



Ruthless Research

Final report:

Evaluation of the Erskine Artists' Residency 2021-23

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Foreword from Erskine and Luminare

Erskine and Luminare began working together in 2017 on a long-term artist in residence programme, and as our collaboration draws to a close we welcome Ruth Stevenson's insightful report into the learning from the latter part of our collaboration, from 2021 till 2023.

From the outset the importance of the partnership between Erskine and Luminare was clear. Erskine staff shared their knowledge and skills, enabling the artists to develop a highly personalised creative process working collaboratively with residents. Erskine, residents and staff, benefitted from the expertise of the artists who opened their imagination to what was possible. As we moved into the second phase – reported on here – this shared learning continued to inform our work together.

We are grateful to the Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust who supported the programme, and to our Unforgotten Forces partners – a network of charities across Scotland who support older veterans. We hope this report will be interesting and valuable for other care providers and cultural organisations who are planning to work together.

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About Ruthless Research

Ruthless Research is an Edinburgh-based independent research consultancy, through which Ruth Stevenson provides a range of qualitative and quantitative research solutions to organisations who work for the benefit of the community.

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Introduction

Background

Luminate and Erskine have previously collaborated on a successful extended artist residency programme working with around 280 veterans, many of whom live with dementia.

Building on this and funded by the Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust, the Erskine Artists' Residency Programme 2021-2023 supported older veterans living in residential care to participate in a wide range of highly personalised arts activities. The programme was intended to have benefits for veterans' emotional and mental wellbeing, and to develop the capacity of care staff to lead future creative activities themselves.

The intended outcomes of the programme were as follows:

1. More older people who experience care engage with the arts;
2. The ambition and quality of creative provision for older people is increased;
3. Participating residents' mental wellbeing is supported;
4. Creative programme at Erskine is diversified;
5. Skills and confidence of staff are enhanced.

In each of the two years of the programme, five artists worked across the four Erskine Care Homes (Edinburgh, Glasgow and two homes at Bishopton). Each artist led two 9-week residencies across the 2-year period. Within each 9-week residency they spent a full day each week in one of Erskine's homes working with residents individually and sometimes in small groups. The initial cohort of artists were recruited from the pool of individuals that had undertaken Luminare's Arts in Care training in 2019. Four of these artists were engaged for both residency blocks, and two artists took part in one block each with a new artist being recruited for Year 2. At the end of each 9-week block there was an informal sharing event. Artist planning/training days also took place, bringing the artists together to share learning and ideas, and to gain peer support.

The Erskine Artists' Residency Programme was also structured to ensure a legacy of skills and resource development for Erskine colleagues.

Methodology

The Erskine Artists' Residency Programme was evaluated by independent researcher Ruth Stevenson.

This evaluation was largely qualitative in methodology.

In July and August 2022 (when each artist had completed the first 9-week residency), Ruth undertook qualitative research as follows:

- 5x depth interviews with artists
- 1x depth interview with Luminare Manager
- 1x discussion session at Erskine Managers meeting

In June and July 2023 (when each artist had completed the second 9-week residency), Ruth undertook qualitative research as follows:

- 5x depth interviews with artists
- 4x depth interviews with Erskine Managers
- Comments from 2x family members, sourced via a form linked on Workplace

Key themes arising from this process are summarised in this report.

***“The Luminate artists is
one of the most impressive things
I’ve ever seen in a care home.
What I’ve seen them manage to get
out of our residents
is sometimes overwhelming.”***

(Erskine Manager)

Creative methods

The six artists engaged with this programme worked in very different ways utilising a variety of artforms. The following examples illustrate the variety within delivery, which was influenced by the particular skillsets of the artists and also inspired by the residents and their interests:

“A lot of my personal work is quite deep, I try to touch people deeper, and I wanted to use that. Most of the people are veterans so a lot of their life experience is about travelling. That was a common thread. I came up with questions and asked them to associate a colour with it. Their favourite place, memorable moments, what they are grateful for in their life. A reflective thing. Then I got Perspex discs and we painted the answers in colours around it. It worked really well. We also did it with mosaics, they could choose the bits and glue them. I wanted it to be more tactile. They have achieved some beautiful things.”

“I was about to go into rehearsals with Scottish Opera to sing in Carmen. We ended up singing because as soon as I would talk about the music they would start singing some of the songs I'd introduced to them. We carried that right through the nine weeks.”

“I wanted to do something with textile that could grow over the nine weeks. They have these big tapestries, a lot of military stuff and poppies. I was just really inspired by that. So I was asking residents to help me design a square a fabric, like a quilt almost, to go on the wall.”

“The bigger film that I made with [resident] took about 50% of my time. He had a clear idea of what he wanted to do. He's finding it frustrating to be in a care home and he doesn't really take part in group activities, but he likes a chat and to do something productive. We had a lot of planning time and then he sent me off to his home town to do some filming. We put in old photographs of his family, and I edited it together. His film was on display at the end, it was amazing. I spoke to his two daughters which was lovely, they said it was really what he needed. I got to really engage with someone and make quite a bit of difference.”

Reflecting on the creative approach taken during Year 1

An internal interim evaluation report was prepared at the end of Year 1, and this report identified some of the key features of the creative approach taken. This proved to be a very successful way of working in a care setting, which led to positive impacts for the residents in Year 1 and was further developed in Year 2.

