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**Implementing, researching and evaluating a Wales-wide arts in residential care
programme: Reflections from the cARTrefu programme**

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Background

Wales has a higher proportion of older people than the rest of the UK and while dementia is not a natural part of ageing, the incidence of dementia increases with age. An estimated 45,000 people live with dementia in Wales and dementia costs the Welsh economy £1.4 billion with £535 million spent on social care costs annually (Alzheimer's Society, 2015). Prioritising limited budgets presents significant challenges for commissioners and providers of services (Jones, Windle, Tudor Edwards, 2018). Legislation in Wales focusses on improving the outcomes, wellbeing and quality of life of people engaging with care and support services in Wales, as noted in both the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 and the Well-being of Future Generations Act 2015.

There is an increasing evidence-base confirming the benefits of the arts for people living with dementia as well as for family and professional carers who support them (All-Party Parliamentary Group on Arts, Health and Wellbeing, 2017; Arts Council of Wales, 2018; Fancourt & Finn, 2019; Windle et al., 2020). The benefits of long-term engagement with certain art activities such as visiting galleries and museums have also been found beneficial for older people (Tymoszuk et al., 2020). Against this backdrop, in April 2015,

Age Cymru began delivering the arts in residential care programme, cARTrefu, which was funded by The Baring Foundation and Arts Council Wales.

The cARTrefu programme

cARTrefu, which means ‘to reside’ in Welsh, aims: to improve the quality of care home residents' experience of participatory arts activities and enhance their general wellbeing; to develop artists' professional practice through the opportunity to work with groups of people with whom they may have little past experience; and to facilitate the acquisition of new skills, and confidence in sharing these, by care home staff. To date, cARTrefu has been funded for 3 phases to deliver bespoke art residencies in care homes across Wales and to the best of our knowledge, it is the largest project of its kind in Europe.:

- Phase 1 (2015-2017): 16 Artist Practitioners delivered 8 residencies of 8 weekly 2-hour sessions with residents;
- Phase 2 (2017-2019): 12 Artist Practitioners delivered 6 12-week residencies, with a particular focus on engaging with care staff to continue creative engagement within the home once the residency had finished;
- Phase 3 (2019-2021) 14 Artist Practitioners to deliver quarterly training to care staff promoting the benefits of creativity within care settings and artist workshops to build capacity amongst artists to support work within care settings. Artist Practitioners will work in 50 care homes for one month to develop a cARTrefu Activity Plan to empower care staff to improve the quality and range of creative provision within the care home.

[Insert Figure 1 around here]

The first phase of the project delivered nearly 2,000 hours of multi-art form activities to over 1,500 residents in 122 care homes, equivalent to nearly 20% of care homes in Wales.

The residencies were with artist practitioners from the visual arts, performing arts, music and words (poetry/prose).

An independent evaluation of the first phase was led by the Dementia Services Development Centre Wales (DSDC Wales), Bangor University and launched in the National Assembly for Wales (Algar-Skaife, Woods, & Caulfield, 2017). It concluded that participating in the cARTrefu programme had a significant impact on older people's wellbeing and staff attitudes towards residents, especially those living with dementia.

'Well I would never have thought I'd be having such fun. My belly is hurting now (from laughing so much)' Resident

Participating staff (which included care staff, activity coordinators, managers and nursing staff) gained the confidence to lead creative activities themselves and were more likely to engage in cultural activities (i.e. arts classes, visiting gallery/theatre) outside of work.

Funders acknowledged the positive impact of cARTrefu by commissioning a further two phases. However, they were unable to offer long-term funding. So, in the second phase, the independent evaluation completed by DSDC Wales explored what cARTrefu embodied and represented to key stakeholders, such as the funders, delivery team, and care staff, and potential ways forward without core funding from the Baring Foundation and Arts Council of Wales. Core components and unique features of cARTrefu were found to include peer support for the artists, multiform arts provision, the sharing of good practice with care staff, and the availability across Wales. A retrospective Social Return on Investment (SROI) analysis was undertaken using the Phase 1 data to provide additional evidence of the social value generated. The SROI analysis demonstrated the extent to which the programme was highly effective and brought about significant positive changes for care home residents, staff, and artist practitioners (the results are currently in preparation for a peer review publication).

