Luminate, Scotland's
creative ageing organisation

luminate

Creative ageing in the pandemic:

10 things we've learned about working digitally and remotely with older people

Welcome

Luminate is Scotland's creative ageing organisation. Our vision is that all older people can take part in high quality arts and creative activities, whatever their background and circumstances, and wherever they live.

If you would like to find out more about what we do, or have a question to ask:

Visit our website at **www.luminatescotland.org**
Email us at **info@luminatescotland.org**
Telephone us on **0131 668 8066**

Photo credits: Page 4, fourth image - Willie Urquhart, West Highland Free Press. All other photographs that appear in this document are of the participants and artists who took part in the four projects, and of the work they created.

Creative ageing in the pandemic

explored how artists can work remotely to offer live, creative activity for older people in care homes and at home.

Here's what we learned...

We're delighted to share with you what we've learned from four creative projects that matched artists with care homes and organisations supporting older people during the pandemic.

Each project explored how artists could work remotely to safely offer live, creative activity for people in care homes and at home.

They worked closely with staff during winter 2020/21 to lead creative sessions remotely using Zoom or telephone.

This booklet shares 10 key things we learned from these projects, which we hope will support and inspire you to build on this work, tailor it to your own practice, support similar projects, or simply learn more.

From the Luminate Team

Creative ageing in the pandemic

introducing four projects

This booklet shares what we learned from four creative partnerships that were piloted between November 2020 and March 2021. It draws on interviews and discussions between those involved: the artists, care homes and organisations, and participants. The projects were:

Digital dance

with Anderson's Care Home

Choreographer Chris Stuart-Wilson worked on a dance project with older people and staff at Anderson's Care Home in Elgin. Inspired by a different musical theme each week, Chris worked alongside staff and older people - via Zoom - to create and learn dance routines and physical movements to music.

Art online

with Ancaster House

Artist Tracy Gorman worked on an arts and crafts-based creative project with the staff and two groups of older people at Ancaster House Care Home in Crieff. Using a range of materials and activities, and meeting via Zoom, the sessions built week-on-week to create a gallery of art for the home's walls.

Telephone stories

Writer Lesley Wilson led **Telephone stories**, a telephone-based project to gather and capture the stories of older people. She worked in partnership with SEALL - a community-focused performing arts charity in Skye.

Working one-to-one with three individuals, Lesley held hours of conversation to hear stories from their lives, then worked collaboratively with the participants to edit and refine a written record.

Changing view
with Lizdean Nursing Home

Photographer Jenny Wicks created photography-based creative activities with the older people and staff at Lizdean Nursing Home in Kilmarnock. They trialled a range of approaches - exploring reflections and shadows, composing still life scenes, and capturing a changing view from a bed or window. The project had to finish early (after eight weeks) when it became apparent that the circumstances of the pandemic made it too difficult for the work to continue.

Creative ageing in the pandemic: ten things we've learned...

1 **The pandemic created a particular appetite for creative projects** [page 10]

The loneliness and isolation of the pandemic meant both care homes and participants were 'hungry' for this project - for novelty, distraction and pleasure. Some people had more free time to participate, whilst some struggled to find capacity. All had to incorporate the demands of social distancing, quarantining and safe working practices into their projects.

2 **Close collaboration between artists and local staff is key in making projects happen** [page 12]

Staff on the ground - in care homes and organisations - played a vital role in organising sessions, providing creative support, and acting as the eyes and ears of the artists. Their trusted relationships with participants was vital.

3 **The ability of local partners to free up staff time for the project makes a huge difference to the shape and impact of activities** [page 14]

Some organisations carved out dedicated time for creative projects, whilst others tried to build creative activity into the day-to-day life of the care home.

4 Care home staff have valued the opportunities to develop their skills and have fun together [page 16]

Many care home staff have found themselves more immersed in creative projects than they expected. This has seen them develop their confidence and creative skills, and build new kinds of relationships with participants. In a difficult year, finding space for fun has been a particular joy!

5 Having good internet access and equipment, and skills in using it, are important [page 18]

Care homes, artists and organisations were all having to adapt their work to embrace digital ways of working. There were rapid learning curves, and technical challenges throughout the projects that had to be tackled, embraced, or worked around.