The following section provides reflections on these creative approaches.

Creating connections

Getting to know the residents and establishing connection and developing those connections. Although their short-term memory isn't strong the connections can grow over the weeks. (Artist)

The artists felt that they had been able to create connections with residents during Year 1 of the residency. The artists described “making some proper friends in the residents” and getting on “like a house on fire” with some, which was “amazing”. They found that “being an outsider could spark a lot of conversation and energy” and that they “built up a rapport” and “shared a laugh” and “shared a smile”. All had experiences that were “quite special”. The artists reported that some residents “would recognise me week to week” and that “people did recognise me, you can tell in someone’s eyes”.

An encouraging presence

One hadn't engaged with anything before then he was really involved with this process. The activity workers were really pleased, they said he was talking about it quite a lot. (Artist)

The artists “showed an interest in people” and “showed them that you see them”, working hard to engage with people who “wouldn't have engaged with group activity” or who were “anxious” or “uncomfortable” or “non-verbal”. Consequently some of the residents “opened up” and “seemed to grow a lot in confidence” and “were far more chatty” and “ended up relaxed”.

Taking creative risks

I realised never say never, try things. If they don't work it doesn't matter but don't think you can't push people with dementia. (Artist)

When working with the residents the artists introduced “stuff they'd never done before” and activities that felt ambitious for individuals, and this worked very well.

As a result of the first year of the residency, the artists described feeling “far more confident pushing the boundaries of what people think is possible”.

Creating legacy outputs

They now have installations that we have designed together. (Artist)

Some of the artists worked with the residents to create something that could be displayed in the homes. The artists noted that the “brightened up areas has a nice benefit overall” and “people can use and enjoy them after the time that I am there”. The artists enjoyed “seeing the reaction of the residents to seeing their work displayed on the board, that was nice”.

Something different for the care home

They bring something different, ways we wouldn't have thought of to communicate and get the best out of our residents. (Erskine Manager)

The Erskine Managers were very impressed by how well the artists “get stuff out of the residents” and “the things they got the residents to do” which they felt were “clever” and “amazing”. They felt that the artists had “bonded very easily with the residents and staff” by being “warm” and “enthusiastic” and consequently the residents were “captivated” and “always animated during the sessions, and also afterwards”.

Moving forward

This creative approach was very successful, and it was built upon across Year 2 of the residency.

Key learning points arising from Year 1

Key learning points from Year 1 as summarised in the interim report are summarised in this section.

The Covid-19 pandemic impacted on programme set-up and delivery

We're still very much in a pandemic. (Artist)

The first year of this residency was set up at the end of summer 2021 when Erskine was emerging from the initial waves of the Covid-19 pandemic, and the Omicron wave in Autumn 2021 added further restrictions. The ongoing challenges of Covid-19 impacted on recruitment, timings and management of the programme in Year 1.

Although Luminare and Erskine had collaborated successfully on a residency programme before (which was mostly pre-pandemic, with a period of completion during the second half of 2021), this cohort of artists started working with Erskine in very different and unprecedented circumstances which demanded ongoing flexibility and innovation from all involved. This is now acknowledged to have been a very difficult time for artists working in social care, and indeed more generally across the sector, and challenges faced were in no way unique to this project or setting.

Navigating the care home setting can be challenging

There's a lot of expectations to be managed. (Artist)

Reflecting on the delivery of the first year of this residency, the artists felt that it had been challenging to navigate their way through the early stages of this new residency for the following reasons:

- Care homes have a “set routine” which underpins daily life and must be understood;
- Care homes are a unique environment which is both “people’s home, their private spaces” and where there is also “care being given” so working in care homes demands particular sensitivity to this;
- It took time to build relationships and manage expectations between Erskine staff and the artists;
- The Covid context and associated legislation and restrictions were constantly changing.

This is a very intense role

It was much more intense than I thought it would be. (Artist)

All of the artists commented that this residency was a very “intense” and “challenging” role which was “very very emotionally draining”. Because of this, one of the artists commented that “you need to be hugely mindful and very careful of yourself”.

Artists need strong support systems

It was peer support that got us through. (Artist)

Various support systems were vital in enabling the artists to succeed during Year 1, including:

- Peer support with fellow artists via a Whatsapp group;
- Strong and positive relationships built with Erskine staff over time;
- Interactions with families of residents to “help me to get to know the individual”;
- Support from Luminare around workplace needs and challenges.

Small but meaningful connections lead to the greatest impact

We’ve produced things but we don’t have a whole gallery of work. I thought ‘oh my God is this bad?’ It is hard not to go into output-oriented work when that’s what it usually is. (Artist)

During Year 1 of the residency the artists needed to learn to ignore any perceived pressure to produce, and instead embrace a more flexible process-focused approach based around small but meaningful connections. For many, this had been a new way of working and a professional challenge. However, by the end of their first block of sessions the artists reported feeling “more confident that what I am doing is the right direction”.

Recommendations proposed following Year 1

Based on emerging findings from Year 1, it was recommended that Luminare and Erskine focus on the following in Year 2:

Flexible project management

- Expecting the unexpected;
- Promoting artist wellbeing.

Building strong support networks

- Reinforcing the support network between artists;
- Looking for opportunities for artists to interact with residents’ families;
- Planning for plenty of contact time between Luminare and the artists.

