunteering teams, Friends and Neighbours befriending group

Art form: Creative writing

Artists: Surya Turner, storyteller and writer, and Leah Thorn, spoken word artist

Support Worker: Miles Openshaw

Those involved: 12 creative writers (8 core members) and 8 At Home participants

Attendance at event: 36

Project outline: A weekly creative writing group for over 25s. Members team up with other isolated older people, keen to tell stories but unable to attend a group, through letters, phone calls and visits. They aim to share creative writing from the group and elicit further stories from At Home members.

Aims and objectives

- As for *Phone a Friend*: to create a cost effective way of including isolated older people in an arts project.
- To incorporate in the project lessons learned in Year One.

Recruitment

The project was promoted widely with fliers and adverts in key community places, newspaper advertising and also by direct contact with groups likely to be interested. In spite of this, recruitment was slow, and it continued to be mainly retirees that were attracted. This may be because Magic Me is known for working with older people rather than the over 25s, or that this age group is occupied either in employment or caring duties and is therefore unavailable. Possibly people who are interested in creative writing are not necessarily also interested in befriending – or rather their confidence in themselves as a writer does not extend to that aspect. Befriending agencies in the borough were ultimately not able to help. Interestingly befrienders acknowledged that their clients had great stories to tell, but they themselves lacked the confidence, motivation or time to attend the writing group.

The group started with low numbers whilst recruitment continued. Three people who began the group were not able to continue, for various reasons. Two people were absent for much of the term, whilst another came but was unwilling to visit a Pen Friend

at home. Throughout the year attendance continued to be an issue for the group - one member was absent for a long spell after a fire at home, another with an undiagnosed health condition. Yet another had to return to New Zealand with visa complications.

Without a definite group of writers in place, recruitment of At Home participants continued though it felt difficult and rather tentative. Five of the Year One At Home people were invited to continue in Year Two and all agreed to. LinkAge successfully recruited a further three people. All were visited by project staff and initial stories were collected for the writing group.

The creative writing group

The creative writers were allowed to bond and develop their own writing for the first half of the term before work began with the At Home people. Members were diverse in age, background and writing ability, ranging from people who had written before to absolute beginners.

Exercises were set each session and participants read back what they had written. They were then given feedback from Surya and the group and invited to refine their work later. Homework was also given to encourage personal writing. People were very soon producing writing of a high standard and were able to consider how this could be used to stimulate a response in the At Home participants. The group also enjoyed having guest artist Leah Thorn leading sessions on occasions.

It is clear that the group meant a great deal to participants who felt it was a safe place to share their writing and personal stories. Several commented that that had not been the case with other writing groups they have been involved in. A real success story of the group is one participant who had been involved in previous Magic Me projects, where she had found being in a group difficult. During *Pen Friends* she really relaxed and grew in confidence: *"The group is like a family to me – of friends and everything. Coming here is like being at home"*.

The At Home participants

The strong identity of the writing group may have hampered the move to their working with the At Home participants; there was reluctance from some people to undertake that part of the project. Securing CRB checks also slowed down the process of visits. However writing was sent regularly to the At Home people, as were Christmas cards. Miles, the Support Worker, and Surya meanwhile visited the At Home people to tell

them about the group's activities, and Miles phoned regularly for a chat and update. In the second term the group visited the At Home people to meet them face to face, share their writing, and to elicit and record responses. The artist and Support Worker paired people based on interests; ultimately three pairings were great matches, and one did not work out very well. The circumstances of certain people in the writing group meant that visits were not frequent enough to sustain a meaningful relationship with one person, though the At Home person would continue to receive writing from the group.

Again volunteers from Reuters typed up transcripts of the recordings. Reports of visits and anecdotes were fed back into the group sessions, which stimulated new writing. One of the At Home people responded to news that the group had written pieces about objects by sending in an 'ode' to her walking stick. This stimulated the group to write similar pieces about objects dear to them.

In the summer term a new book of writing called *Moments In Time* was compiled, incorporating work from the writing group and the At Home participants. It was launched in September 2008 hosted by corporate partners, the newly named Thomson Reuters. Barbara Disney, Commissioning Manager for Older People, London Borough of Tower Hamlets, gave an address at the launch. Two of the At Home participants were able to attend, and were delighted to hear their work read aloud by the group.

Impact

With the added dimension of befriending, *Pen Friends* attracted people who were interested in doing more than just write. The group became very supportive of one another and as a result the standard of writing was high. Though interactions with the At Home people were always complex, their inclusion remained central to the work. This enabled the writers to think about how to base work on other people's experiences, resulting in their choosing biographies as a theme for the follow-on project.

The project was received differently by the At Home people depending on the amount of input from the group they ultimately received. One lady had put all the writing she had received in a folder, which she proudly showed the artist during visits. Where memory was an issue, some people took longer than others to recall writing received, but everyone expressed pleasure in being involved in the project.

"I have enjoyed meeting like minded people and developing in a creative thinking and writing environment"

Writing group member

Added benefits

- A sister of one participant really enjoyed attending the group whilst visiting her. Back home in the Isle of Wight she sourced a writing workshop for herself.
- One person spoke on Ben TV, for the UK Nigerian community, about how she had turned the impact of intergenerational work into a piece of creative writing. She received phone calls from young women telling her how inspiring they had found her words.
- Copies of *Moments in Time* have been distributed to some interesting places by the participants for example Indiana University and the Sokoto State Library in Nigeria.
- Thanks to the group and his new-found confidence one of the participants has started doing stand-up comedy .

The next stage

One of the original aims of *Pen Friends* was that the group might stay together and become self-sustaining once the series of workshops ended in July 2008. Funds had been set aside to support them with room hire, transport, and refreshments, and to have a Support Worker at each session and a termly visit from Surya. The Programme Manager was delighted to hear that the group were planning to continue to meet and contact with the At Home participants continued.

Increasingly independent, members have led parts of each weekly session and with support have developed new initiatives. These included staging a reading to daycare members at the Sundial Centre and planning a booklet of recent writing. The group were also involved in securing a venue free of charge in which to continue to meet.

In Spring 2009 the group were involved in a project with the London International Festival of Theatre (LIFT) archive at Goldsmiths College; staff were piloting work with different communities to make the archive more accessible. This complemented work the group were undertaking on biographies.

A sound recording of some of the group's work is now planned to make it available to people who are visually impaired. Other plans include a reading as part of the local and family history day at Bow Idea Store, plus a second reading at the Sundial Centre. An exhibition about *Moments in Time* will be held at the Idea Store. Future plans include a reading for employees of Allen & Overy, a law firm who may want to set up something similar to *Pen Friends* as part of their pro bono work.

Work with Four Generations

Wisdom of All Ages

Dates: Autumn term 2007

Partners: Jewish Care, Stepney Community Centre for older people, Queen Mary, University of London, and Osmani Primary School

Art forms: Drama, music, video/photography

Artists: Ali Campbell, Sue Mayo, drama facilitators; Julian West, musician; Keith Ellis, film-maker and musician

Those involved: 12 older people, 16 students and 11 pupils

Attendance at performance: 65

Attendance at film: 55

Project outline: Students on the Performance course at Queen Mary worked with Jewish older people and children from a local school to jointly create a unique piece of crosscultural intergenerational theatre on the theme of wisdom and learning.

Aims and objectives

- To run a devised drama and music project leading to a performance for an invited audience, based on the interests, experiences and aspirations of the participants around a common theme (to be chosen during the project's development).
- To focus activities and discussions on the relationships between people of four generations from different ethnicities and cultures: the older people; the Magic Me and Queen Mary team plus school and centre staff; university students taking the 'Spirit of Place' applied drama option; pupils aged 8-9 years.
- To enable older people to: pass on their experiences, songs and skills to younger generations; to learn from younger people from their own and from other cultures.

Recruitment and Planning

Two similar Magic Me projects in 2003 and 2005 involved secondary school students. However Morpeth Secondary School, our original partners, were unable to timetable the project, so Osmani Primary School was approached which had just been involved in *Sense of Adventure*. The Deputy Head who had previously been involved from afar, chose to be the person attending the project and Year 4 children were selected.

In previous work with the Queen Mary drama department and the centre the project was additional to students' course requirements and without credits, and had therefore attracted small numbers. Magic Me wanted there to be a much higher student to child/older person ratio so it was requested that the project be offered as a course in intergenerational arts which attracted more students. As a result it was possible to include a boy with Down's Syndrome who was new to the school.

The key contact at the community centre became sick during the project and did not return. The two care workers and one volunteer who supported the older people each week consequently became much more involved in the project.

The artists communicated with each other via a weekly email bulletin about the project which kept the Programme Manager, musician and film-maker who were not attending every session informed of developments.

Venue

The initial intention was to locate the project off campus so that the students could experience a community setting. In the event it was located in a rehearsal room at Queen Mary but students visited and worked with the adults and children in their own setting before coming together at the university.

Going to the university was particularly potent for the children and adults. The space was light and airy and being set in a university gave the project status. Each trip to the university felt like an outing, and the adults were not distracted by centre routines such as lunch. The carers became much more involved because they had to accompany the adults each week and could not stray off to other tasks. The childrens' visits put them into contact with young adults from a range of cultural backgrounds and a centre for learning that they might aspire to. One boy whose father was a Queen Mary student gained insight into what his father did. Another parent said how pleased he was that his child had been introduced to university, 'to see what her future might be'.

Learning from each other

Whilst working on the project theme of wisdom, participants developed Ten Top Tips for successful living based on their collected wisdom, and put together a list of their talents, and what they could teach one another. Throughout the project they looked at the nature of teaching and learning, regularly asking, 'Who is teaching, who is learning?' Musician Julian West helped the group to create a song about sharing wisdom.

Use of film within the performance and as a documentary

A successful application for funding from the Aldgate and Allhallows Foundation allowed for a film-maker to document the project and make a short film shown within the final performance. This was so that any participant who was ill and unable to attend on the day could still be 'present', and also because a live performance which includes people who are very frail and not used to performing does not always show them at their best. The process had the additional benefit of 'letting the audience in' by allowing them to see the group in the workshops and informally, relaxed and clearly enjoying each other's company.

Hands became a dominant theme: what we do with our hands, what we can show other people, lines of wisdom, touch etc. During the show, footage of hands was visible on screen at the same time as hands were being used in the live performance; this coincidental juxtaposition added poignancy to the audience's experience.

The performance was also filmed and this footage was then edited together with the process section. The aim was to create a souvenir for participants, a learning tool for artists/students and a promotional tool for Magic Me and other partners.

Impact

Hosting the project at the university underlined the theme of sharing wisdom. At the same time, working with different ages subtly placed the emphasis on how all ages contribute to the society in which we live. There were two German students on the course who were apprehensive about the potential reactions of the Jewish older people. In fact one student came from a similar area to one of the Jewish older people who enjoyed chatting about their shared heritage.

The boy with Down's Syndrome sometimes found it difficult to join in, but the film-maker Keith found that making him the sound person for the video or taking photographs kept him focussed. Several of the students had worked with children with Down's Syndrome before and were given the role of working with him. His support teacher gained confidence, enjoying the chance to observe other ways of working.

One lady who has dementia experiences everything in the present. Happy to live in the moment, her enjoyment of the project was infectious, and a great example to the rest of the group. She contributed songs, the words of which she was able to remember. Afterwards when prompted about the project she responded with enthusiasm, as though she remembered the atmosphere if not the detail.

At the performance there was a comment book for audience members to fill in, and some people were filmed to become part of the re-edited film. This was shown at the university in the summer term and every participant received a DVD as a momento of their experience.

"I felt like I was in an extraordinary adventure"

Osmani Primary School pupil

"All courses should be like that"

Queen Mary, University of London student

"The students were very vibrant. The children don't get to meet people like that often. It was fun and they let themselves go. They get very channelled into being a certain thing by their parents - this project let them try something new. It's what should be happening more and more"

Jo Riley, Assistant Headteacher and Head of Special Educational Needs

"It seemed to put things back into balance having all the ages together. You don't notice the separation until you get them all together and then it feels right"

Keith Ellis, film-maker

Added benefits

- The school used the project as an opportunity to get to know the abilities and interests of the pupil with Down's Syndrome and find new ways of working with him. Camera work is now part of his daily routine at school.
- Involvement in the project was very important for one participant who was making the transition from bringing his mother to the centre to being a centre member himself with early signs of dementia. He had worked as a journalist and so was involved in the writing of a press release for the project.

Stepping Out in Stepney

Dates: Autumn term 2008

Partners: Jewish Care, Stepney Community Centre for older people, Queen Mary, University of London, and Osmani Primary School

Art forms: Drama, music, video/photography

Artists: Ali Campbell, Sue Mayo, drama facilitators; Julian West, musician; Bhavesh Hindocha, film-maker and musician; Matt Delbridge, technical director.

Those involved: 13 older people, 11 pupils, 9 students

Attendance at performance: 71

Attendance at film premiere: 52

Project outline: Students on the Performance course at Queen Mary worked with Jewish older people and pupils from a local school to jointly create a unique piece of intergenerational theatre on the theme of their local area, Stepney, and the journeys they make within it.

Aims and Objectives

- As for *Wisdom of All Ages*, to run a devised drama and music project leading to a performance for an invited audience, based on the interests, experiences and aspirations of the participants around a common theme.
- To incorporate learning from the *Wisdom of All Ages* project.

Building on last year's work

Keen to maintain the momentum with Queen Mary, it was hoped that the university could fund a further project in 2008. The course was timetabled and recruitment went ahead but unfortunately the funding was not available. Magic Me made the decision to go ahead using money from its reserves. The same partners were involved and the focus was still to build towards a performance, but some changes were made.

A new film-maker was employed with a revised brief and the three elements were:

- Footage commissioned by the students to be used during the performance
- An introductory film documenting the process the participants had undergone together, to be shown with the performance
- A second film to be made with the documentary of the process interlaced with footage of the performance that could double as a record of the project for participants and a teaching and promotional tool for Magic Me.

The university decided to offer the course to third year students rather than second year, elevating the status of the research element and therefore the status of the project within the university. Students were to act as facilitator participants, whilst researching an area of community theatre of their choice. They would be assessed on their process and a final document which was submitted alongside a workshop diary. Students were very focussed on their grades and what they could take from the project for their imminent careers which made them at once both very focussed on the project and also less natural with the participants.

By their third year the students are always self-directing, thus being guided by the Magic Me facilitator was difficult for them. It seemed that if an idea was praised and they were directed in how to develop it they wanted not to use it, as though to do so would lose them ownership; this frustrated the developmental process of the work. The students were however very thoughtful about the project and ready to try many ways to effect the intergenerational exchange, then analyse and refine processes.

The project was timetabled by the university for Wednesday mornings. However, owing to the large number of Jewish Holidays falling on a Wednesday plus a reading week for the students and half term for the children, many of the sessions were for only two of the three participant groups. This meant that the participants perhaps bonded less well than in the previous year's project and that the show itself was devised and rehearsed in only five sessions.

The previous project had had 14 students, who had worked in intergenerational groups of threes ie student, older person, pupil. They had bonded well. This time with only nine students, the participants worked in three mixed groups and the work became more directed by the students. The students commented that they wished they had had more time with the whole group to get to know everyone. Once again a child with Down's Syndrome was included. He had been at the school since the beginning of his school life and the teachers took the extra reflection time the project afforded to explore new ways of working with him.

