

Open Arms Artists' Collective, in Gloucestershire, Wiltshire and Oxfordshire, is committed to working creatively with older people.

By Angela Conlon

The Open Arms Artists' Collective (OAAC) was born out of the Courtyard Theatre in Hereford's 'Making of Me' project. We are a group of independent participatory artists (and associates) based across Gloucestershire, Wiltshire and Oxfordshire, all committed to working creatively with older people.

An artist collective is an initiative that is the result of a group of like-minded artists working together, usually under their own management, towards shared aims. It allows a cross combination of multiple creative minds and disciplines and the cross-fertilization of ideas and approaches. OAAC was set up in early 2017 and officially formed as a partnership in March 2018.

Collectively we have worked in over 60 care homes and specialist dementia settings with over 1,600 older people in the past 3 years. We are interested in building on the experience and partnerships we have developed in care and community settings, as well as piloting new, inventive approaches using different art forms. Our workshops and residencies are developed in response to the desires, interests and needs of the individuals/groups we work with and through dialogue with organisations, group leaders and carers. Our aim is to engage people imaginatively in ways which increase levels of participation, both physically and mentally, and which lead fundamentally to improving the quality of people's lives.



Working as a collective we:-

- come together to share practice, ideas, network, test out creative ideas
- act as critical friends
- work together on joint projects or apply for funding collectively
- be open to new suggestions, experiences, contacts and ways of working
- share current knowledge, findings and expertise in the sector

Working together we have already established projects with The Order of St Johns' Care Homes, Swindon Dance and The Everyman Theatre, as well as recently securing funding to work with Bethesda Church in Cheltenham on **Creative Age**, an arts project for people living with dementia and their carers.

We are always looking to develop our programmes and partnerships to test out creative and innovative approaches to physically and mentally engage with the frail elderly. As a collective we are committed to working creatively with older people and interested in piloting new, inventive approaches in a variety of different settings.

For further information – www.openarmsartists.org.uk