Ensuring that individual artists have good relationships with staff in their care homes

- Understanding that successful approaches are likely to vary;
- Ensuring needs and values of the programme filter down to staff on the ground;
- Creating more formal opportunities for artists to check in with staff and Managers;
- Sharing ‘top tips’ between artists.

Focusing on small connections and ignoring the pressure to produce

- Ongoing reinforcement and encouragement from Luminare;

- Facilitating artists to consider approaches that are ambitious for individuals but also flexible and in the moment;
- Encouraging the artists to share learning and support one another;
- Briefing of care and activity staff on the value of this approach.

Focusing on strategic outcomes

- Continuing to deliver positive impacts for residents, and documenting these;
- Developing the creative skills and confidence of Erskine staff.

Change in Year 2

**I think it was certainly better the second time around.
(Erskine Manager)**

**It was like chalk and cheese, it really was. It was night and day this time.
(Artist)**

It is acknowledged that Year 1 of the programme was challenging at times for the artists, for the reasons outlined in the previous section.

A significant element of reflection took place between Year 1 and Year 2 of the programme. Recommendations from the internal evaluation were carefully considered and actioned by Luminare and Erskine, and a reflections and planning session was held at Erskine and attended by the Year 2 artists, Luminare, and key members of Erskine staff.

In addition to this session, the Erskine Managers described having “met and said ‘okay, so how are we going to make this better?’ which enabled them to “learn from that first time” and “make the second time a bit better for the artist”. They put actions in place to ensure that they “had a plan” and “improved our communication” and “knew exactly what we were doing to support the artists”. As a consequence they felt that block 2 of the project “hit the ground running” and started with “all guns blazing” which meant that “it just flowed”. This was appreciated by the artists, who noticed that “there were certain things put in place even before we started” which made all the difference to their ability to develop relationships and approaches quickly and effectively within Erskine. They commented that the programme “felt more open because we’ve had these conversations” with “all departments collaborating” more closely, and that they had gained “clarity” and “perspective” in advance of starting Year 2. Both artists and Erskine Managers also felt more confident in Year 2 having had the opportunity to build on the groundwork undertaken in Year 1. In this respect Erskine Managers felt that they were “starting from a place of knowledge” and “know a little bit of what we’re expecting now”, and artists commented that they wanted to “build on my own knowledge and experience” and “try and learn from last year” which could prove easier “because I’ve done it before I knew how it worked”.

Consequently, the artists started Year 2 feeling “excited” and “encouraged” and “optimistic” and “ready”. One artist commented that it felt like “a fresh start”.

The elements of the programme that felt ‘different’ in Year 2 are described in the section that follows.

A focus on relationships and communication

I think we’ve all learned about communication. I think that’s really made my life easier and allowed me to do more of what I want to do when I go into the home. (Artist)

The artists and Erskine Managers alike commented extensively on relationships and communication in Year 2, observing that “there was more interaction” in Year 2 and that “communication was key”.

To enhance communication, some of the actions taken by the Erskine Managers were:

- Nominating “a go-to person in each area, it was always the same person they were able to touch base with”.
- Ensuring that “more check-ins happened the next time around, making sure that we're both OK”.
- Generally “making a bit more of an effort” to ensure that the artists “felt more included” and “feel more supported”.

The artists felt that this had worked well “from day one”, observing that the following had been particularly helpful for them in enabling their work:

- “There's always one person in the house who's the keystone. I met the keystone, the gatekeeper”.
- “Everybody knew I was coming in - to expect me and to embrace me being there and make me part of the team”.
- “Really getting to know the operational nature of the team, like, what are the timings that they meet up? What do they have to do in their day?”

Relationship-focused induction

Second time, we spent a bit more time integrating her into the home, really slotting her in with the activities so that she felt she had a base to then expand. (Erskine Manager)

At the start of both Year 1 and Year 2 the artists spent their first day being inducted into the home. The new approach to communication and relationship-building was a key facet of the induction in Year 2.

During induction the artists were “not expected to go straight into delivery”, and instead the day was “very, very casual”. In Year 2, the artists used this time to “understand the setup” and “see the activity space” and “meet some of the residents” and “speak to the Activity Workers” and “meet the House Manager” and “think what I could do with the environment that I was faced with”. They also sourced practical things such as a “rota” and “schedule” and “key fob”.

The artists found the inductions to be “really helpful”.

Fewer Covid-related restrictions

Covid mitigations were easing and we were better in control of how to deal with infection. (Artist)

The artists observed that Year 2 felt “very different” because “Covid restrictions had changed” which meant that there were “few restrictions” and “more opportunities” and everyone was generally “feeling a lot more optimistic”. As the artists no longer needed to wear masks, they reported finding it easier to work whilst “being able to see people and smile at people”.

Access to Workplace

The artist having access to workplace was fantastic because she was able to put up information about who she was, what she does, introduce herself to the relatives and also as she was doing bits and pieces she was able to share pictures and information as to what they were doing. It was nice for [the relatives] to be able to see and share in the experience. (Erskine Manager)

Workplace is Meta's business communication platform. At Erskine, Workplace includes a range of online pages and groups enabling staff and families to keep in touch. In Year 2 the artists were given access to Workplace "right from the beginning" and began "posting straight away" which meant that they "got feedback from family members" and "developed a relationship with family members even though I maybe haven't met them in person". This also helped the artists to learn more about the residents from the perspective of their families, which could be built into their approach. The artists commented that "I cannot underestimate how important the Facebook thing is" and "what a difference it makes!"