6 Working around technological challenges can present new creative opportunities [page 20]

Artists were keen to explore the benefits of this new way of working, and adapted their work to make the most of working remotely and using digital tools.

7 Building relationships with participants remains at the heart of arts projects [page 22]

Whilst remote working certainly challenges many of the usual ways of getting to know participants, artists found new ways to do this effectively.

8 Artists and participants have shared ownership of projects, and developed them together [page 24]

Artists were concerned that it would be difficult to actively involve participants in the design of remotely-led activities. In some cases the opposite has happened, and new, more collaborative relationships have grown between artists and participants.

9 Working differently has been an opportunity to re-think 'usual practice' [page 26]

For both artists and organisations, Covid-19 meant that usual ways of working were impossible. In many cases, this has led to established ways of working being re-thought, and has created space to experiment with new ways of doing things. For many, this will have long-term effects.

10 Creativity breeds creativity [page 28]

The experience of trying new arts projects remotely has inspired care homes to build more creativity into their future plans. Staff are more confident about the value of creative activities and the approaches used to run them. They have more ideas about how to keep making things happen long-term.

The pandemic created a particular appetite for creative projects

1

The cancellation of activities as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic created space and energy for trying something different.

Care homes and organisations reported real enthusiasm for activities that brought fun and positivity to older people's lives.

The people who took part in these projects welcomed the novelty of something new, particularly because contact with the outside world during the pandemic - especially in care homes - has been so limited.

A different face offered a new opportunity to spark conversation - between participants, with artists, and with staff. The sessions marked a point of difference in the week - something fun and entertaining to look forward to, and they were often seen as a high point:

> "[On a Friday] we just sit and wait till 2 o'clock comes along. We really look forward to it, and we've been doing our exercises all week - learning what you've taught us so we're ready for you!"
>
> Freda - resident at Anderson's Care Home

Inevitably, though, the context of the pandemic also brought additional factors to contend with in taking part in this project, and meant that in some cases teams had very little extra energy to give:

> "Covid gets in the way of everything - the changes in guidance, it consumes you, it takes up all your time".
>
> Angela, manager at Lizdean Nursing Home

With families being so isolated from care homes during the pandemic, some artists noted that the creative projects had been warmly appreciated by families. Tracy joined Ancaster House's Facebook page, where she connected with some families of those she'd been working with:

> "I really got a lovely insight into how [hearing about the project] impacted them - to feel that their family member was being taken care of, and that some good things were happening at this really dreadful time. So that was all quite emotional, actually".
>
> Tracy - artist

Close collaboration between artists and local staff is key in making projects happen

2

Artists were matched with a care home or organisation. The projects all showed that close collaboration between the artists, who were working remotely, and staff 'on-the-ground' was key to success.

> "I was incredibly fortunate that I [was matched with] a home that had an activities coordinator, who completely embraced the project, and who herself wanted to learn as well."
>
> Tracy - artist

The staff provided crucial support in lots of different ways, and invested significant time both before and during sessions. They received and quarantined materials, helped participants get set up and ready to participate, and tested the technology and equipment. During sessions, they provided creative support, helping people participate and being the artists' 'eyes and ears' on the ground.

> "It takes quite a lot of practical support and administration behind the scenes. It takes time to get everyone all ready. We take it quite seriously."
>
> Margaret Ann, manager at Ancaster House

Staff also played an important role in identifying and encouraging people to take part in the activities, or sorting people into participation groups. Some artists had wondered at the beginning of the project whether this would affect which people took part. At in-person creative activities, people often watch from the sidelines for a while, gradually joining in with arts activities as they get to know the artist or the activity. This can be important in welcoming those who are initially a little hesitant, unsure, or resistant. In projects that happen remotely, staff could play an important role in sensitively encouraging people to have a go. In Skye, a SEALL staff member kept a conversation about participation going for weeks with one person ("I had to think about it, had to give it some thought"). This was important in helping as many people as possible feel able to take part.