Creating the performance

The title '*Stepping Out in Stepney*' had resonance for all the groups despite their different experiences of the area. The groups worked on scenes taking place in Stepney during the morning, afternoon and evening – a breakfast café inspired by Pat who starts each day in the same cafe, the fish stall Jean had once had on the market, and going out in the evening, one of that group's many hopes and dreams for Stepney. Using this same framework the performance was able to incorporate many other ideas from the group,

for example a counting game that the child with Down's Syndrome uses, which the audience was encouraged to join in with.

Queen Mary's new technical director was keen to get involved in the project. He created a large map of the world to project onto the stage during the performance. During the show there were projections the performers had 'commissioned' him to create, for example of food for the café scene. Jean's fish stall inspired a fantasy aquarium scene with fish the group had created and flickering light effects, and there were disco effects in the party scene. Bhavesh created a speeded-up film of a Stepney sunset to mark the passing of time. Julian worked with the whole group on a song about their experiences and memories of the area, and this framed the whole show.

In December the university again hosted the performance and the theatre was packed. The film premiere was held in the spring term this time, so that more students were able to come (the summer being an exam term). Lunch was offered, over which the participants enjoyed each other's company once more, and everyone received a copy of the DVD.

Impact

This second project allowed Magic Me to apply what had been learned in the *Wisdom Of All Ages* project. In particular the use of film within *Stepping Out* was developed to good effect within the performance, and Magic Me now also have an effective marketing tool in the finished DVD.

Along with the benefits there were also drawbacks to working with third year students as opposed to second; they were less able to be natural with the participants owing to the pressures of the course. Course leader Ali Campbell regrets the shortage of time which exacerbates the situation: in an ideal world the project would last two terms and more time would be given to promote even more effective intergenerational relationships.

Ali Campbell is very keen to further the university's relationship with Magic Me. He would also like to place more emphasis on the research nature of the work and elevate the status of the partnership within the university. To this end Magic Me and QMUL are hosting a joint seminar about intergenerational work as part of the celebrations for the end of *Our Generations*. Meetings continue to agree the next stage.

"The programme was really good for my son. He enjoyed it all"

Father of pupil participant

"Don't be one of those people who just sit around and frown – get up and walk about, explore, live life!"

Ada, member Jewish Care, Stepney Community Centre

"An excellent and inspirational example of how the theatre can empower diverse participants, create confidence and connections that didn't exist before. Great to see the documentation of such a thorough and sensitive devising process alongside quite a delicate performance. Well done to all involved"

Nicky Petto, LIFT (London International Festival of Theatre), audience member

Additional benefits

- A Queen Mary student used in her essay, material from Magic Me research on using the arts with people with dementia.
- One of the Jewish older people who has been involved in many Magic Me projects and always wanted to sing songs that he already knew, was finally willing to learn a new song for the show and sang it to great applause.
- Ali Campbell applied for research funds to examine the potential and impact of intergenerational arts action research projects.
- Students from Goldsmiths MA course in participatory arts came to see the work. One subsequently sought further information for her course research.

Community Centre Work

Meet the Neighbours

Dates: Summer 07

Partners: Girls' and boys' youth groups using St Hilda's East Community Centre and the pensioners group

Art forms: Photography, film, drama

Artists: Douglas Nicholson and Anita MacKenzie, photographers; Kathryn Gilfoy, drama facilitator

Those involved: 31 older people, 53 young people plus 11 user groups (93 people) involved through photography at two centres, including documenting two events

Final launch event: approx 100 people (including participants) and a further 75 at the Centre's Annual General Meeting

Training: 18

Project outline: A summer holiday project to engage and include older people from both the white and African Caribbean communities, and local young people, mostly Bangladeshi, enhancing relationships between them. Video and photography were used to explore, document and celebrate life experiences.

Aims and objectives

- To work with centre staff and users to design and run intergenerational activities which engage and include older people from the white, African-Caribbean and Bangladeshi communities, and local young people, mostly Bangladeshi, enhancing relationships between them.
- To pilot activities with young and older women, and young and older men separately; thus involving some people who will find this more comfortable and appropriate.
- To use creative activities to explore, document and celebrate changing cultures and life experiences locally, during a time of continuing regeneration and rebuilding, using photography to spread the outcomes beyond the participants and the centre, to reach families, neighbours and the wider community.

Background to the project

St Hilda's East is a lively community centre serving the Boundary Estate in Bethnal Green, running a wide range of projects for all sections of the local community. It also provides social care services, including an award-winning Day Centre for Asian older people, at Sonali Gardens in Shadwell which also houses LinkAge. Participants from different projects rarely meet, but all have a huge sense of ownership of the centre and the service that they access.

A Consultation by the Local Area Partnership (LAP 1) had revealed that there were tensions between young and older people; many adults see young people's behaviour as a key local problem. Staff working with the mainly Asian girls' and boys' youth groups and the white and Asian older people at St Hilda's in Bethnal Green had approached Magic Me with a view to running intergenerational activities. They hoped these would address the lack of positive contact between centre users of different ages and the tensions within the local community. Owing to timetabling the after school youth groups and day time pensioners groups never usually meet each other, and this was true for staff as well as users. A project was therefore designed to run in the summer holidays.

By the time the project happened the Asian older people had moved to Sonali Gardens, a purpose built centre run by St Hilda's, and the white pensioners who used the day centre had been joined by African-Caribbean older people from another centre that had had to close down. There were tensions between the two previously separate groups and it was hoped that the project would provide a way for the groups to come together for a common purpose i.e. to work with younger people.

The project activities

Magic Me artists worked separately with each group in the run-up to the summer holidays. This provided individuals with a chance to get together and discuss what had brought them to St Hilda's, what they get up to there, and what the centre means to them. Magic Me artists guided each group to make these exchanges, through poetry, drama, photography and video.

During the summer holidays the artists worked with the girls' and boys' groups by themselves in the mornings, preparing them for work with the older people in the afternoons. When young and older people came together they developed their photography skills.

Young people also took photos in and around the local area, and the standard of their photography really improved. As their confidence increased, the young people were enabled to meet other centre user groups to interview them on video about why they are a part of their group, and to take their photographs. They also filmed key centre workers.

Stills and film footage were edited with sound bites from the participants to make up a final DVD, *'Meet the Neighbours'*.

Challenges

The challenge of working and negotiating with two services in one centre were very complex. The person with whom the project had been developed, who had acted as a bridge between young and older people's services, was away on long-term sick leave and this may have been a different project had she still been involved.

Meeting with the youth workers and other older peoples' workers at the same time proved impossible; their work hours did not overlap except during school holiday periods, when youth staff were fully occupied. The Programme Manager worked hard to broker the relationships and design a project that would suit everyone's schedules, but a shared understanding of the project never developed between the two staff teams.

Preparatory training sessions with youth workers had not been well attended and there was a sense that the youth workers themselves were not sure why they were trying to effect intergenerational relationships in the centre and/or were unsure how to broker the project effectively to the young people. Participants who had begun the project got involved in other initiatives the centre was organising.

Meanwhile the older people were not able to sustain several intergenerational sessions in one week and similarly wanted to have the time to do other things. They refused to take part in some of the planned sessions just before they were about to happen, leaving the younger people wondering if they had caused offence. Whilst both ages enjoyed each other's company when they met, the challenges to their usual routine made longer term relations problematic.

Celebration

The film *'Meet the Neighbours'* brought together the different groups who use the centre and illustrated the importance it has in their lives. It was premiered at Rich Mix Cinema, a new arts centre close to St Hilda's.

The film was shown several times to accommodate the large audience, alongside two other films that St Hilda's had produced previously but had never had the chance to showcase to the whole centre. Meanwhile a slide show of photographs which the young and older people had taken, was projected in a separate space where refreshments were available and presentations and speeches took place.

A permanent artwork of three photomontaged banners, suitable for outdoor use, was created by artist Anita MacKenzie. The banners will be displayed at both sites.

Impact

The project was instrumental in bringing together everyone who used the centre, through the understanding they were involved in a shared project. The event at Rich Mix was the first time representatives from all the groups had come together for a shared event. It was a huge undertaking with problematic logistics and perhaps only worked because an outside group, Magic Me, was making it happen. The centre is committed to running shorter intergenerational projects, and want to make more opportunities for all users of the centre to come together in the future.

"When it's raining outside, it still feels like it's sunny in here!"

Member of the pensioners group

"I really feel like I have learnt a lot about photography, and working with the older people was fun"

Youth group member

Added benefits

- The film was shown at the community centre's AGM.
- Photos taken by young people were used in the St Hilda's Annual Report.
- The centre went on to develop intergenerational work independently.

The Media Group

Dates: Autumn 06 to June 09

Partner: The Sundial Centre, local older and young people

Artform: Photography

Artists: Liane Harris, Anthony Lam, Douglas Nicolson and Anita Mackenzie, photographers; Kathryn Gilfoy, Programme Manager

Those involved: 11 older and 16 younger people

Portraits project: Year One: 201. Year 2: 218.

Project outline: 3 year project involving workshops in digital photography skills for active older people and young adults, with a view to creating a pool of photographers to document the *Our Generations* programme.

Aims and objectives

- To provide training in digital photography skills to an intergenerational group of younger and older people who can support and encourage each other during the process.
- To document the *Our Generations* programme over three years.
- To create and collate a body of images that can be drawn on to promote the programme and intergenerational work as a whole.
- To establish a group who can continue after the programme to learn new skills and document the work of Magic Me.

Year One

The first term

The change-over in the *Our Generations* Programme Manager in Autumn 06 had a direct impact on this project, which was scheduled to start in October. The original plan was to contract one freelance photographer to work with the Programme Manager to lead this intergenerational group, who would learn skills in photography and document the whole programme. Anthony Lam, an experienced Magic Me project leader, was appointed in August. Just as the project started the Programme Manager left, and so a second freelancer, Liane Harris, was appointed to work with Anthony.

Recruitment of young people was also affected, so in this first autumn term, the sessions started for just the older people, who met weekly to learn digital photography

skills, basic downloading and captioning. The confidence of the group increased considerably during this time. Most members of the group were given their own digital cameras for Christmas; however confidence dipped temporarily when they realised that the controls were slightly different to the Magic Me cameras!

Documenting Magic Me projects

In order to offer documenting opportunities to all the group, it was decided that they would visit all Magic Me projects, not just *Our Generations*. This meant that Magic Me had photographs taken by participants of all the projects for the Annual Report.

It was important that the Programme Manager was involved throughout the three years in order to organise documentary visits; her presence also meant continuity through subsequent changes in artists. Some sessions were run by one artist plus the Programme Manager and some by both artists. Having two artists was useful in terms of their availability when timetabling the documentary visits.

Before the young people started the older people began visits to document Magic Me projects, and their initial nervousness turned to confidence. A photographer always accompanied them. Occasionally problems arose when individual members started to join in with proceedings, and artists had to ensure that they were briefed not to do this, and always fully supervised.

The project involved a range of logistical detail: researching and buying suitable camera equipment for easy documenting; signing in and out equipment; developing a Photo Policy and associated photo permission forms for those being photographed; CRB checks of *Media Group* participants; preparations for documenting visits; downloading images; filing images; and developing a web gallery for selected photos etc.

Recruitment of young people

Recruitment of young people was delayed by a change of staff within Magic Me, but it was always going to be an age group difficult to access. The Programme Manager met with local groups and group leaders to promote the project, but it is very difficult to get young people involved in an existing project as opposed to tailor making one for a particular group. To ensure a group for the spring term a number of photography students from the London Metropolitan University were recruited, some of whom were older than the target age group. Two other young people had contacted Magic Me

following a leaflet distribution and mail-outs. Eight young people signed up, however only two opted to continue with the project for more than a few weeks.

Two sessions were held for just the young people to prepare them for meeting the older people, and subsequent joint workshops were designed to facilitate co-working. When the two groups came together joint editing sessions were held to introduce the young people to the documenting work, and the older people then accompanied the young people on documenting trips.

Developing photography skills

To help the group develop their photography skills, they were set a number of photographic assignments in the local area. The photographs highlighted the rich diversity of life in Brick Lane and Bethnal Green Road, and gave a real sense of the sights, sounds, textures, smells and tastes of the East End. The resulting exhibition '*As I See It*' was shown at the Sundial Centre, and also at Stratford Circus throughout the centre(st)AGE festival curated by Theatre Venture. The group enjoyed a private view event at the Sundial Centre which was attended by local people including participants from the *Phone a Friend* group.

Year Two

Size of the group

All of the older people except two came back in the second year. An advertising campaign resulted in five new young participants, all in further education, though all sadly stopped attending by the end of the first term due to course commitments. Other young volunteers were able to make a short commitment to the project, and one of the young people from the first year continued with the project. Meanwhile another recruitment visit to the London Metropolitan University brought a new older photographer to the group. This meant that the room was at maximum capacity of 16.

Formalising the learning process

Following evaluation with the group at the end of the year, sessions in the second year were more formal in terms of learning skills, which the group enjoyed. They were given a timetable outlining what they would be concentrating on at each session.

Work covered line, rule of thirds, shadow and light, repeat patterns, abstracts, texture, pattern, eye-line, point of view, portraits, and still life. At each session the artists recapped on what had been learnt. The result was that the group became much more able to use technical terms, and also deconstruct their own and other people's work, and their confidence in taking photographs increased.

Introducing the volunteers

In the spring term, owing to the large amount of work back at the office associated with the project, for example downloading, captioning, filing and printing, a voluntary placement was advertised. The team was joined by Charlotte Truner who was followed in the summer term by Claire Horton. This scheme has worked well and was continued in Year Three.

Field visits and exhibitions

To further practice their skills, the group went on field visits to photograph local spaces with very contrasting architectures and atmospheres: practising low level lighting in Wilton's Music Hall, and abstract work at the Allen & Overy law firm City offices including the roof garden. This field work resulted in the exhibition '*different spaces*' shown at Weavers Restaurant Trust and Wilton's itself. The group were invited by inIVA (Institute of International Visual Arts) to add to these architectural images by documenting Rivington Place, the purpose built art gallery where they are based. A selection of the photos were displayed at Rivington Place as part of London's Open House weekend. The group enjoyed another private view, where a slide show of all the photos was displayed. Photographs were also on display at Wilton's during that weekend, another Open House.

Homework briefs

Following group evaluation, the artists incorporated work with members' own cameras, and began setting homework, to encourage them to use skills developed in the group outside the sessions. This was made possible by the presence of the volunteer, who downloaded people's cameras during the session.

In the summer the group met to select photos for the Magic Me Annual Report. Their images received great feedback, a big boost to participants. Their photos were also

used on Magic Me's website, in the local paper and other national and international publications, including the 2007-08 Allen & Overy annual pro bono report.

Year Three

Compounding skills

For the final year the artists decided to equip the group further with the language of photography in order to increase their confidence and belief in how much they have learnt, and allow them to develop their critical skills as regards their work and that of others. They also increased work with their own cameras, setting term briefs (for example photos suitable for greetings cards) as well as weekly homework. A further visit to the university brought two new younger people to the group, and an advert for the volunteer placement brought three others. All the older people remained, except one who became seriously ill. Members of the group visited her in hospital, and a card designed using a photo from the group was signed by everyone. A library of greetings cards was developed by the new volunteer Leyla Güler to send to Magic Me participants and other contacts for different occasions.