Comfort within the process

I was very aware of not trying to do too much, and focus on more in-depth relationship building with some of the residents. (Artist)

In Year 2 the artists spoke more confidently about their approach to the residency, noting that "it's all about the process" and that "some of the best interactions were when I spent in-depth time with someone" rather than focusing on group work or quantity of interactions or particular outputs and end-points. They reflected that "this time, my idea of time is just very different". The artists "kept it simple", describing an approach whereby they would "go with the flow" which "just felt a bit looser" and "slower". As a consequence they felt "much more comfortable myself" and "did not feel too worried, I'd just do it".

Linked to the above, in Year 2 all of the artists described the importance of taking time at the start of each day to "gauge the energy levels" and "suss out" the "vibe" and "get a feel for the mood" and "soak up the environment and the people" in the home. This became "my sort of routine", and crucially in Year 2 the artists felt empowered to do this, noting that "I didn't ask anyone" because "this is a valid part of my residency".

A different feeling

Two of the artists described how these changes impacted on their experience of the residency:

"The second time you know what you're doing. Everything was in place and I knew how it all worked."

"This year definitely felt shorter, but that's obviously just because I felt a little bit more equipped and a bit more relaxed. I had let go of some ideals that I had previously, I'm just going in every day and being present. Some things work, some things don't work. That's fine. Being in this moment, that's all that matters."

Christmas Activity Boxes

A new component of the residency introduced during Year 2 was Christmas Activity Boxes, a resource for Erskine staff to use when the artists were not there.

The Erskine Managers spoke extremely enthusiastically about the how much they appreciated the Activity Boxes:

"We got activity boxes in for the residents and they were absolutely brilliant."

"Everybody loved it. They were so exciting. They went down an absolute storm."

"They've been amazing. There's been so much thought put into them."

They spontaneously described the contents in detail:

"There are so many and things in the box. Painting, watercolour and acrylic, and coloured pencils, planting."

"You had a sheet that had the artist's picture on it. This is the tools that you'll need and step-by-step this is how you would do it. This is how you do it and there's everything you need. Just have a go. It definitely has been helpful."

"I love the cards that came along with it with the ideas of what you could do."

One Erskine Manager described the value of these boxes in enhancing what the care staff could provide for the residents:

"It is easy to just go and get out a jigsaw every day because you don't always have the time and attention to go and get materials and think creatively about what am I going to produce with that."

The Erskine Managers had observed examples of the staff using these Activity Boxes:

"They were fantastic. It meant when the carers had that spare half an hour or an hour in the afternoon and everything had quietened down they were able to just grab the box and do things out of it. The staff really ran with that, they really enjoyed it."

"I have seen the care staff use them if they've got a spare half an hour."

Reflecting on the practicalities of the programme

The following section reflects on some of the practicalities of the residency programme.

Reflecting on the programme concept

This could be happening in care homes across the country, across the world, it could just be a thing you know. (Artist)

As Year 2 of the programme came to a close, the artists and Erskine Managers alike described the programme concept as being “incredibly clever” and “very groundbreaking” and “probably quite innovative”. In summary, “it works”.

Reflecting on positive artist qualities

They were very passionate about their skills and what they were doing. I think that's really important to get people to sign on with you to try something different. (Erskine Manager)

The Erskine Managers praised the artists, and described the artist qualities which enabled them to deliver this project effectively and impactfully. These were:

- “Friendly.”
- “Encouraging.”
- “Compassionate.”
- “Really patient.”
- “Not easily put off.”
- “A sunny disposition”
- “Passionate about what they do.”

Reflecting on the length of the working day

Guided by Erskine they come in about 10am after breakfast, then they leave about 4pm when residents are getting ready for evening meals. It has meant that they have had more of a connection with the staff and the residents, because for that day they are part of the home. (Luminate staff member)

At the end of Year 1 the Erskine Managers described their appreciation of having the artists in the home for full days as it meant that they could “integrate much better with the staff group” and “get that sense of being part of the team” which they felt “helped a lot”. The Erskine Managers also noted that “the longer days helped with the flexibility” because if a resident was not “willing” or “up for it” the artist could “move on knowing she had that time” and “try again later”.

Mirroring this – and reinforced by the value of the strong relationships built in Year 2 - at the close of the programme the artists and staff agreed that the artists being present for full days

“worked well” and “is definitely best” as it allowed the artists to work flexibly around “that rhythm” of “the set timings” within the home.

For the artists this was always “quite a full-on day”, however due to “that section in the middle when you can’t really do anything because everyone is taking lunch at the same time” the artists were able to recharge by taking “a wee break” to “have my lunch” or “clear my head in the grounds”.

Reflecting on the length of the residency

It has reinforced what I think is important in participatory work. It is slow. To get proper ownership of their work you need to take that time and go at people’s own pace. Going at the pace of the person you are working with is how you end up making something that people are really engaged with and are proud of. (Artist)

Although the artists and Erskine Managers appreciated having the allocated time of 9/10 full days per block (considering it “fine”), the majority also commented that “it wasn’t enough”.