Artists played a less direct role in shaping the atmosphere during sessions than they would usually, during an in-person activity. Staff became their co-facilitators as the 'hand in the room' on the day. Sometimes this introduced a different dynamic to the activity:

> "[Staff member] was much more focussed on getting things done, on completing the work by the end of the session. I just decided to embrace and go along with that."
>
> Tracy - artist

The ability of care homes to free up staff time makes a huge difference to the shape and impact of activities

3

> We perhaps overestimated the time and energy we had available to support the project. It wasn't till we tried it that we appreciated the challenges."
>
> Angela, manager at Lizdean Nursing Home

Since staff members played vital roles in all the projects, it was important that they had enough time to focus their energy on the project. This was easier in larger care homes, where there were more staff, including those with specific responsibilities for activities and wellbeing:

> You need a wellness or an activities [staff member] to encourage and support the residents during the activity. [The session] has to be at a time when they wouldn't get moved away onto other activities. Without that - no, it wouldn't work."
>
> Margaret Ann, manager at Ancaster House care home

In one of the smaller care homes that took part in this project, it was more difficult to dedicate a member of staff to support creative activities. This significantly affected the sessions:

> Staff struggled to fit the [creative] tasks into the weekly routines of the home. If the phone rang then staff got called away, and there'd be no support available for the artist or the resident."
>
> Angela, manager at Lizdean Nursing Home

With staff busy in other roles, this meant that the artist arrived each week to an environment where there was lots of work to do to get participants and materials ready to begin.

Compared to working in-person, the artists were more reliant on preparation being done for them, and couldn't be left 'to get on with things'. Staff in the smaller care home simply didn't have the capacity to support this alongside their existing roles.

On reflection, staff in this smaller care home felt that they might have more success in future if an artist provided a list of bite-sized tasks, which staff could lead independently with participants. This would enable staff to pick and choose activities according to their time, the conditions, and appetite from those taking part.

Care home staff have valued the opportunities to develop their skills and have fun together

4

Care home managers involved in **Digital dance with Anderson's Care Home** and **Art online with Ancaster House** explained how proud the staff were of the creative projects they had been involved in, and the sense of ownership they felt over them. The staff felt that they - as well as the participants - had benefitted from being involved in the projects.

> "This project has brought so much happiness and laughter to the residents that they don't want it to end. This has been such a difficult year for us all and since this project began, our residents began to look forward to something again, it has kept them active and thinking about it throughout the week."
>
> Facebook post from Katie, staff member at Anderson's' Care Home

The Managers observed how active staff had been in participating and contributing to creative sessions. Many staff members had challenged themselves to develop their own skills, or to try something new that they'd initially felt hesitant about. As a result, there'd been new kinds of relationships forged between staff and participants - based on sharing, learning and enjoying an activity together, alongside one-another.

Staff were proud that they'd been able to create such joy and pleasure for the older people living in the home. They were keen to share stories about the positivity they'd created for their care home, in a time of such sadness and worry. And for themselves, staff had welcomed taking part in something fun and joyful as part of their busy and stressful working days.

> "It's so uplifting, it's just wonderful. That doesn't just go for the residents, but for the staff too, and for myself. There's been a few difficult weeks, one week particularly - it'd been awful. And I came out of [the room where the dance class was taking place] and felt so much better - to be part of that fun, it was just lovely."
>
> Kathy - Manager at Anderson's Care Home

Having good internet access and equipment, and skills in using them, are important

5

The organisations taking part used their existing equipment. All were having to rapidly change the way they worked and begin to use much more technology. Many homes were buying dongles, learning about Wi-Fi reach and capacity, and otherwise rapidly learning about digital tools and technology. It's not surprising, then, that some technical challenges or barriers were reported by all the organisations taking part, with the exception of SEALL, whose work with Lesley was carried out over the telephone.

