



A New Initiative: Medley

Well, that's one New Year Resolution I've managed to keep...For some time now, the idea of trying to set up a small charity has been lurking at the back of my mind. Volunteering for the wonderful dementia charity YOPEY in particular spurred me to act. This year has flown by, and who could have predicted the year it has been? Now autumn is here Medley has taken its first steps.

Medley is a new initiative exploring music, art and nature's many impacts on health and wellbeing. Initially the focus is the website and blog <https://medley.live>, aiming to build awareness and to highlight different issues. So far blogposts have covered *arts under lockdown *rekindling memory in people with dementia *barriers to communal music-making and *the National Day of Arts in Care Homes.

Medley also has a new forum, <https://medley.forumotion.com>, which could help create virtual support if people would like to share ideas or experiences.

Medley is starting to build a social media presence on Facebook

<https://www.facebook.com/Medley-100378301811844>

and on Twitter <https://www.twitter.com/Medley60746969> and is keen to join in some of the many conversations out there.

In October I hope to start sharing music, art and nature ideas on different themes each fortnight, which people could use to boost mood or to stimulate memory or movement.

The hope is that in a few months' time, Medley will grow to start some community work of its own, either online or face-to-face. I live in the East Midlands so face-to-face work would take place here, but a virtual project could work with people anywhere in the UK. Geography need be no barrier! Medley aims to inspire and support community music, art or nature groups to share creativity or nature with local support groups, such as a group for stroke survivors or people living with sight loss. Drawing together groups across a community could create grassroots connections. A project might focus on either music, art or nature alone, or might link all three.

Medley shares much of The Age of Creativity's focus. So many of the issues or conditions Medley is exploring impact on older people in particular. Dementia, sight loss, hearing loss, stroke and neurological illnesses like Parkinson's disease are all far more common in older people. I hope that Medley will reach practitioners and participants alike, professionals and patients, someone with long experience of working in the creative arts but also someone newly diagnosed with dementia who is wondering how music might help. Meeting different needs will be a challenge but I feel it would strengthen any contribution Medley could make. Balancing art, music and nature will be a further challenge, but all three have specific contributions to make. Moreover, they can interweave: it can be helpful to respond to nature through the arts.

memory paint
song
language
moment plant
stigma

CONNECT

nature and the arts can help older people simply by occupying time and easing boredom as frailty, cognitive decline and/or sight or hearing loss enforce inactivity and idleness.

Medley will look at the widest possible range of uses for nature and the arts in health and wellbeing. But some specific areas stand out. One is the way music can stimulate a reaction in people with dementia who have become largely unresponsive, or improve aphasia following stroke. Another is the way art can improve mental wellbeing and enable self-expression. Another is the way nature can calm and engage people with dementia, autism or learning difficulties, as well as its sensory impact on people with sight loss. I also hope Medley will highlight how

While I'm new to The Age of Creativity, this is such an inspiring space, an opportunity to interact with others who have diverse yet common goals. And to see in action the myriad imaginative, thoughtful ways in which people are connecting with older people through creativity. Medley would like to share some of these initiatives with others through the blog and on social media to help build awareness.

Rarely have imagination and thought been more needed than this year, when the usual interaction upon which participatory arts depend has become impractical. In some ways, the move online has widened participation by older people with no transport or who are too frail to attend events. But the suspension of many groups has greatly isolated others. Seeing how many alternative initiatives have sprung up demonstrates creativity's enduring flexibility.

I see Medley as all about community: sharing ideas and thoughts online through the blog and forum, and then sharing art, music and nature as local groups come together on a specific project. It would be wonderful if you would like to get involved, read the blog and contribute to the forum. At the end of the day, this is obviously not about seeing through my New Year Resolution. Medley exists to draw on creativity and nature to improve lives and to reach more people, and older people are integral to this hope. Could you catch the vision and help build the Medley community? Thank you so much.