As described earlier in this report the artists found a level of comfort with taking a flexible and in-depth approach to working with residents. However, they observed that this approach “is very time consuming” for various reasons:

“It takes a long time to adjust to an organisation, and it takes a long time to build rapport with the staff and the residents and the families.”

“You make connections with people and you can always see the possibilities of where you could take it. I could have done even with more time, it felt like I barely scratched the surface.”

“Ten weeks is fine, but I’m just starting to make inroads for some people who just don’t interact in anything and then, now it’s gone.”

“If you want to really engage someone in the process it can take a bit longer than nine weeks. People can’t necessarily work for lots of hours at a time so you need to spread it out.”

This view was also reinforced by Erskine Managers:

“It really does take a bit of time to build relationships and trust. Maybe an extra four weeks on the end?”

Due to the significant amount of learning and reflection experienced between Year 1 and Year 2, one of the artists suggested that in terms of days allocated to residencies “I kind of feel like the first one should be short and a second should be double that length”.

Reflecting on the value of artist rotation

I have completely different practice than the person that was there before. (Artist)

In Year 2, four of the artists were new to the homes that they were based in and one remained in the same home for both Year 1 and Year 2. The Erskine Managers that worked with a new artist in Year 2 commented that they saw the value in experiencing a “different approach” and “different skills” because “the change was quite nice” and “it was a different experience for the residents” and “if it just been the same again it would just have been a repetition”.

Reflecting on the value of opportunities for sharing

He invited one of his friends along to watch the film, to see what he has been up to. That was a lovely moment. (Artist)

The artists and residents shared their work via a Sharing Day at the close of Year 2, and in addition work was installed or displayed throughout the buildings. The artists and Erskine Managers observed “a real excitement” and “sense of pride” amongst the participating residents in “seeing their work up” and “talking to people about why they made it and how they made it”. Sharing with friends and family and seeing them being “interested in the work they made” was “a really lovely thing for people”.

Reflecting on support provided by Erskine

The more support we have from staff, the more we can achieve. (Artist)

As mentioned previously, communication between artists and Erskine staff was considered to be absolutely key to the success of the residency. In Year 2 the artists described making strong connections with Erskine staff members including House Managers, Deputy House Managers, Activity Co-ordinators, and a Speech Therapist. The artists felt extremely well supported by Erskine staff, describing staff members as “lovely” and “helpful” and “absolutely brilliant”. The artists commented that they felt they “had a good support network up there” and were “very grateful to be welcome so openly, it couldn't be more supportive”.

The artists felt that a great benefit of these relationships was the “inside knowledge” that they could tap into because the staff “have a real understanding of the residents”. This made it easier for the artists to work impactfully with the residents in the following ways:

- “The activity workers are just fantastic at highlighting people that they think would really benefit from me working with them.”
- “The staff would help me connect with people, help me start talking to people”.
- “They would suggest who would be good to work with that day.”
- “They would tell me what their needs are.”

- “They would give you little insights into people's lives which I wouldn't have known otherwise.”
- “The staff were amazing at managing [any challenging or risky moments], they handle that. They know the residents so well.”

Reflecting on support provided by families

Some of the families were very supportive as well. (Artist)

As the residencies progressed – and particularly following the artists being given access to Workplace – the artists were able to speak to or correspond with family members of residents, and this often led to further insights which the artists could use to better understand the residents and enhance the impact of their interactions. For example:

“They would drop clues like ‘Oh, mum always had always wanted to do a painting course’. I would never have known.”

“I went for a walk with two gentlemen and someone from the Activities Team posted us on Workplace doing a photo essay and the daughter immediately says ‘it's fantastic, his entire life he loved photography’. I didn't know that, and he hadn't told me that, or maybe he couldn't remember.”

“The daughter was able to tell me the music she liked and we had some brilliant sessions together.”

Reflecting on support provided by Luminare

Even though they have this set idea of what they want to do, there's always room for [artists to provide] feedback. (Artist)

The artists also very much appreciated the support that they received from Luminare, as Luminare staff members were considered to be “very supportive and “understanding” and “always available”. The artists observed that Luminare would “reach out” to them proactively, but that they felt confident that support from Luminare was “always at the other end of an email phone call” if they needed it. They reflected that “it always feels very safe to discuss things and chat through stuff” with Luminare. This approach was “really appreciated” and the artists found it “really reassuring” which enabled them to feel confident and comfortable within their residency.

The impact of the programme

The following section describes the impact of the Erskine Artists' Residency Programme 2021-2023.

Case study 1: Developing confidence

This resident takes part in activities within a group setting but doesn't talk very much to other residents. She has reduced mobility and lives with the challenges of advanced dementia and is sedentary most of the day. Art activities she had engaged in before were quite prescriptive in that there would be a fixed outcome and activities were often based on children's craft activities or children's colouring in sheets on a relevant theme, for example, Spring, or a seasonal festival.