During the three years the group visited several galleries and photographic exhibitions to support their learning, including Tate Modern, National Portrait Gallery, Getty Images and the Photographers' Gallery. By the middle of the year some people were visiting galleries independently and the volunteer was producing lists of recommended exhibitions; people would feed back in workshops on what they had seen.

Exhibiting the work

Weavers Restaurant Trust was delighted with the summer exhibition and Magic Me was invited to curate and develop an exhibition space long term. *'different spaces'* was followed in the autumn by *'As I see it'*, the previous summer's exhibition. These exhibitions were advertised on the photomonth website, an initiative to flag up photography work in East London.

The Media Group's exhibition of family photos, *'Portraits'*, described below, was hung in November. Sadly Weavers had to close at very short notice due to funding problems only two weeks into the exhibition and before the planned private view event. *'Portraits'* will now be shown as part of the *Our Generations* celebrations in May 2009 at Bow Idea Store.

During this period the Local Authority newspaper East End Life ran a photography competition for images of life in the Borough. The Programme Manager entered photographs for all participants and a photograph taken by Dorothy Lloyd won the competition. She was presented with her prize, a digital camera at a visit to the Town Hall, where she had tea with the Leader of the Council. Her image featured in the Borough's Community Plan, and photos from the rest of the group have since been showcased weekly in the newspaper.

Highlighting achievements

The Media Group are involved in the celebrations for the end of *Our Generations*; exhibitions of their work are planned at various locations in the Borough:

- '*Portraits*' at the Bow Idea Store including a photography event for the Local and Community History day
- A retrospective of the *Our Generations* projects at the Brady Arts Centre
- '*As I See It*' at Christ Church Spitalfields
- '*Portraits*' at Whitechapel Idea Store in partnership with Spitalfields Music Festival including a photography event at their Family Music day, and on a Routemaster bus as part of a reminiscence event in partnership with Spitalfields Music Festival and the Bishopsgate Institute.

Sibell, the volunteer for the spring and summer terms, created books for all the members of the group featuring their photographs, and CV's were made for everyone highlighting their achievements over the three years with portraits the group had taken of each other.

Impact

For Magic Me the impact of *The Media Group* was manifold. For the first time the organisation's work was mostly being documented by young people and older people. The group's presence at events further emphasised an intergenerational approach, showing in particular older people being in charge of the situation and handling the cameras in a professional and business-like manner. The group themselves have been excellent ambassadors for intergenerational work. Having bodies of artwork that represent the organisation in public spaces has been very positive, creating a greater understanding about the work of Magic Me.

Added benefits

- The group supported one of their members who was in hospital for a long time.
- Magic Me's relationship with Allen & Overy has developed a great deal as a result of the group's visit to the Allen & Overy offices.
- One member used work from the project in the personal statement he had to make at the end of his first year at university. Others have photographed members of the group as part of their portfolio work.
- The Programme Manager wrote a supporting reference for one member's visa application.
- One of the older members was asked to take photos of another non-Magic Me group who were modelling unusual hats.

"It's great the way everyone encourages each other, it's like a family"

Keiko, The Media Group member

"It's wonderful to put an exhibition together, I feel so proud, it makes you feel great"

Fran, The Media Group member

"Going to Wilton's was a unique opportunity, also to get inside Allen & Overy – it was a one off. One building was so old and the other so new, what a difference in architecture"

Cyril, The Media Group member

"I have learnt a lot – so much more than click click click"

Vince, The Media Group member

Portraits

The Media Group also created a collection of photos to capture the vast amount of intergenerational activity that goes on in the Borough as a normal part of family and community life. In the first year the group took photos at a family event at Arnold Circus, a green space in Bethnal Green on a roundabout which is part of the Boundary Estate. A local group, Friends of Arnold Circus, are programming events to reclaim the area from its reputation of drug-dealing. *The Media Group* toured the site inviting people to be photographed, sending free copies of photos to people after the event.

The group found going up to people to ask them to take part quite daunting and felt it would be good to have a space they could invite the public into. The next *Portraits*

event was at the Paradise Gardens family festival in Victoria Park in May 2007. The group set up a gazebo and temporary 'studio' space. They photographed 201 people.

The following summer the experience was repeated. This time 218 people were photographed and a new element added. Following the *Wisdom of All Ages* project, where wisdom was shared between the generations, visitors to the event were invited to say what they had learnt in their life from a young or older person. Answers ranged from tips for recipes to sayings. These were displayed alongside the photos at the exhibition at Weavers. The group divided into pairs and took turns in inviting members of the public to have their photo taken, putting them at ease to get a good shot, recording their words of wisdom, and documenting the event. Again photographs were sent to all who took part.

Impact

The photography at events captured the imagination of the public, and people were happy to talk about what they had learnt from someone younger or older than themselves. Portraits highlighted intergenerational groups at public events and revealed the very different ways in which people chose to define their 'family'. Some portraits included pets and dolls as well as people. The largest family the group photographed was nine people, all different ages enjoying a day out together.

Conclusion

Our Generations offered an extraordinary opportunity for Magic Me to develop and refine intergenerational practice over a three year period. The presence of an external evaluator further helped to challenge the organisation's practice, and take forward lessons learned. Cross-fertilisation between projects flourished, supported by the Programme Manager and enhanced by the visits *The Media Group* made to document each project.

The following areas were important elements in the success of the work:

Preparation and Reflection

Preparation as ever was critical to the success of the programme, and advance work with partners to refine the project processes was vital. Yet the reality of intergenerational work is that situations regularly change and major complications occur. Accommodating the changes, be they personnel, time table or venue, needed to be managed sensitively and appropriately throughout the programme. Where restrictions threatened the original intention of the work it was vital to revise and establish new goals, as in the *Phone a Friend* project.

Reflection was an integral part of all the projects. Participants were encouraged to think about what the project meant to them, what they had learnt and in what way they had benefited.

Training and support of artists

The flexibility and commitment of the artists and a high artist/staff to participant ratio meant it was possible to cater for individual's specific needs. Participants ranged from pupils on the Gifted and Talented register, or adults showing particular aptitude in photography, to frail elders with specific physical and psychological needs and children with Down's Syndrome.

The training from Magic Me's CPD programme equipped artists to be responsive to the emerging needs and interests of the groups. Sufficient space within the projects allowed artists to integrate the interests and talents of participants, enabling them to actively shape their project. Working with professional artists the participants were

able to reach a high standard of artwork whilst retaining a strong sense of ownership.

Creating new ways of working

Specific initiatives were developed through the programme to share the work more widely, for example encouraging parent involvement through meetings and newsletters. Osmani Primary School saw an increasing number of parents attend Magic Me events and then get further involved in school activity. This is just one example of one of the many added benefits of the programme.

Celebrating the projects

Celebrations were a recurring theme of the *Our Generations* programme and a chance to share successes with family and friends. Ways to celebrate the work were devised for each project – working towards a shared goal engendered a sense of collective achievement. Involving an audience in this process – through decorating a tablecloth, making and recording a sound-scape, or adding to film footage – added another dimension to the celebration. This allowed the audience to experience the work for themselves. Maintaining a display of the work often consolidated the experience and prepared the ground for future work. For example the second year's group of children at John Scurr School felt they already knew the adults at Pat Shaw House because of the photos of them around the school.

The artwork from *Our Generations* was showcased in a variety of spaces new to Magic Me, from world renowned art gallery Rivington Place through work with inIVA, to a Routemaster bus at Spitalfields Music summer festival. This has resulted in several new partnerships and possibilities for future work.

Applying knowledge to new ways of working

Our Generations provided the chance to try new models of work, including projects with people aged 75+ and meeting the specific needs of frail and isolated people. These new ways of working confirmed many basic tenets of Magic Me's approach:

- Intergenerational relationships need to be regular and sustained to be meaningful. Where the *Pen Friends* were, for personal reasons, unable to keep the relationship with their At Home person going, the aims of the project were not maintained.
- There needs to be equity between the partner groups and equal contributions to

the aims of the project must be facilitated; for example, during the *This Is My Life* project, both residents and visitors contributed to the stories and photos within the books. There is a chance for stereotypes to be examined and disproved, for example during the *Meet the Neighbours* project where suspicion between ages and racial groups existed.

Participants get most out of a project when they are helped to work together to achieve a mutually beneficial goal, for example when the young and older people of *The Media Group* documented Magic Me projects together or created exhibitions of their work.

Overall *Our Generations* was an ambitious programme of work. The skill, expertise and commitment of Magic Me artists combined with that of partners helped to unlock the potential of the participants, demonstrating just what can be achieved in the field of intergenerational arts work.

The Future

Our Generations has been an important part of Magic Me's programme over the past three years. Lessons learned and links made have fed into concurrent projects, enriching the organisation as a whole. Public celebrations of young and older people's achievements have heightened awareness of Magic Me generating increased demand for new projects.

At the same time the scale and reach of *Our Generations* has raised questions about Magic Me's capacity: how do a small staff team both manage and sift the array of new ideas and opportunities thrown up by so many groups working away creatively together, and also support the many, often vulnerable, individuals, who participated?

In Autumn 2008 a strategic review by Magic Me staff and Trustees helped shape plans for the next three years and beyond. Elements of the 3 Year Plan that grow directly out of *Our Generations* include:

- Further projects that build on the successes of the new models developed and lessons learned, particularly *This is My Life*, *Pen Friends* and *The Media Group*.
- A continuing focus on the need for purposeful activity and community engagement of older people in care homes, or those becoming isolated at home.
- New projects with new partners in the arts, care, education and business sectors.
- Further Continuing Professional Development for Magic Me artists and staff, in recognition of the need to grow and share good practice to maintain quality and be flexible to the changing needs of participants.
- A new role of Community and Communications Officer, responsible for maintaining relationships and involvement with participants, volunteers and supporters when time-limited projects end, and providing practical support to individual participants, such as transport or information about other services.
- A new Project Development Manager, to meet growing and broadening demand for new projects in Tower Hamlets and beyond. *Our Generations* has confirmed the level of planning, preparatory work and expertise needed to grow good quality projects with partners.
- Building on relationships with Goldsmiths College and Queen Mary, University of London, to grow more understanding of intergenerational practice and theory through further research, course design or teaching and student placements.

These ideas have already gained much interest from potential funders and work is underway to finance them and put them into practice. Magic Me has ambitious plans.

Innovative practical projects and research to deepen understanding and best practice are key. At the same time Magic Me will continue to influence the growing field of intergenerational work sharing its expertise and experience.

Much has changed in the world since 2006 when *Our Generations* started. The economic boom has been crunched; unemployment is rising and pensions are not. Charities are feeling the financial pinch, just as demand for their services rises.

But at the same time, interest in intergenerational approaches to community building has never been greater. Central and local government have seen the potential of this way of creating and releasing social wealth, particularly as financial wealth decreases. Magic Me believes the lessons learned from *Our Generations* will fall on fertile ground, as more and more local authorities and community organisations across the UK begin to grow their own projects.

Appendix

Magic Me would like to thank all those who contributed to *Our Generations* including:

For introductions to corporate sponsors:

- East London Business Alliance

For support with recruitment of participants and artists:

- Bromley by Bow Centre
- Friends and Neighbours
- LinkAge Plus
- London Metropolitan University
- Mile End Hospital
- Provide at Queen Mary, University of London
- St Paul's Centre
- Whitechapel Art Gallery

For photography field trips and exhibition and celebration space:

- Allen & Overy
- Bow Idea Store
- Brady Arts Centre
- Friends of Arnold Circus
- Guardian Newspapers
- inIVA at Rivington Place
- Kings Place
- Paradise Gardens
- Spitalfields Music
- Stiffords Community Centre
- Theatre Venture
- Thomson Reuters
- Wilton's Music Hall

For input to larger projects:

- Bishopsgate Institute
- Guardian Education
- London International Festival of Theatre archive project at Goldsmiths College
- Museum of Childhood
- Spitalfields Music

Exhibitions and artworks created during *Our Generations*

'Sense of Occasion' live performance including music; the *Marble Memory Mansion*, Chinese dragon, puppets; displays at school and home, 2007

'Sense of Adventure' pilot photo frames, 2007

'Sense of Adventure' live performance including music; collages, props and costume including a bus stop; displays at school and home, 2008

'This Is My Life' cards, postcards, cushions, books and posters exhibitions at Silk Court Care Home and Whitechapel Idea Store, 2008

'Touching the Sky' book of creative writing by the *Phone a Friend* group, 2007

'Moments in Time' book of creative writing by the *Pen Friends*; exhibition at Whitechapel Idea Store, 2008

'Wisdom of All Ages' live performance including music and film; DVD, 2007

'Stepping Out in Stepney' live performance including music and film; DVD, 2008

'Meet the Neighbours' DVD and banners, 2007

'As I See It' Media Group at Sundial Centre and Stratford Circus, 2007; Christ Church, Spitalfields, 2009

'different spaces' Media Group exhibition at Weavers Restaurant Trust, 2008; Rivington Place, 2008; Wilton's Music Hall, 2008; Sundial Centre, 2008

'Portraits' Weavers Restaurant Trust, 2008; Bow Idea Store, Whitechapel Idea Store, 2009

Many thanks to all who volunteered on the *Our Generations* programme:

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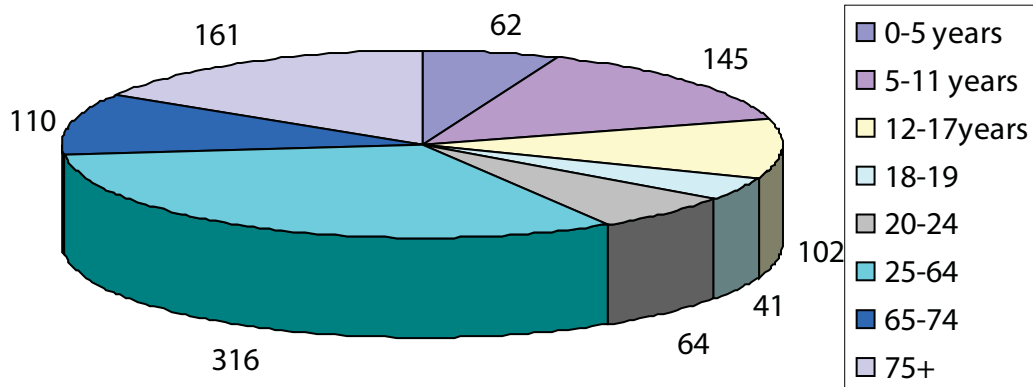
Victoria Johnson, Clare Manning, Jennifer Mingell, Caroline Monmagh,

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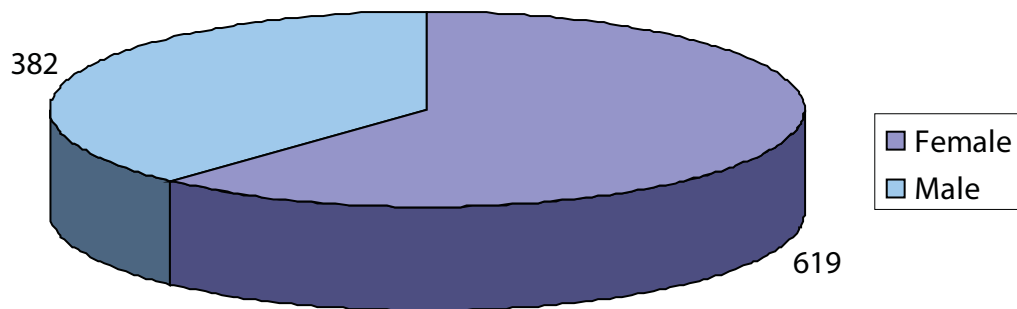
Those taking part

Our Generations involved 433 regular participants and 568 short term participants, a total of 1001 people. The graphic shows who they were.