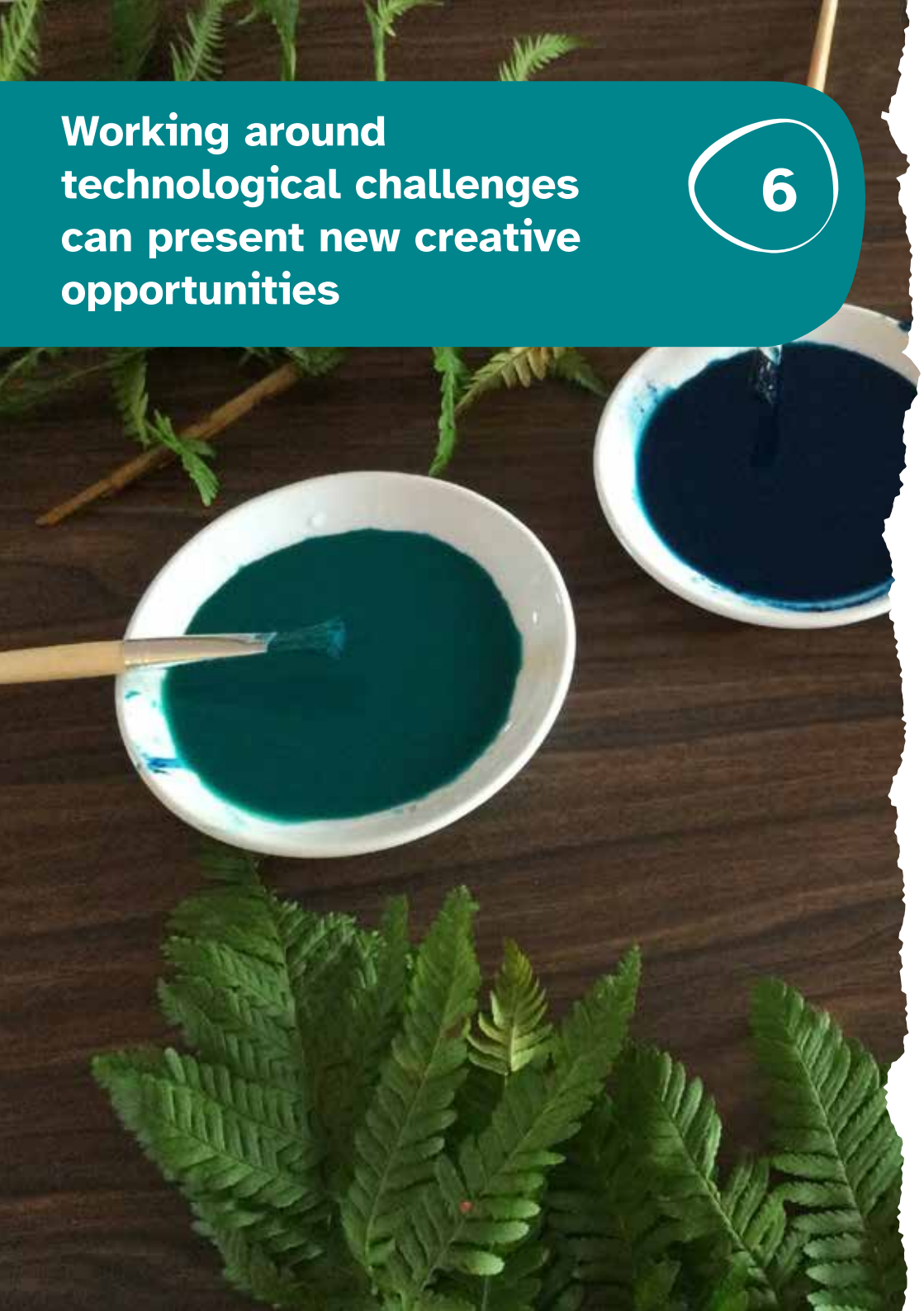
> "I enjoyed all the classes and would take part again. Technology was sometimes a pain."
>
> Jean - resident at Ancaster House

The technical challenges experienced included:

- Poor Wi-Fi coverage, so the artist had to be situated in a very specific part of the room to reach coverage. Tracy described this as sometimes feeling as though "You're sitting at a table on your own, listening to the next table having lots of fun but not being able to join them".
- Staff not being confident about getting to grips with new kit and apps.
- Difficulties in fitting virtual sessions around the routine of the home - e.g. Jenny being 'carried' from room to room on screen, resulting in a disjointed and disorientating experience.
- Learning for the artists in how to practically teach or demonstrate work, and how to film themselves effectively.