Based on learning and recommendations from both phases, cARTrefu 3 (2019-2021) will help Age Cymru to identify ways to further extend the impact of cARTrefu, with a long term aim of influencing the social care sector to ensure that arts and creativity are considered vital to a person's ability to live well and to embed within the sector. If successful, this will create a sustainable legacy for the cARTrefu approach.

Impact and sustainability

Mindful of the importance of achieving impact, learning from the cARTrefu project has been shared on national and international and practitioner and academic platforms (e.g. Alzheimer Europe, British Society of Gerontology, Engage UK, ENRICH Cymru, UK Dementia Congress conferences) and the project is included in two key UK arts and health reviews (All-Party Parliamentary Group on Arts, Health and Wellbeing, 2017; Arts Council of Wales, 2018). The delivery and research teams have been approached by organisations and researchers from across the globe (Ireland, Germany, Japan, China) for insight of their experiences of implementing and evaluating a successful arts in residential care programme.

Another important output of the cARTrefu project was the development and production of the cARTrefu Activity Card packs for care home staff, which is available online and has been sent to every care home in Wales. A touring and evolving cARTrefu exhibition, the cARTrefu Cube, was also established to raise public awareness of creative life in care homes, though the artwork created with and inspired by the people living in, working in and visiting care homes. This has featured in arts venues, hospitals and a university campus.

Age Cymru have provided evidence to the *Parliamentary Review for Health and Social Care in Wales, Count Me In* and fed into *Connected Communities: Welsh Government Consultation on Tackling Loneliness and Social Isolation*, using the statistically significant evidence from the cARTrefu Evaluation Report 2015 – 2017 to raise awareness of the

cARTrefu approach and successes at a strategic level. More recently, cARTrefu were invited to present at the Welsh Government Cross Party Group (CPG) on Arts in Health. A case study was prepared and distributed to all AMs. This led to plenary questions to the Minister for Health and Social Services (12/02/2020 [Health and Social Services Questions](#)) regarding how the Welsh Government is supporting the use of arts to improve health and wellbeing in social care settings. During the CPG meeting, representatives from the Welsh NHS Confederation also reported that the cARTrefu activity cards were being used by NHS teams as well.

While the evaluation of cARTrefu to date provides robust evidence of the positive impact for care home residents, staff and artist practitioners, a high-level investigation of how to embed the cARTrefu approach into social care is now required to ensure the long-term sustainability of the programme. A Masters project funded by the Knowledge Economy Skills Scholarships (KESS 2), a major pan-Wales operation supported by European Social Funds (ESF) through the Welsh Government, and developed in partnership between Bangor University and Age Cymru, begins in August 2020 with the aim of addressing the following key research question: How can the cARTrefu approach be embedded within the social care sector as a way of:

- Meeting the wellbeing needs of care home residents living with dementia;
- Building positive staff/resident relationships; and
- Upskilling staff?

The project will engage various stakeholders across Wales to explore the ways in which the cARTrefu programme supports older people living in care home settings, to achieve personal wellbeing outcomes. Research findings and recommendations will enable Age Cymru to identify ways of embedding the cARTrefu approach within the social care sector as

a way of meeting the wellbeing needs of care home residents and supporting staff to implement the approach.

Adapting to Covid-19

Coronavirus had a considerable impact on the cARTrefu programme. By necessity, months of planned care home and artist workshops were cancelled from mid-March, as well as activity plans postponed midway through delivery. After a pause in activity at the height of the pandemic, the cARTrefu team began planning for delivery online to offer support to care homes and to allow the continuation of programme objectives.

The team developed a fortnightly e-newsletter for the cARTrefu care home network to share suggestions by cARTrefu artists for creative sessions, suitable for group work or one-to-one where residents are having to isolate, as well as signposting to all the free online creative and cultural resources and events taking place. Through the release of this e-newsletter, cARTrefu had requests for inclusion on the subscription list from several care homes they had not engaged with prior to COVID-19. Following an online ‘Skills Session’, run in partnership with Public Health Wales, the need, and want, of help and support delivering creative activity in care homes became evident by the number of and feedback received from care home workers who attended the session. The team also began work on refreshing the current Activity cards for care homes, making use of the knowledge and skills developed in inclusive practice by the artists from Phase 2 and 3. The focus of the pack will be ‘inclusive for all’, adaptable, and deliverable as a group session or one to one.