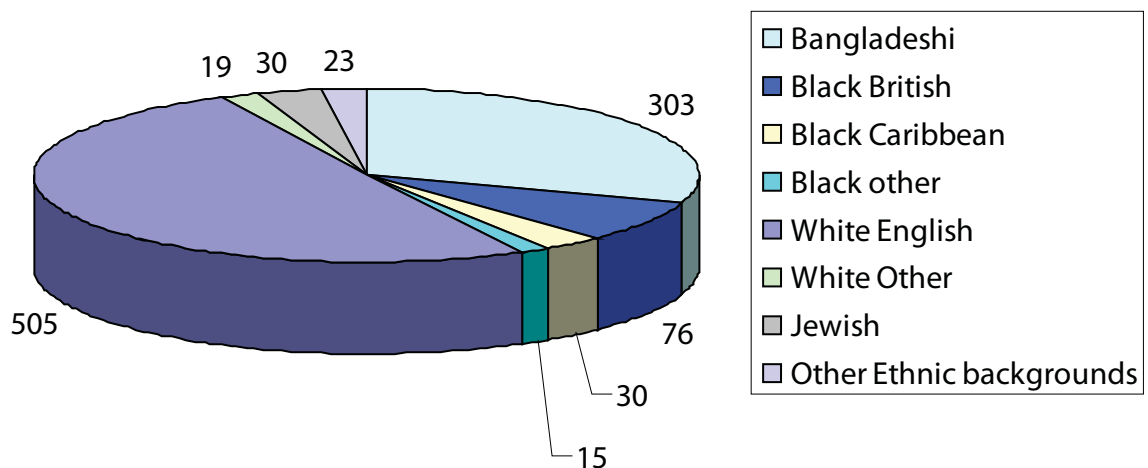
Participants' Ages



Participants' Gender



Participants' Ethnicity



Part Two
Our Generations
External Evaluation Report
Dr Caoimhe McAvinchey

Contents

Section 1 Setting the scene for *Our Generations*

Introduction	94
Context 1: Magic Me and creative risk	96
Context 2: An Ageing Society	98
Context 3: The social and cultural context of Tower Hamlets	100
Context 4: The imperative for Intergenerational Practice	101
Evaluation Methodology	104

Section 2 Findings from *Our Generations*

1. Intergenerational Arts Practice: What does good practice look like?	108
1.1 A long-term approach	109
1.2 Staff with appropriate skills and training	110
1.3 Preparation of participants	111
1.4 Activities focus on developing relationships between generations	112
1.5 Activities are shaped by participants and therefore meet their needs	113
1.6 There are mutual benefits from the activities	113
2. Place and Space	115
2.1 Tower Hamlets: a sense of place	115
2.2 'The East End is the best end.'	115
2.3 'It's huge, it's so local.'	116
2.4 Site specificity: a sense of space	117
2.5 Staging questions about education	118
2.6 Making art in private spaces	119

3. Realising Practice: Training and Organisational Support	121
4. Performing Inclusion	122
4.1 Each person is needed	122
4.2 'We are more than we appear to be.'	123
4.3 Celebrate the individuals who make the group	124
5. The Art of Negotiation	126
5.1 Negotiation between Magic Me, partner organisations and staff	126
5.2 Renegotiation of a project	128
5.3 Negotiation between artists and artistic disciplines	129
5.4 Negotiation between participants	130
Conclusion	133
Bibliography	137
Acknowledgements	138

Section 1

Setting the scene for *Our Generations*

Introduction

Magic Me has been developing intergenerational arts projects with people who live in Tower Hamlets, East London since 1989. For the past two decades, Magic Me has pioneered ambitious community arts programmes, documented its work and disseminated principles of good practice in this field. *Our Generations* was an opportunity for Magic Me to reflect on and further test existing models of intergenerational arts practice whilst developing new approaches to working with people of different generations from diverse social and cultural contexts.

The three year *Our Generations* programme consisted of nine individual projects. Kathryn Gilfoy, the Programme Manager for *Our Generations*, details the narrative of each of these projects in the first section of this publication. This project-by-project account does two things: firstly, it outlines *Our Generations'* scale and ambition as a community arts programme which sought to address issues of personal and community development, social exclusion and cultural exchange; secondly, it illustrates how this ambition was successfully realised.

This section of the publication is the external evaluation report. Rather than looking at each of the projects of *Our Generations* in isolation, this evaluation considers learning *across* the programme. It identifies specific themes and issues that have arisen from projects and how these can inform Magic Me's current and future practice and the wider field of intergenerational and community arts work.

In the worlds of arts, academia and social policy, intergenerational arts practice is under-represented and under-theorised. Much of the existing research recognises the possible social benefits of this work and calls for additional quantitative research to measure its personal, community and social impact. Whilst the measurement of social impact is a very valuable area of research, it is not the only one for consideration: what can new and different models of arts practice reveal of the possibilities of intergenerational arts practice? What can they reveal of the socio-cultural contexts within which they take place?

Magic Me sought to address these questions through *Our Generations*, an exploratory and investigative programme to develop new models and understandings of intergenerational arts practice and their contexts. The external evaluation reflects

the research-led imperative of *Our Generations*. It identifies, documents and reflects on moments in the programme which reaffirm the already agreed principles of good practice in existing models whilst also highlighting specific issues arising from the much broader range of models implemented within *Our Generations*.

The external evaluation focuses on five issues from *Our Generations*:

Good Intergenerational Arts Practice: what does it look like?

This chapter focuses on what good principles of intergenerational arts practice look like in action. As an illustration, it examines the *Sense of Occasion* project. This project, in effect, provides us with a base-line, as the approach utilised was grounded in what is for Magic Me a classic model of intergenerational work. Magic Me built on this foundation to investigate new models – adapting practice to specific socio-cultural contexts.

Place and Space

Often in community arts practice, place and space are practical issues to be addressed. Where can people meet? Is it accessible? Is it appropriate? Is it available at a time that suits the participants? Throughout *Our Generations*, different kinds of questions about place and space emerged. This chapter illustrates how *Stepping out in Stepney* and *Wisdom of All Ages* developed directly in response to a shared sense of place, Stepney, and the physical space within which the projects took place, Queen Mary, University of London.

One of the aims of *Our Generations* was to develop models of arts practice that reach older people, particularly those over 75, who are at risk of isolation. *Phone a Friend* and *This is my Life* were models of arts practice which engaged with people in private and domestic spaces: people's homes or private rooms in care homes.

This chapter reflects on the impact of site on arts practice and how the *Our Generations* programme raises pertinent questions about where community arts practice can happen.

Realising Practice: Training and Organisational Support

This chapter addresses questions about training and support raised through *Our Generations*. New and existing models of intergenerational and community arts practice require specific skills. This chapter asks: what kinds of skills and training are required to support artists who are developing work in challenging contexts? And, what kinds of organisational assistance are required to support artists working in this way?

Performing Inclusion

Good intergenerational arts practice seeks to include each individual within the creative and relationship-building process. The principles which foster good practice are clear; but what approaches do artists use to ensure that people are genuinely included and not just 'in the room at the same time'? This chapter reflects on three exercises which illustrate the successful practice of inclusion.

The Art of Negotiation

The parameters of good arts practice go far beyond the creative work that happens with participants: it is an evolving negotiation and collaboration between everyone involved in the project – the arts organisation, the partners, individual staff at partner organisations, artists and participants. This chapter illustrates some aspects of these negotiations – between arts organisations and partners; between artists and participants; and between participants – which evidence the scale of time, care and rigour required to develop good arts practice.

Before looking at each of these areas of learning from *Our Generations* in detail, it is important to establish the socio-cultural contexts which frame this work: Magic Me's commitment in developing necessary and appropriate models of arts practice; an ageing society; the social and cultural context of Tower Hamlets; and recent research in the field of intergenerational practice.

Context 1: Magic Me and Creative Risk

Although there is no single definition of intergenerational practice, the most commonly used is from the Beth Johnson Foundation's Centre for Intergenerational Practice (CIP) which describes it as 'purposeful activities which are beneficial to both young people (normally 25 or under) and older people (usually aged over 50)'.¹ As well as being a useful definition it also provides us with what is, in effect, a classic model: two groups of people socially separated by age being given the opportunity to produce, create or experience something together.

Within *Our Generations*, the *Sense of Occasion* and *Sense of Adventure* projects illustrate Magic Me's use of this approach: one younger and one older group are identified; they prepare to meet each other through sessions run for their specific group; finally, the

1 Beth Johnson Foundation, Centre for Intergenerational Practice
<http://www.centreforip.org.uk/default.aspx?page=23455> [3/03/09]

groups meet and work together over a sustained period of time. This model has a solid frame which allows many variations to develop in response to the specific needs of the groups. Furthermore, from an organisational point of view, this tried and tested structure also enables the organisation to pre-empt and plan particular strategies for managing the project. It is a model of intergenerational arts practice which is robust, has integrity, works well for certain groups in particular contexts and, critically, has served Magic Me well in the past.

But the aim of *Our Generations* was to go beyond this: it was an opportunity to not only reflect on the organisation's current practice, but to acknowledge the social and cultural shifts in the local community context and to identify how Magic Me might develop new models of practice which respond to the specific needs of the communities within which it works.

Through taking creative risks, *Our Generations* asked: what models of arts practice are appropriate for working with different generations, not only generations at either end of the age spectrum? What approaches can respond to the specific needs of isolated older people who are at home? What types of practice can encourage families and friends of older people in residential care to find new things to share together? What happens when more than two generations meet?

As a result, some of the models that were developed and investigated during the programme broke the mould of classic intergenerational practice. Some brought together primary school children, university students and older people. Others were about developing relationships between people of the same generation. Theoretically they can be referred to as multi-generational or cross-generational, however they all share a fundamental aim which is about developing meaningful *inter*-action between people.

The following is a thumbnail guide to the programme's projects and where they fit along the intergenerational spectrum.

- As already discussed, *Sense of Occasion* and *Sense of Adventure* were based on the classic model of intergenerational arts practice: a younger group from a primary school worked with a group of older people in a care home over two terms.
- *Meet the Neighbours* brought together two youth groups and a pensioner group who, although based at the same community centre, had never, prior to the project, met.
- *The Media Group* was originally planned as an intergenerational photography group for active older people and young adults who would document the *Our*

Generations programme. In practice, a group of older adults formed the core of the Media Group, as there was difficulty in accessing and recruiting young people for the project.

- *Wisdom of All Ages* and *Stepping Out in Stepney* were new models of cross-generational practice working with groups from across four generations. In these projects, there were two groups who were under 25 years of age (a group from a primary school and a group of university students) and a group of older people from a community centre. In addition to this, the artists, teachers, care staff and other support staff working on the project, whose ages ranged from the early thirties to the early fifties, were explicitly acknowledged as another generation within the project.
- *This is my Life* aimed to support people who had recently moved into a care home, by developing a photography project that they could participate in with their families and friends. The specific aims of the project could not have been addressed through a classic model of intergenerational practice; the project sought to develop appropriate creative ways of working across generations within families.
- *Phone a Friend* was initially planned as a collaboration between active older people and older people who were home-bound to address issues of exclusion, isolation and confidence. Once again, a classic model of bringing a group of younger and older people together would not have been appropriate as the project worked with individual older people in their own homes. The practical difficulties in realising the original aims of the project shaped the subsequent development of it. *Phone a Friend* evolved into *Pen Friends*, a creative writing group whose members' ages range from 32 to over 75.

The following sections outline the various contexts which shaped and informed the development and realisation of *Our Generations*.

Context 2: An Ageing Society

One of the key aims of *Our Generations* was to develop and test models of arts practice to engage people who are over 75 years of age. This aim was informed by demographic shifts in the population and the identification of specific needs which result from them. Britain has an ageing population. The most recent census for England and Wales, taken in 2001, revealed that for the first time there are more people over 60 than there are children. The Office for National Statistics explains this shifting demographic:

‘ This ageing of the population reflects longer life expectancy due to improvements in living standards and health care. It also reflects the fact that there have not been any events with a corresponding effect on life expectancy like those of the first and second world wars.’²

There has been a particular growth in the number of people aged 85 and over: ‘On census day 1951, there were 0.2 million people aged 85 and over (0.4 per cent of the total population) in the UK. By census day 2001, this had grown to just over 1.1 million (1.9 per cent of the total population).’³ The number of people over pensionable age is projected to increase ‘from nearly 11.4 million in 2006 to 12.2 million in 2011, and will rise to over 13.9 million by 2026, reaching over 15.3 million in 2031’.⁴

This demographic shift has economic, political, social and cultural implications. Charities such as Age UK, the newly established organisation which merges Help the Aged and Age Concern, are promoting a greater awareness of these issues and are lobbying the Government to provide the types of specific support needed for an ageing population: ‘Rising life expectancy is not a problem to be solved but our greatest achievement. So, later life should be framed as a time of opportunity, achievement and contribution – not of need and decline.’⁵ This statement from Age Concern recognises both the possibilities of older age and the practical issues which need to be planned for. Key issues facing policy makers include equality, the prevention of social exclusion in later life, the provision of social care and, significantly for the projects under evaluation, intergenerational understanding.

These fundamental shifts in demography will impact on relationships between the generations and this is one of the key areas that Magic Me seeks to address through its work.

2 National Statistics Online 2001 Census
http://www.statistics.gov.uk/census2001/demographic_uk.asp [accessed 2/03/09]

3 National Statistics Online 2001 Census
http://www.statistics.gov.uk/census2001/demographic_uk.asp [accessed 2/03/09].

4 National Statistics Online 2001 Census
http://www.statistics.gov.uk/census2001/demographic_uk.asp [accessed 2/03/09].

5 Age Concern (2008), *Age Agenda*. London: Age Concern, p. 12.

Context 3: The social and cultural context of Tower Hamlets

Magic Me's work is rooted in the East London borough of Tower Hamlets. The Indices of Deprivation, which analyse statistics for employment, health, education, crime and the environment, reveal that Tower Hamlets is the second most deprived borough in London and the third most deprived area in England. This is evidenced by some key points:

- In 2002, 36% of the local population of pensionable age received Income Support – the highest proportion of any London Borough⁶
- 40% of older people live alone⁷
- Over 80% of the population of Tower Hamlets is estimated to be less than 50 years of age, with the under 20s comprising over a quarter of the population⁸
- Tower Hamlets has the highest rate of child poverty in London.⁹

Commission for Racial Equality research illustrates that Tower Hamlets is a densely populated and culturally diverse area:¹⁰

- Tower Hamlets has the largest proportion of any non-white ethnic group anywhere in Britain
- The black population in Tower Hamlets is about 12,000 people, or between 6% and 7% of the population. The average figure for London is 11%. There are almost equal numbers of Black African and Black Caribbean residents
- 37 % (72,000 people) of the borough's total population are Asian and 92% (66,000 people) of this group are Bangladeshi: a quarter of the entire Bangladeshi population in England live in Tower Hamlets

6 Our Generations – Evaluation Brief, Magic Me 2006, p. 7.

7 *Our Generations* – Evaluation Brief, Magic Me 2006, p. 7.