> "I am concerned that the project won't get off the ground because aside from the [pandemic] situation they are in right now, the technology still isn't in place and I worry that this will stand in the way of progress. I think the iPad is still boxed up!"
>
> Jenny - artist, journal extract

Despite these challenges, there was a great deal of enthusiasm about working in these new ways. One artist wondered whether it was helpful that none of the artists and organisations had worked together before this project. That meant that they didn't have an existing - face-to-face - way of working to compare the digital project to, which perhaps helped the digital project be accepted on its own terms.



Working around technological challenges can present new creative opportunities

6

Rather than see digital workshops as a ‘lesser’ or ‘second class’ experience, the artists were keen to explore the benefits of this new way of working.

As the only project that didn’t use the internet or online tools, **Telephone stories** noted the impact that not being able to see one-another made to their relationship. Participants asked for (and were sent) a photo of the artist, which they found helpful in building a relationship and putting a face to the voice. For the artist, however, there was a different impact:

> “I think it’s a benefit, because when I write [a participant’s] story, I have an image of them which is based purely on what they’ve told me, and the sound of their voice and how they describe where they live, or what they do, or what their interests are.”
>
> Lesley - writer

All the artists noted that conversations online, or via the phone, tend to be faster paced than working face-to-face. People seemed less comfortable with silence and more inclined to fill all the time with conversation and activity. They missed the opportunity to sit quietly beside someone, and to take their time building a relationship slowly.

In some cases working digitally made group sessions difficult. Some of the artists adapted by working one-to-one with individuals:

> “Lesley said something interesting – we’re so used to working in a group or collaborating, and now the world we are in right now is about the individual. It’s about trying to find ways of connecting and opening up people’s worlds a bit”
>
> Jenny - artist, reflecting on peer group conversation

The artists had to adapt to pandemic-related restrictions, as well as the challenges of working remotely. Sessions that use physical materials (i.e. arts, crafts, photography) found that they needed to send materials in advance, for quarantining. This meant artists needed to be much more organised about which activities they would use in each session, and could be less flexible in changing plans on the day.

Building relationships with participants remains at the heart of arts projects

7

All the artists described the way they arrive and settle into a place - unpacking their kit, starting to chat to people - as a key part of building relationships when working face-to-face. Working digitally, they had to find new ways of creating one-to-one introductions and welcomes to get to know participants (and staff) on an individual basis. At one care home, doing these 'hellos' via iPad helped more staff members feel comfortable getting involved in the same way as participants, and helped build a sense of everyone - staff and participants - learning together.

> "The residents have been showing me what they've been learning yesterday, and we've been having such a right good laugh."
>
> Lauren, staff member at Anderson's

Communication remained difficult with some participants who struggled to communicate verbally. Some artists found that physical connections - through a touch of a hand or tapping along to music together - were difficult to replicate meaningfully on a screen.

Staff in care homes and partner organisations were important in making sure that participants always had a face-to-face connection to someone they knew and trusted. In Telephone stories, for example, a local member of staff, Iseabail, stayed in touch with participants throughout the project - checking in and visiting people at home to see how they were getting on:

> "I don't think this project could have happened without Iseabail. Not just because it needed a coordinator, but it needed somebody who really could engage at a very deep level with the participants. They need to have that trust with someone on the ground."
>
> Marie, Creative Director at SEALL

For **Telephone stories**, both Lesley and SEALL staff described how important it was for the individuals involved to recognise their own stories as important, or to be 'seen, heard and understood'. Many of those involved in the project were excited to meet face-to-face when restrictions allow.

In addition to the relationships that artists built with participants, the group of artists met regularly throughout the project. All appreciated this connection, and benefitted from the time they spent together.

> "When you're doing this work, even if it wasn't online, it is actually quite isolating work."
>
> Chris, artist

> "It was a much-needed chat with the other artists and helped put things in perspective. Or at least allowed me to disperse some of the concerns I had."
>
> Jenny - artist

Artists and participants have shared ownership of projects, and developed them together 8

Older people taking part in **Digital dance with Anderson's Care Home** had come to feel a real sense of ownership over the project. This was a source of great pleasure for the staff and artist, as well as for the participants. Participants contributed their own moves to dance routines, arranged surprises for the artist (such as a performance from a visiting Highland dancer), and chose to practice routines - and teach them to staff - between the weekly sessions:

> "It's become their project in a way - they're leading it now. Chris is delivering it but the residents are actually leading the project."
>
> Kathy - manager at Anderson's Care Home

This shared ownership was equally appreciated by the artist:

> "I've never done more challenging work, actually. Because the work that I have done up until the pandemic had all been [taught]: let's just do some exercises. Whereas this was actually, like a kind of physical conversation. It was a proper collaborative experience."
>
> Chris - choreographer

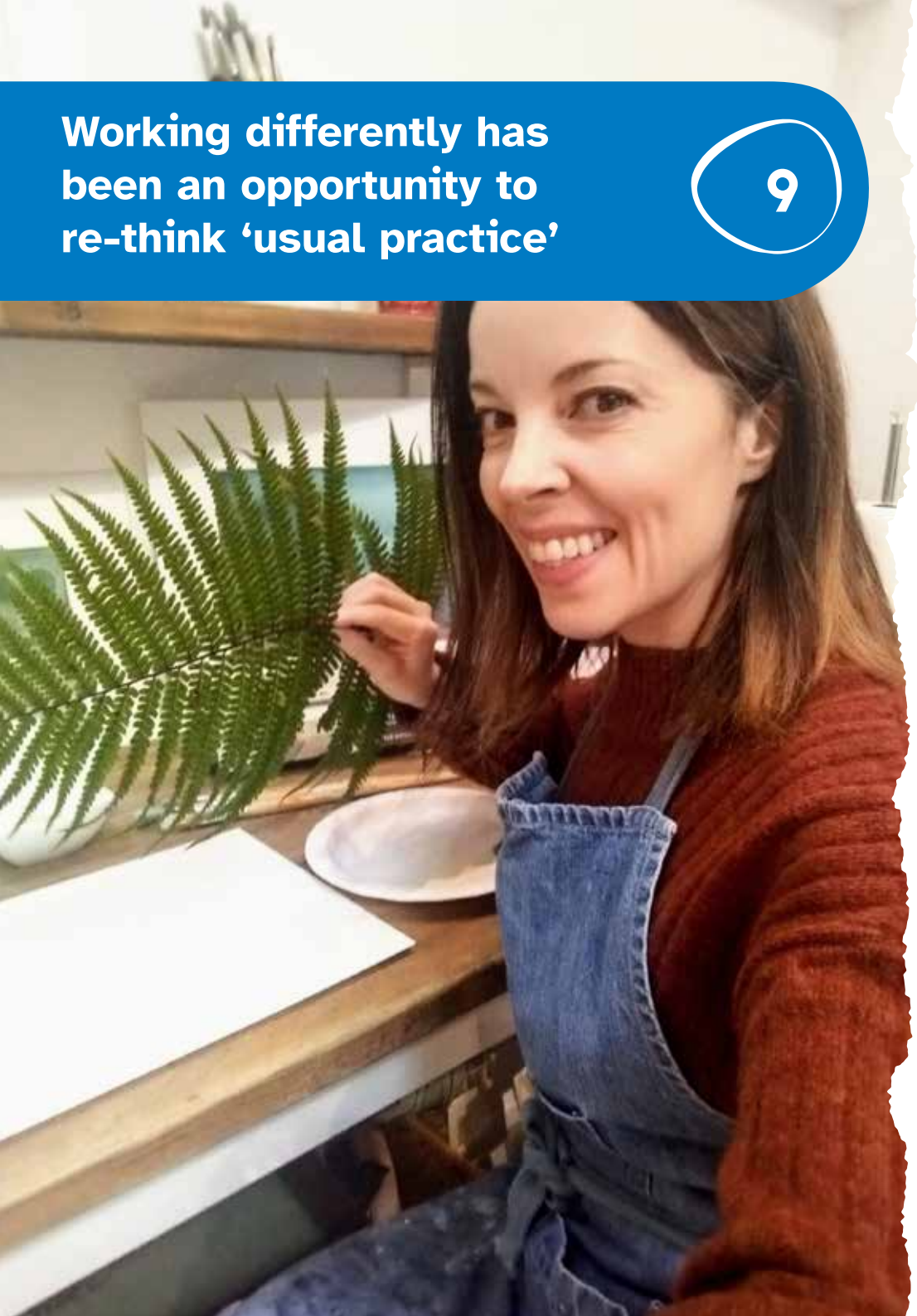
This collaborative experience was echoed in the ownership that SEALL participants took over the stories that Lesley wrote from their discussions - adding their own corrections and edits, and sometimes significantly rewriting the draft that Lesley had prepared:

> "Initially I worried about that in terms of the power - [I was concerned that it might be a case of] they will tell stories and I would write them down. I didn't particularly want that, I wanted that collaboration, and eventually we got there."
>
> Lesley - writer

In Skye, one participant made a suggestion for taking greater ownership of the project in future, so that it could be led locally, and by older people. In informal discussion with a trusted member of staff, this participant observed that: "It is difficult to speak to a stranger on the phone, who doesn't know the place and doesn't know about crofting". He suggested that (post-pandemic), he and some of his peers could hire out a local village hall and sit to have tea and scones and talk about the old days together - with someone present to record the stories. This would represent a significant step toward this project being owned and led by older people.

Working differently has been an opportunity to re-think ‘usual practice’

9



Whilst some of the artists are itching to get back to working face-to-face, some have used this project as a way to develop and test new ways of working in future. In these cases, the artists expect their experience of working remotely to influence their work long-term.

In particular, both artists and care homes - especially those in remote or rural areas - were excited by the chance to use digital tools to tackle the geographic restrictions of face-to-face work. They expected that working remotely could make creative sessions cheaper, more accessible, and more straightforward in the future:

> “We want to get involved with as many things as possible. Zoom will help with that.”
>
> Margaret Ann, manager at Ancaster House care home

However, artists were aware that some organisations and care homes remain very reluctant to work in this way, and that remote sessions will be less suitable for some people, or some artforms. As such, working digitally was seen as a useful complement to face-to-face work, rather than as ‘the new normal’.

In a number of cases, the experience of the pandemic and this project has led artists and organisations to think differently about their plans for the future. At SEALL, this project has helped the team explore their role on the island and to think about the people they reach. Combined with a new funding opportunity via Creative Scotland’s Culture Collective, this has led to plans for **Telephone stories** to continue, expand, and develop.

For some artists, the pandemic created a moment to pause and reassess the work they were doing. The need to work differently led them to consider how their skills might be adapted and re-thought to help them work in different ways. In some cases, this experience of having to think on their feet and work in a new environment had been confidence-building. For others, however, the challenges of trying to implement work in a new way was a dispiriting experience. For them, their hopes for a successful project had contrasted starkly with the realities of working in very difficult circumstances.

Creativity breeds creativity

10

Care homes involved in this project expect that it will have a long-term impact on their creative activity - both being led by artists, and by staff members.

Care home staff felt that now the technology used for this project is up and running, it will be much easier to use it again. The hard work of the learning has already been done, and now they have seen the benefits they feel more confident about seeking funding for new projects, or investing their own money in them:

> “Now you’ve tried it and it’s worked, you can justify the costs again.”
>
> Margaret Ann - Manager at Ancaster House

For Lizdean Nursing Home, where there was less staff time to support artist-led activities, there was a feeling that sessions led by staff would enable creative activity to be more easily integrated into the day-to-day life of the home.

> “We will try again. We’ve definitely seen glimmers of possibility for creativity... we don’t look at it as not having worked. We learned through it, it certainly hasn’t put me off trying again.”
>
> Angela, Lizdean Nursing Home

In the care homes where crafts and photography were used in this project, staff hope to continue using these elements in the day-to-day life of the care home. Staff now had more ideas about the sort of activities and sessions they could run, and were more confident in their ability to lead these kinds of activities.

> “When I started to talk about using watercolour paints, [staff member] was a little bit anxious. But then she engaged in them with me the first week, and then she grew in confidence, I think, in the delivery of it. And so I really watched her evolve in the sessions, which was really lovely. And I have since learned that the legacy of the project is that she does a painting workshop [with residents] every week now. So that’s been really lovely to watch.”
>
> Tracy, artist

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Published by Luminate, June 2021

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Luminate principal funders: Creative Scotland, The Baring Foundation, Age Scotland