At first this resident was hesitant to join the artist. On their first week together, the artist had set a table set up with paper-based art materials and for this session the resident just watched as the artist drew shapes and cut them out, sometimes she would suggest a colour or a shape. After the first 2 weeks there was a stark change in her engagement in the activity. The resident would meet the artist as they came into the room and hovered whilst they set up the art table. Instead of waiting for the artist to start and then join in, she asked if she could 'make anything I like?'. She continued to pick up scissors, something the artist had been told she wouldn't be able to do due to her arthritis, and began to create shapes from different papers to create an abstract collage. Each week this resident would make another creation completely spontaneously and without direction sitting for up to 45 minutes at a time. A woman of very few words, she said it was freeing "because it doesn't have to look like anything, I just like lots of bold colours. It's like being back at school." Her work grew in scale as her creative confidence increased. Staff were surprised that she had been able to make her collaged work. Work was displayed in a communal art board which meant the resident could see her work from the TV area where most residents gathered. Her work was much admired, which the resident was visibly pleased about.

The resident's work was shared with her family on the private Workplace online platform and there was some lovely feedback from her children, who live too far away to visit often. There were also lots of comments from staff from other areas of Erskine, inspired to try such an accessible and low cost creative activity with their own residents in other houses.

The artist has remarked that as a facilitator it has been so rewarding for them to see someone go from a tentative start to taking the lead and ownership of a creative process. Collage is a great way to get people, who are living with a dementia diagnosis, engaged, as it calls upon everyday skills including muscle memory such as scissors, pattern choice and colour matching. It doesn't have to look like anything, you can get quick results working individually or in a group and the result is always colourful and eye-catching. When the resident was creating, she was in the moment, her body language changed to a more relaxed shape, she didn't feel she had to make eye contact and she was making decisions about the composition and rearranging the shapes. The artist also commented that it is often the case that misinformation around ability is, especially when it comes to the arts, really common. If the scissors had not been available for three weeks in a row then this particular resident may well have not felt comfortable picking them up. For a short time she was calling the shots and in control and it was evident she really enjoyed it.

Impact on participating residents

It has a massive impact. You're stuck in a house looking at the same walls and the same stuff every day in the same routine. So to have something completely different, something new, and something that's outside of your comfort zone. It brings that bit of excitement and change for them. (Erskine Manager)

The Erskine Managers felt strongly that the residents “seem to enjoy” working with the artists, and that even though “they might forget afterwards” they had been “so engaged” and “alert” and “really enthused” and “you see the joy in their faces and their eyes”. Erskine Managers described that between sessions it was “something they look forward to” and there was “that kind of excitement around it” with residents often mentioning the artists, and saying “is she in today, I can't wait, we're going to be doing this or this”.

For many residents, participation in this programme was a way of finding connection:

“Music directly takes over as a form of communication because they might not have remembered my name but they remembered I was the person that sang that tune with them. It was quite astounding.” (Artist)

“Sewing is quite a universal skill or thing to do, and that would just unravel a bunch of memories or connections.” (Artist)

“We just chatted about Cyprus. So then I went and bought a map of Cyprus, and then we started talking about how this man had been posted there, and the RAF.” (Artist)

“She was a newer resident but they found out that she played the piano. I said ‘I hear you play the piano. Will you play me a tune?’ She played this beautiful tune. When I arrived a week later she just grabbed my hand and took me straight to the piano. We had a couple of sessions where I was playing a tune to see if she could play it back. And she actually found a way so she definitely retains the ability to play by ear. The cognitive level she was at, I was quite astounded. In the second half of the residency her family brought in a keyboard so she could have it in a room as well.” (Artist)

Many of the artists found ways to connect with residents who do not typically engage:

“One gentleman was not really a group person. He loved art. I worked with him one-to-one every week for the ten weeks.” (Artist)

“It was a lady who didn't really come out of her room very often but she came out to bring her dirty crockery. I just grabbed the moment and said ‘do you mind if I come into your room and have a conversation with you? I hear you like music’. Which ended up developing into a three-hour one-to-one session just in her room where I learned so much about her and her musical tastes.” (Artist)

Case study 2: *I'm Glad I'm Alive*

We have a gentleman who made a video, it was just really, really powerful. You realize just how much quality they've got in their life, his life has meaning today. That's one of the most powerful things I've ever seen. His speech is really improving as well, we've noticed it's a significant improvement. These are things that you wouldn't expect." - Erskine Manager

The quote above is about a resident who worked one-to-one with an artist during the first year of their residency. After multiple visits and getting to know each other, this resident began directing their own film, '*I'm Still Alive*' which was edited and co-produced for them by the artist. The resident had creative control of what they would like to present. One part of the film involved the artist filming themselves hiking up a hill nearby to the home. This was because the resident recalled climbing a steep hill in their time during the army and wanted to feature something around this within the film. As such, they asked the artist if they could go and film themselves walking up the hill for them, as he wouldn't be physically able to. Much of the filming was done by the resident, as the second half of the film documents their life at Erskine, including interviews with the staff about why they like to work at the home and what social care means to them. Within the video, the resident is also able to talk about their determination to be alive and how much they are glad to be here.

After the residency, a small celebration was held with residents, staff, artists and Luminare staff. At this day, the resident's film was shown on a large screen and seeing it come up they waved their hands in the air and said 'that's mine!' and was so excited and proud to see their work being shown.