8 Tower Hamlets Public Health Report
<http://publichealth.thpct.nhs.uk/PublicHealthReport/index.aspx?pid=46> [accessed 3/04/09]

9 4 in 10: The End Child Poverty London Project,
<http://www.endchildpoverty.org.uk/london/child-poverty-in-london-the-facts/tower-hamlets-43/>
[accessed 3/03/09]

10 Commission for Racial Equality, Ethnicity Profile, London, Tower Hamlets,
<http://chinesesex.herechina.net/sitearchive/cre/diversity/map/london/towerhamlets.html> [accessed 5/4/09]

- Tower Hamlets has the largest population of Muslims in London - nearly 72,000 people
- The number of non-Bangladeshi Asian people is small – 3,000 Indians and 1,500 Pakistanis
- There are around 3,500 Chinese people living in the borough, giving it one of the highest concentrations of this group in London (nearly 2%)
- Many parts of the borough – especially the easternmost areas around the Isle of Dogs and Docklands – have undergone significant residential development during the last 25 years. This has attracted many recent migrants to the borough – Poplar had the highest numerical increase in England of foreign-born residents (15,000) between 1991 and 2001.

In early 2009, statistics revealed that the average property price in Tower Hamlets was £306,831: the average flat cost £295, 007 and an average terraced house, £444,174.¹¹ The result is that the children of older people living in the area find that they have to leave the borough to find affordable housing. Family and community networks are impacted upon.

These figures give an insight into the complex social, economic and cultural contexts which inform Magic Me's work. As an organisation it is committed to personal and community development through the arts: where people who live in the same locality but who are different to each other – in age, gender, cultural background and experience – have the opportunity to meet, to create something together, and, through this creation, to develop an understanding of, and relationship with, each other.

Context 4: The imperative for intergenerational practice

The Centre for Intergenerational Practice (CIP) states that:

‘Intergenerational practice aims to bring people together in purposeful, mutually beneficial activities which promote greater understanding and respect between generations and contributes to building more cohesive communities. Intergenerational practice is inclusive, building on the positive resources that the young and the old

¹¹ BBC, 'UK House Prices',

http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/shared/spl/hi/in_depth/uk_house_prices/html/bg.stm [accessed 3/04/09]

have to offer each other and those around them.¹²

There is a perceived sense of distance between people from different generations. This distance – the generation gap – is both real and imagined. The socio-political landscape of Britain at the beginning of the twenty-first century is very different from that of fifty years ago: migration, working patterns, family structures and educational opportunities have impacted on the everyday experience of people's lives. Beyond family structures, there are few opportunities for people from different generations to spend time with each other. The reality of this separation of generations shapes people's perception of those who are not 'the same as them': it fosters assumptions about what people can and can't do because of their age.

Age Concern's report, *Ageism: A Benchmark of Public Attitudes in Britain*, explores and describes ageism in the UK. The research found that, 'Ageism exists in Great Britain and is more commonly experienced across all age ranges in comparison to other forms of discrimination.'¹³ The report details that prejudice, based on assumptions about age, ability and interest, is illustrated in many social and cultural examples: restricted access to the work place after the age of 65; most motor insurers will not quote for new customers over the age of 75;¹⁴ limited, often comical, representations of older people on television and the rapidly falling rate of employment of older actors. In an age where it is possible and acceptable to have a 'lunchtime facelift' with a Botox injection, it appears that as a society we are happy to live longer as long as we *look* younger longer.¹⁵

Research evidences that discrimination can be addressed through positive contact between older people and those of other ages.

'It is thought that 'positive' contact (i.e. close, confiding contact of the kind that results from friendship) between groups of people can reduce stereotyping and prejudice, the causes of discrimination. A recent meta-analysis of 515 studies – dating from the 1940s through to 2000 and conducted in 18 nations – established a large evidence base to back up this theory. It shows a strong inverse relationship between contact

12 Centre for Intergenerational Practice,
<http://www.centreforip.org.uk/default.aspx?page=23455> [accessed 1/02/09].

13 S. Ray et al. (2008) *Ageism: A Benchmark of Public Attitudes in Britain*. London: Age Concern, p. 7.

14 S. Ray et al. (2008) *Ageism: A Benchmark of Public Attitudes in Britain*. London: Age Concern, p. 9.

15 Conversation with Susan Langford, 4/04/09.

and prejudice. And importantly, if an individual has positive contact with only one person of a different group, this can and does colour their views of that group as a whole.¹⁶

But what does 'contact' actually mean? Is it an encounter? A conversation? Or something much more structured over a longer period of time? What qualities must this contact have to facilitate shifts in attitudes and behaviour? Superficial contact can reinforce rather than challenge stereotypes. What does 'positive' contact look like and how can it be facilitated? As policy makers are increasingly aware of the potential benefits of structured intergenerational work it is vital to identify characteristics which foster 'positive' contact between people of different generations so that it can be, in the planning stages, distinguished from work which seeks to stage casual encounters between people from different generations. Age Concern proposes that elements of 'positive' contact are:

`equal status between the groups involved; cooperation towards common goals (such as a safer or greener neighbourhood); 'getting to know each other' (time and space for individuals to interact); and finally that stereotypes are disproved (ie that people learn something 'new' about each other).¹⁷

The possible impacts of positive intergenerational contact are many. The National Foundation for Educational Research report, *Intergenerational Practice: A Review of the Literature* (2008), surveys and analyses literature published since 2002 which advocates and evidences the effectiveness of intergenerational practice. It builds upon the findings from Granvilles's 2002 report, *A Review of Intergenerational Practice in the UK*, and asks: `what kinds of outcomes can be achieved through intergenerational arts practice and for whom? How do the outcomes for different groups relate to social objectives present in government policy? What are the characteristics of effective intergenerational practice?¹⁸

Springate et al. identify that there is no single model of intergenerational practice and that the term 'intergenerational arts practice' has no single definition and is used in different ways by different people. However, what the research does confirm is that:

16 Age Concern England (2008) 'Age Agenda'. London: Age Concern, p. 13.

17 Age Concern England (2008) 'Age Agenda'. London: Age Concern, p. 14.

18 I. Springate et al. (2008), *Intergenerational Practice: A Review of the Literature* (LGA Research Report F/SR262). Slough: NFER, p.1

- Effective intergenerational practice has the potential to generate positive outcomes for individuals and communities, as well as offering the possibility of contributing to a range of social policy agendas
- Four main outcomes were experienced by all participants, both old and young: increased understanding, friendship, enjoyment and confidence
- Outcomes specifically experienced by older participants related to health and well-being, reduced isolation and a renewed sense of worth, whilst outcomes specifically experienced by young people related to the gaining of specific skills and increased self-esteem
- Several outcomes for the wider community were identified, including improved community cohesion and the potential to address other community-related policy areas, as well as the diversification of volunteering and educational institutions becoming more involved in their communities.¹⁹

Through practising these principles of positive contact – equal status between groups, cooperation towards common goals and time to develop new understandings about themselves and each other – Magic Me are challenging assumptions about difference in a collaborative, creative and structured environment. It is hoped that, through these experiences, the participants can reflect these new understandings of equality and respect in a wider social context, beyond the geographical and temporal frame of a specific intergenerational arts project.

The following section of the report details how the evaluation of the *Our Generations* programme was carried out.

Evaluation Methodology

Evaluation is integral to the work of Magic Me. It is valued as a way of understanding what is happening in a project and why and how this learning can inform future projects. Magic Me are committed to developing understanding about intergenerational arts practice in order to develop their own work and, through dissemination of books, reports and training, they also seek to develop the practice of a wider community of artists and organisations. Through their Continuing Professional Development (CPD)

¹⁹ I. Springate et al. (2008), *Intergenerational Practice: A Review of the Literature* (LGA Research Report F/SR262). Slough: NFER, p. 5.

initiative and structured evaluation sessions, Magic Me work with artists to encourage and support them in developing appropriate ways of evaluating the projects they facilitate. The internal evaluation mechanisms of Magic Me are very robust. So what is the role of the external evaluator?

At its most simple, the role of the external evaluator is to understand the overarching aims and objectives of a project and to discern if, and how, they have been realised. There is no one model of evaluation: the way in which an evaluation is carried out depends on each project and the specific, agreed focus of the external evaluator.

The term 'external evaluator' may appear impersonal, suggesting someone who does evaluation *on* someone or something, in an effort to maintain a critical, objective distance. This kind of approach to evaluation is sometimes appropriate. However, it was not appropriate for the external evaluation of *Our Generations*. Magic Me's work is about fostering intergenerational relationships through the arts: it invites people to participate, to meet other people from different cultures or generations, to try new things, to negotiate the assumptions of others, and to make something together. In order to understand the rich possibilities and learning from within *Our Generations*, the external evaluation would have to find a way to be *inside* the programme of work whilst still maintaining an informed and objective position *outside* the work.

To be *inside* the programme meant that at times I participated in the project workshops. The artists and participants in each of the projects within the *Our Generations* programme in effect welcomed a stranger, the external evaluator, "the one writing about the projects", into the group, to be a part of it, if only for a brief time and in small ways. For example, over the course of the evaluation I was invited to take part in a creative writing session; elsewhere I joined in to make a human version of the letter B in a drama workshop; in an art workshop I helped someone to stick a photograph on a postcard; and, I have found myself, months after first hearing it, humming the chorus of a song written about what teaching and learning looks like from the collective perspective of primary school children, university drama students and older people.

This accommodation of the visitor has meant that the findings articulated in the evaluation of the *Our Generations* programme have been informed as much by the subjectivity of participation as the critical analysis of literature in the field.

The evaluation design I developed for the *Our Generations* programme mirrored the nature of the work itself: participation, dialogue and reflection. The evaluation research was carried out in the following ways:

- Observation: visiting each of the projects and, where appropriate, participating in workshops.
- Interviews: with project participants, staff at partner organisations, families and friends at celebration events, project artists, the Programme Manager for *Our Generations* and the Director of Magic Me.
- Reflection workshop with artists: in collaboration with the *Our Generations* Programme Manager, I devised and lead a Continuing Professional Development day for Magic Me artists. Many of the artists were involved in *Our Generations* projects.
- Literature Review: surveying literature on intergenerational practice, government policy, NGO commissioned research about age and society, and community arts and applied theatre practice.
- Review of internal and public materials pertaining to Magic Me: this included evaluations from previous and current Magic Me projects and reviewing publicly available materials about Magic Me including *Sharing The Experience* (Langford and Mayo, 2001), 'Getting Everyone Included: Report on a Magic Me action research project involving people with dementia and those who work with them' (Cotter et al., 2002), 'Report on a Programme of Continuing Professional Development and Good Practice' (Langford and Stirling, 2007) and the profile of Susan Langford and Magic Me in Gordon Brown's *Britain's Everyday Heroes* (2007).
- Evaluation meetings: over the course of the programme I met with the *Our Generations* Programme Manager and Director of Magic Me to give formal and informal evaluation feedback.

In the first section of this report, Kathryn Gilfoy gives a detailed account of each project in *Our Generations*: the aims and objectives; circumstances which shaped the project; outcomes; the impact of the project; and specific learning distilled from each project. Her report illustrates the range of work undertaken and the depth of internal evaluation which is characteristic of Magic Me's commitment to elicit and articulate the learning from its work. The second part of the report, the external evaluation, articulates learning drawn *across* the programme of work and, as outlined in the introduction, is structured in the following way:

- Intergenerational arts practice: what does good practice look like?
- Place and Space
- Realising Practice: Training and Organisational Support
- Performing Inclusion
- The Art of Negotiation

At times, I use diary notes, taken during a workshop, to illustrate a specific moment during the project and these are identified by being written in the present tense and indented.

People's names have been changed to protect their anonymity.

Section 2

Findings from *Our Generations*

1. Intergenerational arts practice: what does good practice look like?

The NFER report, *Intergenerational Practice: A Review of the Literature* (2008), has provided the intergenerational arts community with a clear framework and set of principles defining good practice:

- A long-term approach.
- Staff with appropriate skills and training.
- Preparation of participants.
- Activities that focus on developing relationships between generations.
- Activities that are shaped by participants and therefore meeting their needs.
- There are mutual benefits from the activities.²⁰

But what do these principles look like in practice? How is a long term approach defined? How are appropriately skilled staff identified and what kind of training is useful and necessary? How are artists supported in developing a project that prepares participants to meet each other and to build relationships with each other? In short, where do the parameters of intergenerational arts practice begin and end?

Intergenerational arts practice is not purely the moment when people of different generations meet to work on an arts project together. Rather it is a carefully negotiated practice which begins months, sometimes years in advance of groups ever meeting.

A useful illustration of the principles of good intergenerational arts practice was the *Sense of Occasion* project based at Hawthorn Green care home involving residents and pupils from nearby Osmani Primary School. The project ran weekly from October 2006 to April 2007. It demonstrated each of the factors needed for successful intergenerational practice and, furthermore, reflected Magic Me's working practice across all projects in

²⁰ I. Springate et al, (2008), *Intergenerational Practice: A Review of the Literature* (LGA Research Report F/SR262). Slough: NFER, p. 5.

the *Our Generations* programme.

The *Sense of Occasion* project invited the participants to explore stories linked to special events through puppetry, music and visual art. This was the first project I visited in the *Our Generations* programme. Even before I arrived at the activities room in the care home I could hear the children and older people singing 'Welcome to the Marble Memory Mansion', a song about what to expect when you go to a care home as a resident or visitor.

I was invited to join the circle of participants. A special game of bingo was introduced where, instead of calling out numbers, a series of sound clues were played. Each of these clues was related to the job that one of the older people had done. This had been a subject of discussion in a previous session. The group listened intently – the sound of an aeroplane, of cutlery, a snippet of a song about a match girl – and shouted out the name of the person who the sound referred to and the job they had done – working in a munitions factory, in a cutlery factory, selling matches. Together, the pairs of younger and older participants crossed this off their bingo card. By this time, the project had been running for over a term and it was clear that the room was full of people who knew and were comfortable with each other.

1.1 A long-term approach

Intergenerational arts practice requires a considerable investment of time to lay the groundwork for a successful project. In order to develop the *Sense of Occasion* project, Magic Me's Director and the *Our Generations* Programme Manager engaged in a series of conversations with management staff at Hawthorn Green and Osmani Primary School for at least six months before the project began. Magic Me had worked with both the care home and the school before on previous projects so each of the partner organisations (if not individual staff due to staff changes) was familiar both with each other and intergenerational arts work.²¹

Once an agreement is made in principle for a project to happen, there then follows a detailed discussion about the many practicalities involved: permission slips from

²¹ Coincidentally, one of the staff members in the care home had been a participant in a Magic Me project when she was attending school. She joined the staff after the initial planning phase, when the project was up and running.

parents; the resolution of school timetabling issues; negotiating lunch times at the care home; each of the partner organisations deciding who will participate and which staff will support the project. In addition to this, Magic Me needs to consider what art form may be most appropriate for a particular project. Sometimes Magic Me invites an artist who has taken part in Magic Me's intergenerational arts training to participate in the development conversations. At other times they may approach an artist when the project plans are in place. These discussions and decisions take time but are critical in building the structure that supports the aims and ambitions of the project.