There have been positive outcomes of moving cARTrefu online, such as increasing the reach across Wales in areas where they previously had difficulties engaging, allowing care homes in more rural areas of Wales to attend and connect with each other as an ongoing support network for activity coordinators. As travel will not be a factor for the foreseeable

future, artists from different areas of Wales are able to deliver workshops together enabling sessions with more varied art forms and a wider knowledge base. Going forward, the research team addressing ways to embed arts provision within the social care sector will be able to oversee many more workshops and activity plans than time, and finances, would have allowed on a face-to-face basis.

Reflections on the successes and challenges of cARTrefu

cARTrefu is highly valued by those involved and the question of how it has received three rounds of funding is often asked by other organisations wishing to emulate its success. The heads of both funding bodies have publicly championed the programme. Nick Capaldi, Chief Executive of Arts Council of Wales recently described cARTrefu as “...one of my favourite projects” (p.32, Age Cymru, 2020) and David Cutler, Director of Baring Foundation, described it as ‘brilliant’ in a blog exploring the opportunities for creative ageing in Wales (Cutler, 2017).

In this blog, Cutler poses the question ‘*why is Wales winning an enviable reputation in participatory arts with older people?*’. He suggests that the partnership between Age Cymru and Arts Council of Wales has been central. Gwanwyn, the creative ageing festival run by Age Cymru and funded by Welsh Government and Arts Council of Wales has run since 2006. In fact, the Gwanwyn project manager has always been part of the cARTrefu team and many of the links built up over the years will have helped promote cARTrefu. The Age Friendly Cultural Network expands this partnership to include National Museum Wales and Ageing Well in Wales. There is also the Wales Arts, Health and Wellbeing Network (WAHWN) which aims to support arts and health professionals by providing training and a knowledge bank of case studies. All of this shows the commitment by organisations to improve the arts provision for older people in Wales and as noted, legislation in Wales

demonstrates Welsh Government's commitment to improving the wellbeing of the population.

The long-term research partnership is another success of the programme. The evaluation is led by DSDC Wales who have over a decade of research expertise within the arts and dementia field. Despite the evaluation budget decreasing in the second and third phase, infrastructure funding from Welsh Government, through the Wales Centre for Ageing and Dementia Research has provided additional support to allow the research team to continue working with the cARTrefu programme and building research capacity. Gaining funding for a Masters project for the third phase evaluation allows a full-time postgraduate student to undertake a rigorous study to inform future steps.

Implementing and evaluating the cARTrefu programme has not been without challenges. Despite the long-term research partnership, conducting an evaluation of a Wales-wide programme posed certain logistical challenges for a research team which consisted of one main researcher collecting and analysing data (although additional support was provided during analysis stage). There is the age-old question of how to evaluate benefits for people living with dementia that are often 'in the moment'. Reducing such benefits to numbers ignores the richness of experience and therefore a mixed-methods approach was required which produced over 1000 reflective journals by the artist practitioners along with another 1065 pre/post questionnaires by staff and residents. Artist practitioners were required to collect data from participants as well as being participants themselves which created a potential tension between the evaluation needs and the work of the artist practitioners. However, several of the cARTrefu artist practitioners have reported that they have continued to use some of the evaluation methods within their own practice and the reflective journals from the artist practitioners provide a rich data source for secondary analysis and future research.

Conclusion

cARTrefu is a flagship programme for Age Cymru. The strong emphasis on evaluation from the beginning has enabled the programme to gather powerful evidence of the benefits and impact of cARTrefu on residents, staff and artists. However, to continue, the team must plan for the future by further raising awareness that the cARTrefu approach goes beyond a pleasant activity into an innovative solution to meeting individualised wellbeing outcomes that are critical to realising health and social care policy ambitions.

Health and social care are a devolved responsibility and the care home sector is a core component of health and social care provision in Wales. There are great financial pressures on this sector, with increases in salaries, including the living wage, outstripping fee contributions from social services and continuing health care funding. To manage reduced funding and increasing demand, innovative solutions to contemporary health and social care challenges for those living with dementia are required (Welsh Government 2014, 2015, 2017).

Identifying ways of embedding cARTrefu, an innovative approach, within the social care sector, will help ensure that care home residents are supported to achieve personal wellbeing outcomes that contribute positively to their quality of life. This in turn can contribute to supporting staff morale and staff development, leading to a more stable and consistent workforce that is better equipped to respond to the challenges of an ageing population, including support for those living with dementia.

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Figure 1: Sophie McKeand, a cARTrefu 1 artist, working alongside a resident

