

Making the road

*Walker, your footsteps
are the road, and nothing more.
Walker, there is no road,
the road is made by walking.
Walking, you make the road,
and turning to look behind
you see the path you
never again will step upon.
Walker, there is no road.
only foam trails on the sea.*

From *Proverbios y cantares* by Antonio Machado

Over the last few strange weeks I have found myself drawn back again and again to this verse and, as I reflect on the exam question, *since lockdown...how has the role of creativity changed in the Age sector?* it elbows its way into my brain again.

I'm in no way qualified to speak for the sector as a whole, I can only speak for my own organisation, where, as I reflect, I realise creativity has taken centre stage since lockdown. We are in uniquely uncertain times – *'caminante, non hay camino'*: 'there is no road' - but creative thinking has helped us grope towards making sense of our experience - or to tolerate our inability to do so and the extended uncertainty. Creative expression has helped us to understand myriad individual experiences of lockdown and challenge the tendency that has, if anything, become more prevalent throughout this period to assume that older people are a homogeneous group, sharing a common experience. Creative practice will help us to *'make the road'* ahead – nothing else can.

The age sector was quick to respond to the initial demands of lockdown and our organisation is no exception, drawing on our creativity to re-invent ourselves at speed and at scale - to provide support with shopping and medicine collection, to work with people to find ingenious solutions to a host of issues presented by social isolation and to make thousands of friendly, weekly telephone calls to connect with people and find out how they are doing.

But are food parcels and phone calls the best we can offer? I hope not! As lockdown begins to loosen its grip for some, many remain socially isolating. The locked down experience threatens to become a 'locked out' experience for some and the impact of this is already becoming clear in raised levels of anxiety and depression. 'Creative and cultural participation' tops the league table as the leading contributing indicator to wellbeing in later life in Age UK's Index of Wellbeing. This has to influence how we *'make the road'* ahead. Our challenge now is how to build on some of the inspiring creative responses to lockdown by, with and for older people. We have been circulating a well-received weekly *Creativity at Home Newsletter*, highlighting some of the many creative activities and opportunities online and, for older people without digital access, we are about to pilot a *Creativity Pack* and a *Poem on the Phone*.

As a sector, we now urgently need to pool our expertise with the creative sector to ensure we have a creative offer by, with and for people in later life to meet the needs of these exceptional times.



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