A long term approach is also important and beneficial as, over time, an organisation will develop a greater understanding of the contexts they are working in and the specific needs and languages of partner organisations. With years of experience of developing partnerships with a range of organisations in educational, social care and community settings, Magic Me has learnt what each of the partners needs to do to enable a project to happen: it can anticipate and flag up recurrent practical issues that need to be addressed by a school, a care home or community centre. It has to understand the different concerns of partners in different contexts and the specific vocabularies they use: the language of Magic Me, a community arts organisation, has to accommodate the language of educational, social and health policy. It is not enough for the arts organisation to do 'arts speak': it has to learn the vocabulary of schools and care settings - it needs to know the difference between Individual Learning Outcomes and Individual Care Plans and why these matter. Ultimately, Magic Me has to negotiate robust, clear partnerships so that the artists it employs understand the context they are working in, what is expected of them and what is expected of each of the organisations in the partnership.

1.2 Staff with appropriate skills and training

When the project framework has been negotiated and agreed, the project itself is carried out by artists who are supported and managed by Magic Me. A puppeteer, a musician and a visual artist worked together on the *Sense of Occasion* project. Each of the artists brought with them their own particular expertise and, crucially, an understanding of the specificity of intergenerational arts practice.

The 'casting' of practitioners by Magic Me is perhaps their most important decision as they are both the face of the organisation and enable the aims of the project to be met in a creative, challenging and engaging way for the participants. An artist who may be very accomplished in their own field may not necessarily be confident in working in a community context and may not understand the specificity of intergenerational work. Magic Me has been proactive and committed to developing a group of artists who are

skilled in intergenerational arts practice. Between 2004 and 2006, it ran an innovative, unique programme of Continuing Professional Development and Good Practice. This prepared artists for the complex contexts that they would be working in as Magic Me developed new approaches to cross-generational community arts work.

It is significant that most of the artists working on the *Our Generations* programme had participated in some, if not all, aspects of this training and validated the necessity and ambition of this approach. This investment in artists had many returns: in interview, each of the artists acknowledged the impact of the training on their work. They felt that their work was valued and that they had learned a great deal about intergenerational arts practice, their own practice and that of other artists who had worked with Magic Me. The training also meant that the ambitions for *Our Generations*, as a programme of individual projects some of which set out to develop new models of practice, could be tested with confidence. Magic Me was sure that the artists they employed were prepared to work in a range of contexts and the artists felt that they were equipped to develop work in complex and challenging environments.

It is also important to note that in the *Sense of Occasion* project a team of three artists worked together with a group of 20 younger and older people. This ratio of artists to participants is reflected in much of Magic Me's practice. This allowed for each of the artists to take responsibility for different aspects of the session – if one artist was leading an activity, the others could be particularly aware of the participants and their needs. To employ three artists to work on a project which runs over two school terms is an illustration of the value that Magic Me places on supporting artists to work in an enabled and collaborative way.

1.3 Preparation of participants

Before the students at Osmani Primary School and the residents of Hawthorn Green care home met each other, each of the groups worked independently with the project artists for four weeks. In these separate but parallel sessions, each group was encouraged to discuss their expectations and assumptions about each other and to think about what they wanted the other group to know about them. The pupils made cards with their names and photographs for the older people. The older people made puppets, illustrated with information about themselves, to give the children a sense of who they were about to meet. This exchange of ideas, of information, before the groups met meant that when they finally did meet there was a sense of anticipation and recognition.

This time for preparation also gives the artists time to get to know each of the individuals

within the separate groups. They can identify any particular needs and ways to adapt activities, to ensure as full participation as possible: if a person has limited mobility, sight or hearing, activities can be planned and adapted to facilitate inclusion.

In addition to the work done separately with each group, there is also time planned with each group before and after a joint session. In *Sense of Occasion*, the students from Osmani Primary School would walk to Hawthorn Green and have time in a separate room at the care home to prepare for the shared session. This gave the project a sense of spaciousness – it was not rushed, it was a specific and substantial part of the week, it was valued. For the children, the time before the session allowed them to shift gears, to refocus – to stop worrying about who won the football match at lunchtime. The reflection after the session allowed the older participants time for a cup of tea and a chat, to gradually ease from the rhythm of the session to the usual rhythm of life in the care home. For the artists, the time before and after each joint session gave them the opportunity to discuss the work that had happened in previous sessions and to reflect on the session with the participants.

1.4 Activities focus on developing relationships between generations

When planning specific activities for intergenerational arts practice, artists need to consider, what is it about doing this activity *together* that makes it better than doing it separately? What does the ‘togetherness’ bring to the activity?

The *Sense of Occasion* project was rooted in the idea of occasion, of days which mark particular events in people’s lives and cultural frame of reference – birthdays, Halloween, New Year, Chinese New Year, Pancake Tuesday. This choice of theme allowed the artists to frame the project clearly and encouraged discussion between the groups about their individual sense of occasion – what days or events they knew about or mattered to them. During the project, two of the staff at the care home left and these departures were marked collectively by the group within the project.

The group made the *Marble Memory Mansion*, a large scale version of an Advent calendar (about 3 foot by 2 foot). Unlike a regular Advent calendar which has a door for each of the days leading up to Christmas, this calendar had doors which revealed an event that the group had chosen to explore. Materials from each session were put behind the door so the calendar acted as a point of reference, documenting what the group had done, as well as exhibiting their work. The calendar was an illustration of the shared experience of the group – reminding them of their shared history together, something within their collective frame of reference.

Other activities included the making of a Chinese dragon puppet: these kinds of activities, with a shared, practical point of focus, allow the younger and older people to work together, to negotiate with each other about how to make their section of the puppet. It is a concrete thing which depends on both participants working with each other and fosters an environment of collaboration and fun.

This careful approach, this consideration of specific activities that enables participants of different generations to work together, is central to intergenerational arts practice in general and something that has been illustrated by artists from different disciplines throughout *Our Generations*.

1.5 Activities are shaped by participants and therefore meet their needs

An artist working in an intergenerational context has to perform a particular balancing act: creating a robust conceptual frame for a project, whilst being able to identify and respond to the needs of the group and the individuals within it. There is a particular challenge in guiding the group's needs rather than deciding what direction you, the artist, want a group to go in. It requires flexibility and adaptability to think of appropriate, inclusive and engaging ways to structure activities in ways which support both the participants and the aims of the project.

One particular activity illustrated how an artist can work with material shaped by participants. The material for the lyrics of the song, *Marble Memory Mansion*, which became the signature tune of the group, was devised by the group. The group had a discussion about what people needed to know when they went to a care home. The musician carefully listened to what was being said and found a way to hold, shape and represent these ideas in the song. The fabric, as it were, of the song came from the group but it needed the musical expertise of the artist to shape it. The piece included phrases suggested by the participants who heard, through the singing of the song, their thoughts and opinions reflected back to them.

1.6 There are mutual benefits from the activities

Research in the field of intergenerational arts practice evidences that there are four main outcomes experienced by all participants, both old and young, through good

practice: "increased understanding, friendship, enjoyment and confidence".²² These outcomes were illustrated throughout *Sense of Occasion* and other projects in the *Our Generations* programme.

Over the two terms of the *Sense of Occasion* project, the artists observed small, significant and cumulative shifts in attitude between the two groups. Some of the older participants used wheelchairs, some had difficulty hearing or being heard, others had dementia: the younger participants, through both the preparatory work and the week-by-week, longer term nature of the project, found ways to negotiate people's different levels of ability to participate. They demonstrated an understanding that in the space of the session with the older people, they had to adapt their usual behaviour to support both the individual older people who they were working with and the group.

The children acknowledged that they were expected to do things differently in different spaces: the walk from the school to the care home allowed them to make a transition from one mode of behaviour to another, from being loud and running around when playing with their peers to being calm and considered when working in the larger group. One of the older participants remarked, "I didn't have any children and was wary about not knowing what I'd have in common with a 10 year old and a 10 year old must feel the same way. I was surprised by how gentle and considerate they were". The relationship between individuals was continually negotiated throughout the project as people realised and understood something new about others and themselves.

This sense of understanding was articulated throughout, particularly at the *Sense of Occasion* celebration event at the end of the project. At Stifford Street Community Centre, all the project participants held a mini-fair, sharing and reprising some of the things that they had done together: pancake making, making orange and clove pomanders and creating a puzzle made out of a map of the area. Also present were family members of the participants and staff from the school and care home. It was a busy event, with many things happening in different parts of the room. I observed the younger participants, immersed in the activity they were responsible for, whilst also being mindful of needs of the older people: one of the girls stayed with an older person in a wheelchair throughout the event – bringing her around each aspect of the fair, never leaving her unattended, leaning in to hear what she was saying, having a conversation. There was a sense of genuine enjoyment of being in each other's

22 Springate, I., Atkinson, M. and Martin, K. (2008), *Intergenerational Practice: A Review of the Literature* (LGA Research Report F/SR262). Slough: NFER, p. v.

company. In addition to the fair, there was a performance where the group shared songs and a shadow-play with their families and friends.

This sense of event, of a special occasion was re-iterated in many little but pertinent ways. One of the care workers at the home observed: "They were all looking forward to it. Elsie got her hair done". A project which set out to explore the idea of sense of occasion had, itself, created just that. When I asked one of the younger participants what the event was celebrating he said, "that there's more other people in the world besides ourselves and our families".

This chapter has outlined the principles of good intergenerational practice and how they have been modelled by Magic Me using a classic model of intergenerational arts practice. The care, detail and negotiation involved in *Sense of Occasion* are reflected in all of the projects under evaluation.

2. Place and Space

2.1 Tower Hamlets: A sense of place

Magic Me's work is rooted in the borough of Tower Hamlets. It is truly a *local* community arts organisation. Over the three year evaluation of *Our Generations*, I visited projects and celebration events across the borough and was struck by the range and number of different locations that Magic Me works in: primary schools, secondary schools and universities; community centres, residential care homes and specialist dementia units within care homes; and public spaces in the borough including Victoria Park, the Idea Store, Wilton's Music Hall and The Women's Library.

If you were to imagine a map of Tower Hamlets with a dot for each of the sites where *Our Generations* projects have taken place, the map would be heavily speckled. It's an illustration of Magic Me's sense of place, of their commitment to working locally, through the development of long term relationships with different partners.

2.2 "The East End is the best end" [lyric from *Stepping Out in Stepney*]

This sense of locality was reiterated and celebrated in the project, *Stepping Out in Stepney*. Throughout the three month project, groups from Osmani Primary School, Queen Mary, University of London (QMUL) and Jewish Care, Stepney Community Centre explored, through drama, music and film, their shared stories about the local area: what it's like to live in, how you get to school, different ways of moving around it,

things that have happened in its past. The project culminated in a performance in the Pinter Studio at QMUL:

The studio theatre is packed with more than 60 people - an audience of friends and family. The lights go down and a map of Stepney is projected onto the stage floor. The group take their positions: a scene set in a local café; a scene inspired by a local fish stall; a party. Live action is mixed with a documentary film which illustrates aspects of the group's collaboration. There are scenes shot in and around the local area: the number 25 bus, local landmarks, the groups arriving at QMUL after travelling from the school or community centre. The performance culminates in a song written with the group, based on their reflections on life in Stepney, which reiterated the site-specificity of this project and the shared sense of place celebrated by the group:

“Up and down the stairs,
Left, right. Left, right
Down Mile End Road and Vallance Road,
Left, right. Left, right.”

As the group sings, the lights dim and a map of Stepney is projected onto the group who are all wearing white tops. The outline of the streets and street names envelope the group: their faces fade in and out of focus, street names fade in and out of focus. People and places are merging. The cast is performing their group identity, celebrating a sense of place shared by individuals whose lives are shaped by very different social, cultural experiences.

The group's performance invited the audience to consider the geography of the area: QMUL is roughly a mile away from Jewish Care, Stepney Community Centre and Osmani Primary School. Although the physical distance between these places may seem very little, the actual distance in people's experience is vast: prior to the project, many of the QMUL students arrived at Mile End tube, walked to class and returned home without having any sense of the local area beyond campus; an eight year old girl, curious about what people in a university did, had the opportunity to see some of the possible things that can happen there; an older person who had lived in the area for years hadn't, until now, set foot in QMUL. The subject matter of the project became a means for people to reassess their sense of place: of who goes where and why they go there.

2.3 “It's huge, it's so local”

Miles Openshaw, an artist working with *Pen Friends* and on the *Sense of Adventure* project, lives in Tower Hamlets. He described how, through working with Magic Me,

his own sense of place was refreshed:

“I’ve lived here for 8 years and know it well but to actually be able to interact and chat to people who have lived there for generations is fascinating and gives you a feeling of attachment. I try and immerse my work around where I am – I like the drilling down. I’m not averse to looking at global things but there is something so immediate about living and working in the area – this is where I buy my fruit and veg, where I go to the pub, my local cinema – and to be able to talk to people about Victoria Park and how it has changed! That’s the fascinating thing. For me, as someone living in this community, it’s amazing to fill in the gaps and have other people’s thoughts about what the area is like – the elders and kids – talking to the carers: the majority come from elsewhere but are making their lives in the East End.”

I just feel that this is where everything has to start – in this tiny, tiny little place – and if it spreads, that’s great but it doesn’t need to spread – it can be contained, giving people experiences. You can do that on a local scale and you can make great changes by doing that. That kind of progression – it’s huge, it’s so local.”

This sense of place, this sense of commitment to the local, is integral to the work of Magic Me. In an age of globalisation, where there is a pressure to replicate, multiply and ‘roll-out’ successful practice, Magic Me retains its focus and belief in sustainable, local work. For the past 19 years, Magic Me has been working in the borough of Tower Hamlets. This focus and commitment have enabled the organisation to develop an extraordinary knowledge of the local area, its needs, challenges and possibilities. It is easy to romanticise arts work in locations far from home – to imagine that it is more demanding and valuable because it is in a different cultural context. Susan Langford contests this idea, advocating the necessity, value and often surprising nature of local work when she says, “It doesn’t have to be far away to be extraordinary”.

2.4 Site Specificity: A Sense of Space

The *Our Generations* programme also raised many questions about space: what usually happens in a specific space? Who goes there? Can the everyday functions of a particular space be re-inscribed with different possibilities through arts practice? Where can community arts practice happen? What does community arts practice in a domestic or private space look like? What kinds of support does an artist need to develop this work?

Often, intergenerational arts projects are held in a venue where one of the partner groups is already based or where they gather to meet. This fixed location frames a

certain expectation of what happens in that space. A dining room in a care home is inscribed with the smells and memories of food. A class room in a primary school suggests particular kinds of behaviours. Although each of the projects within *Our Generations* is distinctly different, one of the commonalities they share is that they disrupt assumptions of what can happen in a particular space and who can be there. By working in people's homes (*Pen Friends*), in bedrooms (*This is My Life*), in a variety of public setting (*Media Group*), an activities room (*Sense of Occasion*), artists facilitate the creation of different ways of being in a particular space. The groups participating in the *Wisdom of all Ages* project met at Queen Mary, University of London (QMUL). This site raised many questions about education, knowledge and wisdom which informed the content and development of the project.

2.5 Staging Questions about Education

QMUL is a world leading university and its Department of Drama has recently been rated the top drama department in the UK. The *Wisdom of All Ages* and *Stepping Out in Stepney* took place mainly on the QMUL campus. The reason the sessions took place at QMUL was initially circumstantial rather than planned. In previous Magic Me projects with Jewish Care, the work had taken place in the community centre. However, in the planning of *Wisdom of All Ages*, it emerged that the centre wasn't able to host the project, so alternative space was sought. QMUL was able to offer space so the primary school children and older people travelled to the Mile End Road campus each week for the project.