The artist worked one-to-one with this resident over ten weeks and built a close relationship with them, finding out about their life and giving them ownership over what they might want to put together within their film. There were no preconceived ideas or outcomes at the beginning of their time together and this allowed for a special relationship to form and creative output, that was completely directed and owned by the resident. As mentioned in the quote above, this resident is currently living with a speech impairment and throughout this residency the staff were able to see some improvements, which was an unexpected positive outcome for them and the artist.

You can watch this film, and another three resident films that were produced over the two years, on Luminare's website here: <https://luminatescotland.org/project/erskine-artists-residencies-underway/>

For some residents, participation was a new way of expressing themselves:

"I had this special afternoon. It was with a resident who didn't really like the group sessions and too much noise, she can get quite angry sometimes and she'd sit with her head in her hands. I was coaxing her out throughout the weeks, basically we just sat in this room and we were just present with each other, and it was incredibly magical for me. I'd be showing her some materials, and the textures and the colours and there'd be the glint and the glimmer there in her. I felt like this connection with her." (Artist)

*“One gentleman had Parkinsons and was losing his ability to communicate and his eyesight. I think the things we did helped him to come to terms with this, and open up in a positive way.”
(Artist)*

Impact on non-participating residents

We have a few residents who their communication and physically they're not great and who went along but weren't actually doing it themselves. Being in that atmosphere and being able to see and enjoy hearing people talking and doing things around them really helped them and gave them a bit of enjoyment out of that day. (Erskine Manager)

The artists and Erskine Managers also noticed that non-participating residents were able to benefit from the atmosphere created by the residency.

Impact on family members of participating residents

You can see clearly the relatives loved seeing their parents doing these kind of activities, getting involved and engaged. (Erskine Manager)

The artists and Erskine Managers observed that family members of participating residents had appreciated the opportunity that their family member had been given. They “said their loved ones really enjoyed the project” for which they “were really grateful”. Family members provided the following comments:

“Mum had a great time. She enjoyed the activities and made several items of which she was proud. It is so good for the residents to participate in a range of activities. I love that mum gets to participate in these activities regularly.”

Some of the family members took an active role in participation themselves which “was really lovely to observe”, and others received “a lasting legacy of their parent” in the form of creative outputs as well as photos, video and audio.

Two Erskine Managers described family members valuing the high quality of this experience:

“They couldn't believe that we were providing things like that and opportunities like that.”

“His family were just so proud of that video, that later on in his life he's been supported to produce something of that calibre.”

Case Study 3: Music and end of life care

Initially, this resident was quite shy and reluctant to join in small group activity, keeping themselves mostly in their room. Through discussions with staff and making some observations during their visits, the artist working in this house had noticed that perhaps the resident might be interested in joining in but had a lack of confidence to come and make music. On one of the visits, the artist took an opportunity to approach this resident as they crossed paths in the communal kitchen and asked them if they would like to have a chat together. Joining the resident in their room 1-1, the artist began to ask them about what music they liked and as the artist put it, 'a switch was flicked'. Photo albums were brought out, favourite music was shared and a mutual love of cross stitch was discovered. Three hours passed at that first conversation and a new trust was formed.

Not long after this first interaction and after subsequent sessions together, the resident was receiving end of life care and the artist had become aware of this. The artist was initially unsure of whether to offer to do some music with the resident at this point in her care but had a strong feeling it might be something they could benefit from. Seeing the family on one of their visits, the artist could tell they were exhausted and distressed, knowing that it was likely their Mum would pass away soon. The artist asked the family if they could join their Mum to provide some gentle music and they instantly said yes and began telling the artist about some of the music their Mum enjoyed. She loved Pavarotti, she'd seen Pavarotti in Glasgow.

On this day, the artist ended up spending five hours with the resident. Using a calming percussion instrument, singing and some recorded music, the artist was able to choose music that this resident would enjoy, interpreting facial cues as they went along to understand what was working well for her. The artist remarked that it was a total privilege to provide this care for the resident and to provide some respite for the family at a difficult time. As the artist left that day, one of the nurses said 'she's so much more peaceful than she was this morning'. Although she took another 48 hours before she did finally pass away, the family remarked that the peace created in that session stayed with her until the end.

The artist commented afterwards that, had it not been for the special 1-1 interactions they'd had in previous weeks, this level of person-centred care may not have felt as easy for the artist or the resident, as the trust and relationship, may not have been as developed. Taking small opportunities throughout the artist's residency, to work one on one with people, meant situations such as this one could organically take place with the resident's wellbeing at the heart of their work.

Impact on Erskine Homes

Purposeful activity is a core aspect of what we do. (Erskine Manager)

The Erskine Managers felt that the programme added value for Erskine Homes.

One of the Erskine Managers described the way that they typically engage with external activity providers: "We have a wide variety of groups and people come in, but more from an

entertaining point of view rather than an engaging actively point of view". They felt that this residency brought something different.

The Erskine Managers felt that this programme was "new" and "exciting" and "fun". It enabled the residents to benefit from "people with different skills" that are not available in-house. The arts-focus was felt to work particularly well because "we already knew that it's something that most people enjoy" and "arts covers a lot of people" which is useful and "something you don't get often" when "you're trying to find things that a lot of people are interested in".

The programme has also produced some legacy outputs which have been "exhibited in the care home" to "brighten up the place" and act as "a talking point" and provide "a daily reminder" and "a lasting memory" of the activities.