Rather than being a purely logistical concern, the specific space became a catalyst for discussion and creativity in the project. There were many questions raised and addressed in the project: What does a university look like on the outside? What does it feel like inside? How does an internationally respected research institution engage with its local community? Who can be at a university? Can knowledge and understanding be developed by people who are not university students or academics? What is the value of everyday experience and how can this be reflected on, shared and valued in an academic context? How can this shared knowledge, articulated throughout these community performance projects, inform people's understanding of cross-generational arts practice? Of multiculturalism?

Often intergenerational arts practice happens in the 'home' site of one of the groups – a primary school or, more often because of transport and mobility issues, a care home or community centre. The space becomes a place where people meet, a logistical consideration rather than a creative one. In the *Wisdom of All Ages* project, circumstance brought the issue of space centre stage and the artists embraced the possibilities

that this site-specific work offered. By responding to the site that the work took place within, the project offered a shared and equal platform for all the participants to begin a conversation about education, knowledge and wisdom that could not have been fostered in this way in another context.

During the performance of *Wisdom of all Ages*, the group read a list of things the audience could learn from them:

“We could show you:

patience

how to make triple chocolate brownies

how to stop someone from making your baby cousin cry

and horse jumping

You could learn to:

cut hair

to get along with other people

to try and learn new things

and to get your head to touch your feet backwards

We could teach you:

to sail a boat

to accessorise

new songs.”

This declaration of experience and group expertise, performed on a stage in a university, challenged the audience who witnessed the performance to consider their assumptions about knowledge: What is valued? How is it shared? Who can teach?

These questions and understandings about education, knowledge and wisdom were distilled in a conversation I overheard between two of the participants:

Azar (Osmani): “You can’t teach unless you learn.”

Milly (Jewish Care): “That’s a very clever thing you’ve said.”

2.6 Making Art in Private Spaces

In *This is my Life*, Marysia Lachowicz worked in Silk Court residential home with individual residents on a photography project to reflect and document their lives. Marysia worked with each resident, supported by the home’s Activity Co-ordinator and, occasionally, friends and family members of the residents. The work took place in

people's private rooms which had a bed, an armchair, a TV and, in most cases, personal objects.

The aims of the project – to support families, friends and staff involved in the care of older people – meant that classic models of intergenerational arts practice would not be appropriate. This specific model of arts practice was designed to facilitate the gentle, gradual relationship-building between the older person and staff, and to support families coping with a period of transition.

The intimate nature of this project and the space it took place within meant that the artist had to carefully build a relationship with each of the residents. The dynamics of the space – someone's private living and sleeping space – meant that the project could only be realised if there was a genuine sense of trust between the artist and each of the residents. The artist, on behalf of Magic Me, invited someone to participate in an arts project which reflected on their life. However she, in turn, needed to wait to be invited into someone's life. This is a significant thing to ask of anyone – participant or artist. To build this level of trust demanded time and for the artist to be prepared to bring something of herself to the project:

"I suddenly realised how much of me I give. You have to give quite a lot of yourself to get other people talking [...] I build a rapport by sharing my life with people so they feel comfortable to share with me. I've brought in my photos, ones that I've taken, so it works as a two way thing and they feel like they are getting to know me at the same time."

Often in intergenerational arts work there is an emphasis placed on relationship building between participants. In *This is My Life*, the design of the project and the physical space it took place within – people's bedrooms – highlighted the specific dynamic between artist and participants. In the more public arena of Live Art, there is a developing critique of one-to-one performance where artists invite individual members of the public to enter into a performance piece with them. Although the terms of engagement are very different, one-to-one community arts work which seeks to address the specific needs of individual older people raises questions about personal space, intimacy and skill. This is a highly specialist area of work which needs further research to detail its complexities and ensure that artists are offered appropriate training and that organisations understand the resources required to develop and support this work in the way that Magic Me demonstrates.

Questions of space and intimacy raised through *This is My Life* were reiterated during the *Phone a Friend* and *Pen Friends* projects. Elements of these projects also took place within a person's living space, their home, and raised pertinent questions about

where community arts practice *needs* to take place. As the population becomes older and sections of the population become less comfortable in spaces outside of their home, how can arts organisations respond to their needs and address issues of social exclusion, isolation and loneliness? These new models of practice highlight the needs and challenges of developing such work: they may be clearly defined on paper but demand very specific skills, experience and support in practice.

3. Realising Practice: Training and organisational support

“The quality of work correlates with the quality of relationships.” Sue Mayo’s insightful comment distils the essence of good community arts practice: relationships take time to build and good relationships between people enable them to take creative risks together.²³ Mayo’s comment referred to the specific relationships built between participants in a project, ‘the bridge building’: however, the principle of this statement can be applied to the relationship between an arts organisation and the artists it employs.

In interview, each of the artists who worked on a project within the *Our Generations* programme commented on the training and support offered by Magic Me. Most of the artists had participated in Magic Me’s three year programme of Continuing Professional Development and had benefited from this in a range of ways: the acquisition of new skills, having a supportive environment to share, reflect and debate practice, a sense of being valued and nourished and being part of a community of artists committed to developing excellent practice.

Artists also commented that Magic Me include planning and reflection time within contracts and that the organisation paid artists well compared with many other organisations. The support offered by Magic Me – the CPD, the acknowledgement and value of people’s skills, expertise and time – demonstrates that Magic Me recognises the need to build relationships with the artists they employ. In turn, the artists are supported in facilitating relationship building between the different groups they are working with. This virtuous circle built on care, planning and commitment enables ambitious inter-, cross-generational and one-to-one community arts practice to be imagined and realised.

23 Sue Mayo is an Associate Artist with Magic Me who worked on two of the projects within the *Our Generations* programme.

Within Magic Me's practice, classic models of intergenerational arts practice often have a team of at least two artists working together in a very structured way. In the *Our Generations* programme, *Phone a Friend*, *Pen Friends* and *This is My Life* were led by one artist. These projects were dependent on the artist developing a relationship with individuals over a longer period of time in challenging circumstances. These models of practice require specific additional support to enable the artists to reflect, plan and discuss the project. Within *Our Generations*, this support was provided by the Programme Manager, Kathryn Gilfoy. The role carried considerable responsibility: attending to the overarching shape of the programme whilst responding to the specific needs of each project and partnership, and the unexpected issues that arise on a daily business.

As Magic Me plans new models of arts practice in response to local, social and cultural needs it is vital that the organisation continues to support the development of the artists it works with to enable the ambitions for this practice to come to fruition.

4. Performing inclusion

Good intergenerational arts practice seeks to include each individual within the creative and relationship building process. The principles which foster good practice are clear but what approaches do artists use to ensure that people are genuinely included and not just 'in the room at the same time'? This chapter reflects on three exercises which illustrate the practice of inclusion: each example is drawn from *Wisdom of All Ages* and *Stepping Out in Stepney*, the cross-generational projects with participants from Osmani Primary School, Drama students from QMUL and elders from Jewish Care, Stepney Community Centre.

4.1 Each person is needed

Wisdom of All Ages: Osmani Primary School, October 2007.

In this preparatory session with the primary school children everyone is in a circle on their hands and knees, their shoulders touching. Ali Campbell, one of the lead artists on the project, asks everyone to lift their right hand and place it on the floor, between the hands of the person next to them.²⁴ The circle of hands is now latticed.

24 Ali Campbell is a Senior Lecturer at QMUL who teaches an Applied Performance course. The

Ali then asks the group to tap the floor, one hand at a time, in the order that they appear in the circle. Very tentatively, the group taps the floor. There is much giggling which fades to silence as people look at the criss-crossed hands, trying to figure out who owns what hand. The rhythm builds, falters and is re-established as people focus on the order of the hands in the circle. The air is thick with concentration. Gradually the rhythm develops into a confident, sustained patting of the floor. There is a sense of achievement and pleasure as something initially difficult is mastered through the group's shared commitment.

This apparently simple exercise illustrates a great deal about the dynamics in the room: this game models a group dynamic where each person is needed equally in order to create an unbroken circle of sound. Each person is dependent on each other to complete the circle. Everyone can hear and see each other working as a group.

This image of a circle of criss-crossed hands is a distillation of the principles of practice which echo across *Our Generations*. These principles are not only specific to intergenerational work but are key to all good community arts practice. The exercise *performs* rather than describes inclusion.

4.2 'We are more than we appear to be'

As discussed previously, good practice will give participating groups time to work alone before they meet and work together, allowing each group to consider and reflect on their expectations and assumptions about the group they will be meeting. It gives each of the groups an opportunity to think about how they may be perceived by others. These sessions also encourage the participants to recognise that each person, regardless of age, cultural or religious background, has a variety of interests and experience that challenges the idea that everyone in a particular group is the same.

It is a complex idea to understand that each person's identity is a mosaic of influences rather than one specific label, i.e. child, young person, older person, student, artist, care worker, Bangladeshi, Jew, male, female. However, one particular drama exercise facilitated the participants' understanding of this.

students on this course were one of the generations participating in the project whilst learning about facilitating intergenerational arts practice.

Stepping Out in Stepney. Osmani Primary School Gym. October 2008

The pupils from Osmani Primary School and the students from QMUL are standing in a circle. It is the first time that these groups have met. After some warm up games where the group experiments with different ways of moving across the circle, Sue Mayo, one of the lead artists on the project, introduces a drama exercise. She asks the group to look around the circle and to notice how people are arranged: there are clumps of pupils and clusters of students.

Sue then asks the group to rearrange themselves based on people's height. The circle fragments as people assess where they fit into this new arrangement of the group: people are standing back to back, asking for others to help judge who is taller. A new circle is made. Sue asks the group to look around the circle and see how the group is now arranged. All of the same people are in the room but they are arranged differently.

The game continues. Sue asks the group to rearrange themselves based on the month in which they were born. The circle scatters and reforms as people negotiate their position, asking each other about their birth month and date, rearranging the circle in birth-date and month order. Once again, another version of the group is articulated in this new formation of the circle.

The exercise develops further and the circle is unmade and remade determined by the first letter of people's names, gender and shoe colour.

This drama exercise illustrated that this gathering of people was more than the sum of its parts, i.e. a group of primary school and university students: it revealed that identity is much more complex and negotiated than group labels and that people can be many different things all at the same time. Through participating in the negotiation of the formation of a circle, the group demonstrated their understanding that we are, in the words of one of the students, "more than we appear to be".

4.3 Celebrate the individuals who make the group

Wisdom of All Ages. Queen Mary, University of London. November 2007

Thirty six people are sitting in a circle in the rehearsal room of QMUL: pupils from Osmani Primary School, drama students from QMUL and elders from Jewish Care. For nearly two months, a team of artists has been working with each of the three groups, separately and then together, on the theme of wisdom.

Julian West, a musician, has carefully listened to the group's thoughts on teaching and learning in previous sessions and has distilled them into the lyrics of a song.

"Take a moment,
Show me your hands.
Lines of wisdom
Written in your hands.
We can learn
And we can teach you
The wisdom of all the ages.

Some say teaching is like watering flowers,
Adding to the soup of knowledge.
Learning is eating
Going on a journey
Spiralling around and around."

The lyrics of the song also reflect stories told by individuals in the group over the past two months – learning to ride a bike, working as a journalist, learning to swim – which have now become part of the shared memories of the group.

"There are hands that are all fingers and thumbs
Typing up the story for the newspaper.
Hands that will hold you steady on your bike – ding!
Or gliding through the water as you swim."

The group devised gestures to accompany the lyrics. As I sat within the singing circle, learning the lyrics and gestures, I was struck by the extraordinariness of this event: this particular combination of people, who wouldn't ordinarily have the opportunity to meet, had developed a strong sense of group identity based on an understanding of the individuals in the room. This was not an anonymous gathering of people – this was a room full of individuals who have been witnessed by each other. This sense of recognition of the individuals, who together make this specific group, was reiterated through the performance of the song. Each time they sang a line or made a gesture, the group was reminded that these words and gestures came from this particular group who had rigorously and playfully discussed their understandings of teaching and learning. Through the song, the group was modelling teaching and learning, they weren't just saying, "this is what we think it is", they were performing it, illustrating it through enactment.

The theme of the project, learning and teaching, was embedded in the practice of the

project which recognised the specificity of *this* group. The lyrics and gestures for the song, *Wisdom of All Ages*, had come from this particular group of individuals: another combination of people would have come up with different stories and ideas which would have been articulated in a different way.

Because cross-generational arts practice by its very nature takes place in such varied social contexts, projects cannot be replicated in a 'one size fits all' approach. Existing models of cross-generational practice provide a foundation for planning a project but each project needs to recognise and adapt to the specific needs of the participating groups. Excellent and ambitious inter- and cross-generational arts practice requires artists with specific skills and expertise to facilitate the creative and collaborative shift from, to use Sue Mayo's phrase, "a crowd of people in a room at the beginning [to] become a room of individuals" who have developed relationships with each other as part of the same group.

5. The Art of Negotiation

The *Our Generations* programme was imagined, planned, developed and realised through continuous negotiation: between Magic Me and project partner organisations; between Magic Me and artists; between participants; between artists and participants; and between artists from different disciplines. Negotiation is a live act: it demands vigilance, perception, dialogue, time and care.

The following section illustrates some of the range, depth and complexity of negotiations which have shaped the *Our Generations* programme.

5.1 Negotiation between Magic Me, partner organisations and staff

Throughout *Our Generations*, Magic Me negotiated partnerships with many organisations. When negotiating with a school, Magic Me considered the cultural context of the school: the demands of the timetable, the needs of the pupils and how these would be supported within a particular project. When negotiating with a residential home, Magic Me considered the practicalities of working in this context: how to support visiting family and friends in their participation in a project, the help that the staff may need in understanding and supporting this work, including how to 'read' the impact of a project on the elders and how this could be documented in a resident's care plans. As an organisation, Magic Me is continually negotiating assumptions, expectations and needs of all involved in a project.

One of the key objectives within the *Our Generations* programme was to develop and test models of practice to engage and support those aged 75 and over. Access to people in this age group is often mediated through a community centre, care home or support agency such as LinkAge. In order for Magic Me to work effectively with such organisations, it is imperative that a genuine partnership is negotiated so that the expertise and responsibility of each organisation is declared and acted upon. The amount of time it takes to nurture and establish relationships cannot be overestimated.

Within community centres and care homes, organisational partnerships are dependent on individuals within the organisations. Often the development or sustainability of a project is dependent on this individual's belief in the possibilities of personal and community development offered through the arts work. Over the three years of the *Our Generations* programme, some individuals in key positions in partner organisations left or were absent at crucial times. Although someone else filled their positions, they did not necessarily share their predecessor's understanding of, or commitment to, arts practice. The impact of the departure/absence of specific individuals who brokered and managed partnerships between a specific home and Magic Me was substantial. Without another person in the home to take responsibility to facilitate a project, Magic Me found itself in a position where it was, essentially, managing the project on behalf of both sides of the partnership. This had a direct impact on the demands made on Magic Me, particularly the Programme Manager who, in turn, sought to absorb and deflect this impact from the project artists. Personnel changes in partner organisations had a substantial impact on *Sense of Occasion*, *Phone a Friend*, *Meet the Neighbours* and *This is My Life*.

During project negotiations, a letter of agreement was drawn up outlining specific roles and responsibilities for each partner. Within a care home, these agreements were made by managers on behalf of the organisation. However, it is the care staff who are working with residents on a day-to-day basis who need to understand and commit to supporting individuals and the project in order to maximise potential. To facilitate this, Magic Me offered training to the care staff to encourage their understanding of, and participation in, a project.

Magic Me was also keenly aware of the practical, social and cultural issues faced within care homes and sought, through this training, to acknowledge and address them. Although, in classic intergenerational arts practice, much of the focus is on the relationships between people from different groups, it is vital not to ignore that people who are identified as being part of the same group, who live and work in the same space, may not have had the opportunity to build relationships with each other. Sometimes it is more difficult to establish a new kind of relationship with someone who is already familiar to you. Within a care home setting, staff and residents have a

prescribed relationship and there may be little opportunity to challenge expectations of what is shared or known of each other. Staff in the homes may not be from the East End of London or England. This cultural diversity means that there are fewer shared points of reference. Sally Knocker, an artist on *Sense of Adventure*, highlighted this when reflecting on the project:

“The other thing that has been fascinating about working on this project is working with staff teams that are predominantly non-British. With the children, the cultural difference is not so much of a barrier because they have been raised in Britain and they are very in touch with British cultural references, but a lot of the staff teams we are working with, have second language English. So, for me, there is a piece of work to be done around helping care staff from different cultural backgrounds to know how to promote conversation.”

If care staff within a partner organisation participate in a project, it opens up the possibility for new relationships and understandings to be built between staff and residents. This new understanding may reveal itself in small but significant ways which can further develop a sense of community within a care home.

5.2 Renegotiation of a project: From *Phone a Friend* to *Pen Friends*

The original idea for *Phone a Friend* developed out of a recognised need to support older, home-bound people who are potentially very isolated. In the first section of this report, Kathryn Gilfoy outlines the various stages in the renegotiation of this project from *Phone a Friend* to *Pen Friends*. By reflecting throughout the first year of the project it was possible for Magic Me, in discussion with the lead artist, participants and partners, to acknowledge the limitations and challenges of the initial approach. Modification and negotiation ensured that despite the fact that the initial project was unable to develop as planned, Magic Me acknowledged the possibilities and opportunities offered by the circumstances. Rather than seeing the project as a failure because it didn't turn out the way they expected it to, Magic Me saw it as an opportunity to adapt the essence of the idea to develop a more appropriate model. Informed by the writing group's enthusiasm, skill and desire to develop, Magic Me continued to support the development of this project from *Phone a Friend* to *Pen Friends*. As the official *Our Generations* programme draws to a close, the *Pen Friends* writing group continues to work together.

5.3 Negotiation between artists and artistic disciplines

During the planning of each project, Magic Me considers the specific art form and artists that may be appropriate. There are a number of considerations that Magic Me has to take into account:

- What is the experience of the artists – do they have specific experience of working with a particular age group or working intergenerationally?
- Will the artist be working as part of a team or as a lead artist supported by a project manager?
- Is it appropriate to have a support artist working on a project?
- What art form(s) are most appropriate with particular participants?

By bringing artists from different disciplines to work on projects together, Magic Me is providing opportunities for artists to develop new working relationships and to challenge and invigorate their own practice by working in collaboration with another artist within a specific social and cultural context. This supported space – where new relationships and new ways of working can be tested – is a rare and valuable thing. A number of the artists have commented on how much they have learnt about their own practice through working with artists from different disciplines and in specific contexts.

Sally Knocker and Ginny Carvisiglia were the lead artists on *Sense of Adventure*. Sally's background is in theatre and she has considerable experience as a drama therapist, working with older people and as a trainer for staff in care home settings. Ginny is a visual artist who has trained as an art therapist and has significant experience working with young people and in a range of community settings. *Sense of Occasion* was the first intergenerational project that Sally worked on and was Ginny's third project with Magic Me. The artists had met during Magic Me's CPD training but this was the first time that they had worked together.

Both artists commented on how this project informed their own understandings about intergenerational arts practice, their individual practice and collaborative practice. For Ginny, her independent artistic practice and intergenerational arts practice reflect and inform each other:

“Doing this work makes me feel like I'm continuing to be creative. It's not the same as a lot of my other work where you have your art practice and you have your work and they are very different. It does feel like a creative thing. I suppose in a way it keeps me quite enthused about my own work and the other way around as well. Doing my own

work keeps me enthused about Magic Me. Yes, it probably does feed into it more than I think.”

Outside of Magic Me, much of Sally’s work is training staff in care homes to work with older people, particularly those with dementia. Collaborating in an intergenerational arts project has informed her practice in an immediate way:

“This work [with Magic Me] has really helped me in my other work. In training, I use lots of anecdotes. [...] I’m always saying in training that no doesn’t always mean no when an older person says they don’t want to come [to an activity]. It’s been so significant on this project. The amount of times when the older people have said that they haven’t wanted to come, then they have and they have had a ball. It really made me realise how a lot of the staff get really into this thing about choice, not pushing people to do things because it’s their choice not to do things. But actually when people are quite low and depressed in care homes, they will always say no unless you really cajole. I’ve always known that but it has manifested itself a lot on this project – how important it is to get beyond that initial resistance. And that helps when I’m talking to staff because [...] for instance, last week, Charlotte started off very depressed and said, ‘I don’t want to come, nobody can hear me, I can’t hear anybody.’ She was really low. But by the end of the session her whole body language had changed. She was sitting upright and sparkling. Just totally a different person. And I thought, if I’d have respected her initial choice not to come, she’d have missed this. But it’s a tricky one because if it’s not done with sensitivity and someone was cajoled in a really pressured way... [it is about] teaching staff about how far to go. That’s been good to see in action.”

5.4 Negotiation between participants

All of the projects within *Our Generations* have revealed the complex process of individuals negotiating and building relationships with each other. It takes time to understand someone, their specific interests and what you share with them. Ginny Carvisiglia reflected on the developing relationships she witnessed in *Sense of Adventure*:

“Aliya was working with Bridget. In the beginning she was a bit unsure and I overheard this. But [as the project developed], I could hear them greet each other – “ Hello Bridget!” “Hello Aliya!” – and it was really nice, they were recognising each other and having their own particular way of saying hello. Anne had a very nice relationship with Afan. She was constantly talking about his hair, how nice it was. He was initially embarrassed but then he started laughing about it - it became their thing. One of the boys, Iqbal, was working with Eleanor – the stories he got from her, he got so much

detail – you can tell that he was really talking with her and listening. Felix and Arthur – Felix has a grandfather with Alzheimers and he is so patient with Arthur. Arthur has his good days and his bad days and Felix has coped really well. I think, in the beginning, most of the children found it quite hard. There were a couple of them who wanted to swap their partners, but nobody has actually said they wanted to swap again.”

Ginny’s comments illustrate not only the relationship-building between participants but the awareness, care and insight that inform the artists’ relationships with the participants.

A different sense of negotiated relationship was evident in *Pen Friends*. As the group developed, it became clear that this was a group of people who enjoyed each other’s company whilst being committed to the active engagement, critique and development of each other’s work. The range and depth of discussion spilled beyond the writing exercises to include ballet, fine art and Shakespeare. The conversation within the session is a vital aspect of the group’s cohesion. Surya Turner, the lead artist on *Pen Friends*, reflected on the dynamic of the group and how she negotiates the rhythm of sessions:

“They are all very strong characters. It’s a good place for discussion, lots of things come out of what we write about. People sense that it’s a forum for people to say things. They have a trust and support for each other; that comes out in the reading and feedback to each other. Overall, it’s the meeting of people through the art of writing but it’s also for people who want to come and have a chat. It’s a concrete thing in our diaries – we all know that this is going to happen – that’s the thing I like. There is this thing we have to achieve but people can also talk more or less about what is happening in their lives.”

During one *Pen Friends* session I observed that a woman arrived who wasn’t part of the regular group. The core group were very accepting of her. She participated in all the writing exercises and discussions. There is a tone in the way the group works – ‘you are here, we are here, let’s write’ – which illustrated that the group’s identity was robust enough to accommodate this visitor.

The group’s sense of the craft of writing was illustrated throughout the session: when someone would offer to read something, the group would listen attentively and give feedback which was both responding to the content and to the form and structure through which it was expressed. This peer-negotiation and ability to constructively critique each other’s work was developed by the artist’s ability to negotiate the needs of the group and the rhythm of each session. Surya commented that:

“You have got to give people enough time to get into talking about things. It’s making

that space where people feel confident enough to do it – I am measuring how much time people need to write, to reflect.”

There are currently two collections of writing which have developed from the creative writing projects in *Our Generations: Touching the Sky* from the *Phone a Friend* project and *Moments in Time* by *Pen Friends*. The stories encompass a panoply of subjects: journeys, exile, childhood, justice, joy, disappointment, memories, expectations and faith. The range of subjects and craft in their writing is a declaration of each person’s negotiated sense of themselves, the stories they have to tell and a belief in an audience who will hear them.

Conclusion

This conclusion summarises the key findings of the Our Generations external evaluation.

Our Generations was an opportunity for Magic Me to reflect on existing successful models of intergenerational arts practice whilst developing new approaches to working with people of different generations from diverse social and cultural contexts. The site of the programme was the London Borough of Tower Hamlets.

This evaluation

This evaluation identifies, documents and reflects on moments in the programme which demonstrate the good practice present in the *existing* models of work - models that have been the backbone of Magic Me's approach for nearly twenty years and highlights specific issues arising from the much broader range of *new* models explored and developed within *Our Generations*.

The learnings from the programme will inform Magic Me's future practice and, it is hoped, the wider field of intergenerational and community arts work, a field driven by significant demographic change. At the turn of the twenty first century, Britain has, for the first time, more people over 60 than under 18 years of age. Attained through improved living standards and health care this should be viewed as an achievement but it must also be recognised that the UK is a society with conflicted attitudes towards ageing. Given this, within the policy arena, there has been an increased interest in the potential of intergenerational activity to address issues of ageism, social segregation and exclusion. At this particular moment it is vital that the field articulates and evidences 'good' practice, advocates for its efficacy and argues for continued investment in innovative and appropriate approaches.

Our Generations set out to explore such approaches but it also reaffirmed what is already known and agreed – that 'good' practice:

- Takes a long term approach
- Provides artists and staff with appropriate skills and training
- Prepares participants in advance of a project
- Creates activities which focus on developing relationships between people
- Is shaped by and for the needs of participants.

It is the finding of this evaluation that Magic Me demonstrated the principles of good practice throughout each of the projects within *Our Generations*. But the imperative for *Our Generations* was not only to demonstrate the known but to explore the unknown. Traditionally intergenerational practice has brought together two groups of participants – one younger (under 25) and one older (over 50). This dynamic, viewed as being the ‘classic model’, is valuable in specific contexts and forms an important part of Magic Me’s work. However, as the context and the demographic changes, there is a need to develop different models of arts practice which respond to this reality. Through taking creative risks, Magic Me designed new models of arts practice to address the socio-cultural needs of communities within Tower Hamlets. These new models, described within the body of this report, investigated:

- Approaches for working with different generations, not only generations at either end of the age spectrum.
- Approaches which responded to the specific needs of isolated older people, particularly those over 75, at home or living in residential care settings.
- Practices which encouraged families and friends of older people in residential care to find new things to share together.
- Practices bringing together more than two generations.

These new models of practice were beneficial for participants and have developed Magic Me’s understandings about community arts practice and the contexts within which it takes place. This report finds that the original aims and objectives of *Our Generation* were successfully met. However, this evaluation is not only about accountability, illustrating that Magic Me did what it said it would do: it offers the opportunity to reflect on broader issues that arose from the programme.

The following is a summary of key observations within the external evaluation:

Magic Me

Magic Me is committed to individual and community development through the arts. It brings together people who live in the same locality but who are separated by age, gender, cultural background and experience. Through this intervention, individuals have the opportunity to meet, to create something together, and through so doing, develop both an understanding of, and relationship with, each other.

Through practicing the principles of positive contact – equal status between groups, co-operation towards common goals and time to develop new understandings about

themselves and each other – Magic Me are challenging assumptions about difference in a collaborative, creative and structured environment.

Place and Space

A sense of place, of commitment to the local, is integral to the work of Magic Me. This investment and commitment to the area has enabled Magic Me to develop an extraordinary knowledge of the locality, its needs, challenges and possibilities which was evidenced throughout *Our Generations*.

It is sometimes easy to romanticise arts work in locations far from home. *Our Generations* demonstrated the challenges, complexities, value and, at times, surprises of arts practice infused with a sense of place.

In an age of globalisation, where there is a pressure to replicate, multiply and ‘roll-out’ successful practice, Magic Me retains its focus and belief in sustainable, local work. However this does not mean that the work is insular: the learning from and about the local is disseminated, nationally and internationally, through Magic Me’s training, documentation and publication of research.

Space is not only a venue. Often in community arts practice the choice of venue is determined by practical issues of access and availability. However *Our Generations* revealed the resonance of certain spaces for participants. By developing work in venues that participants may not previously had access to, it allowed them to see their own locality and their possibilities in it differently.

Many of the projects within the programme took place in schools, community centres, care homes and other semi-public spaces. However some of the projects took place with individual older people in their homes or in private rooms in residential care settings. *Our Generations* raised pertinent questions about where community arts practice can and *needs* to happen.

As the population becomes older and sections of the population become less comfortable in spaces outside of their home, how can arts organisations respond to their needs and address issues of social exclusion, isolation and loneliness? Through *Our Generations*, Magic Me demonstrated arts organisations can appropriately respond to these needs by developing practice with individuals rather than groups.

Training and Support

Magic Me's programme of Continuing Professional Development prepared artists to work in complex and challenging contexts within *Our Generations*. As Magic Me plans new models of arts practice in response to local social and cultural needs it is vital that the organisation continues to support the development of artists to enable the ambitions for this practice to come to fruition.

One-to-one community arts work requires a considerable investment of time and resource. *Our Generations* evidenced that it takes artists with specific skills to be able to develop this practice and that it makes significant demands on an organisation to support it. One-to-one work is more expensive than larger group work however, if as a society we are committed to engaging isolated older people, it is imperative that this work is invested in.

Negotiated Practice

Because community arts practice, by its very nature, takes place in such varied social contexts, projects cannot be replicated in a 'one size fits all' approach. Existing models of practice provide a foundation for planning a project but, as was the case in this programme, each project needs to recognise and adapt to the specific needs of the participating groups.

Good community arts practice seeks to include each individual within the creative and relationship building process. Through *Our Generations*, Magic Me sought to ensure that people were genuinely included throughout the project and not just in the room at the same time. The *Our Generations* programme revealed the continuous negotiation required to develop this work. Negotiation is a live act.

The idea of intergenerational or community arts practice is very appealing: people come together to meet, explore ideas and build relationships through creative arts practice. However the reality is complex. Ultimately this evaluation report advocates for the importance of a long term approach in developing excellent community arts practice. Magic Me have, through *Our Generations*, revealed the rich benefits of such an approach: it enabled the organisation to understand, question, dream, plan, realise, document and reflect innovative approaches which have advanced the field of intergenerational and community arts practice.

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