Impact on Erskine staff members

They automatically have learned just by being part of what's going on. (Erskine Manager)

Linked to this, the Erskine Managers felt that Erskine staff members benefitted from their involvement with the programme in the following ways:

- "The staff really quite enjoyed it."
- "I think the staff took some new skills out of it as well."
- "Staff have got ideas of things they can do."

Several artists also recalled Erskine staff members describing with surprise that some of the creative activities were "quite simple" and "they said they would love to use it in their work".

As one Erskine Manager had noticed:

"I've seen the staff doing the same thing they would have been doing when [artist] was here. And I think it's because she showed the staff how simple it was, as it can be daunting sometimes. These things are remaining with us."

Impact on artists

It has been a really positive experience for me. (Artist)

On reflection, the artists felt that the programme had been "a very positive experience" for them.

A desire for this work to continue at Erskine

We'd love to do it again. If it's something that Luminare would take forward and do again we would absolutely jump at the chance to be involved. (Erskine Manager)

At the close of the Erskine Artists' Residency Programme 2021-2023, the Erskine Managers expressed that they would like to continue working with Luminare and professional artists if funding allowed.

Progress against intended outcomes

The following section summarises progress against the intended outcomes of the programme.

	Intended outcome	Progress against outcome	Status
1	More older people who experience care engage with the arts	It is estimated that 167 residents from the Erskine Artists' Residency Programme via direct participation.	Achieved
2	The ambition and quality of creative provision for older people is increased	Through the Erskine Artists' Residency Programme, older people were given opportunities to participate in varied creative activities (including visual arts, music and film-making) led by professional artists with expertise in socially engaged arts practice and training around Arts in Care. The successful approach was process-focused, based around developing connections with individuals and exploring a creative process that was ambitious and meaningful for them.	Achieved
3	Participating residents' mental wellbeing is supported	The Erskine Managers felt strongly that undertaking purposeful activity was vital in supporting the wellbeing of their residents and enhancing their quality of life, and that the Erskine Artists' Residency Programme had enabled Erskine Homes to extend what they could offer. The artists and Erskine Managers and participants' family members emphasised the enjoyment that residents had gained from participating, which was highly valued in a care home environment and especially amongst residents with dementia and disabled residents who might have otherwise found it difficult to engage with creative activities, group activities, or activities more generally. Wider wellbeing impacts were observed, with particular depth, largely due to the creative process being focused around finding meaning through building connections between artists and residents.	Achieved
4	Creative programme at Erskine is diversified	Erskine Homes has confirmed that the depth and quality of creative provision achieved would not have been available to their residents without the Artists' Residency Programme.	Achieved
5	Skills and confidence of staff are enhanced	The Erskine Managers observed that staff members have learned a lot from observing and working alongside the artists, and some are now more likely to instigate creative activities. Specifically, it was reported that the artists demonstrated to Erskine staff members that creative activities could be "simple" for both residents and staff, and did not require a lot of equipment or need to be lengthy or resource-intensive. In addition, Erskine staff members have been supported to deliver creative activities independently through the Christmas Activity Boxes, and these have been well received and used.	Achieved

Concluding remarks

The Erskine Artists' Residency Programme 2021-2023 commenced in difficult circumstances caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. Despite the challenges faced, both Luminare and Erskine have felt that the partnership has been a success. At the end of Year 1 Luminare commented that "the partnership has gone well considering we have not had the easiest start" and Erskine commented that "it is a real positive experience and long may it continue, the partnership that we have".

The split structure of the programme afforded Luminare, Erskine and the artists the "time and space to think" in advance of Year 2, in order to "make more informed plans for next time". This reflective process was embraced positively and enthusiastically by all involved and as a consequence a refined Year 2 of the programme ran extremely smoothly and impactfully.

All stakeholders agreed that residents had benefited substantially from taking part in the programme, having certainly fulfilled Erskine Homes' aim of providing "purposeful activity" which was enjoyable, meaningful and high in quality.

Erskine staff members were reported to have "absorbed" a lot of knowledge through working with the artists, and had learned that creative activities could be "simple" but impactful. They had consequently been observed to have grown in confidence in initiating creative activities themselves.

The structure of the programme was effective in the following ways:

- The "casual" induction days allowed the artists to familiarise themselves with the environment and practical elements of their specific home, and start to make connections with key staff members.
 - In Year 2 it worked particularly well that Erskine colleagues spent time making plans and briefing staff in advance of the induction day.
- It was important that artists spent full days on-site so that they could feel integrated into the home and have plenty of flexibility with their time, with the boundaries of 'full days' being determined by the daily routines of the home.
- The length of each residency block was considered "fine" but it is likely that even more depth and impact could be achieved across a slightly extended block of sessions due to the time it takes to build connections in this environment.
- Having two residency blocks enabled a useful process of reflection in between.
 - This was particularly helpful where individual artists and staff also took part in both blocks.
 - It may be worth considering making the blocks asymmetric, with the first block being shorter and the second block being longer so that artists and staff could more effectively consolidate their learning in block 2.
 - Erskine Managers appreciated that a rotation of artists enabled them to offer more variety for residents. This also provided a "fresh start" for the artists.

It is likely that this programme would have replicability in other care settings or similar environments, with success being reliant on an early focus around communication, sufficient time and flexibility being allowed, and artists having a degree of comfort in working with process rather than outcomes.