

Age & Opportunity Making Art at Home Pilot

Evaluation Report

August 2021

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1 Introduction

Age & Opportunity commissioned Imogen Blood & Associates (IBA) to evaluate the Making Art at Home pilot initiative which ran between April and June 2021 with a final evaluation session facilitated by IBA held on 21st June 2021. The pilot aimed to create opportunities for older people to engage in art during COVID-19 restrictions using remote online methods and to support the broader roll out of the initiative using pre-recorded instruction from September 2021. The pilot was delivered by an established artist and arts facilitator and by members of the Age & Opportunity engagement team using Zoom videoconferencing. IBA conducted a light touch evaluation using the Most Significant Change evaluation technique¹.

This evaluation report describes the pilot activity and reports participant feedback and reflections about taking part in the pilot. The objective of the evaluation is to assess the success of the pilot and what learning can be taken forward to future models of arts-based delivery.

2 The Making Art at Home pilot

2.1 Age & Opportunity

Age & Opportunity is a national charitable organisation based in Dublin, Ireland. Age & Opportunity is focused on improving the quality of life of people aged 50-100+. It has a portfolio of initiatives aimed at inclusive activity, engagement and involvement with the arts. *Art Making at Home* developed as a result of Age & Opportunity's Creative Exchanges QQI accredited level 6 minor award course, which trained care staff, and professional artists in the development, delivery and evaluation of art-making activities in care settings. An opportunity was identified during the COVID-19 pandemic to generate greater inclusivity through online delivery to older people in their own homes.

2.2 The Pilot

The Age & Opportunity pilot project *Making Art at Home* was commissioned with funding from Creative Ireland. The pilot was borne out of an early initiative to encourage people to create art and have fun using common items around the home during the COVID-19 lockdown via six pre-recorded YouTube videos curated collaboratively with artists and Age & Opportunity. The videos were posted on the Age & Opportunity website as an accessible resource open to anyone.

The videos inspired the development of an interactive format to engage older people in live workshop activity facilitated through Zoom videoconferencing. Pilot participants were

¹ For more information of the Most Significant Change Technique, please see our story-based evaluation website <https://www.seralliance.org/>

recruited through the Cultural Companions programme and other networks. 17 participants were identified for the pilot programme and were recruited from across the country 10 out of 17 attended 8 pilot sessions. All participants were aged 50+.

An extensive waiting list of 40 older people remained in place for a larger phase 2 roll out which followed the pilot. Phase 2 would not include live facilitation but would include the same instruction from pre-recorded YouTube videos and the same art kit materials provided via the postal service. Additional recruitment is planned for Sept 2021.

2.3 The Pilot activity

In advance of the sessions, participants were posted an art kit containing a sketch pad, notebook journal, paints, pencils and crayons, bubble wrap, masking tape and water colour paper required for each session to use alongside household items. Participants were introduced to a range of art making activities over eight one-hour weekly online workshops which corresponded to topics in pre-recorded YouTube videos.

All sessions started as live sessions with facilitators Tom (artist) and Ciarán (co-facilitator) and the group. Some sessions began by showing a pre-recorded video of Tom demonstrating the week's topic. Other sessions demonstrated the week's topic live to camera.

Sessions involved participants making art while online and guided by the arts facilitator. Participants were not required to share their artworks with other participants live in the session but were encouraged to communicate with the facilitators and each other. The workshop sessions took place on Mondays, 2-3pm over April, May and June 2021.

The following table outlines the workshop content for all 8 pilot workshop sessions:

Workshop	Content
1	Sketch book maintenance - introducing the habit of keeping a working sketchbook.
2	Watercolour pencils - drawing/painting a simple landscape.
3	Watercolour pencils leaf - using a leaf as a model, building on our learning with watercolour pencils.
4	Bubble wrap printing - using bubble wrap and acrylic paint to do simple and fun printing.
5	Acrylic cloud painting - taking a photo of the clouds as a model to explore acrylic paint.
6	Flower Mandela - using natural materials inside and outside to create beautiful images.
7	Drawing a face.
8	Window light box - drawing a building, sketching detailed structures using the window as a light box, then transferring this image to watercolour paper by carbonising the sheet.

2.4 The pilot evaluation

The pilot included an evaluation element conducted by independent evaluators, Imogen Blood & Associates (IBA). IBA is a UK based social research consultancy, working to promote equality and improve effectiveness across the public and not-for-profit sectors and has extensive experience in evaluating national arts-based programmes involving older people.

The evaluation provided an opportunity to reflect on and capture the learning from the Art Making at Home pilot project. IBA adapted an evaluation approach called Most Significant Change, which uses storytelling as a way to understand what difference a project makes to those involved. IBA used a range of storytelling techniques to measure the difference Art Making at Home made to participants including discussion, visual representation, and invitations to use various media.

2.4.1 Choosing and using Most Significant Change

Most Significant Change (MSC) is a storytelling and story sharing qualitative approach to evaluation. It is particularly useful where evaluating people-orientated projects, services, or events, and where the desired impact is about making a (hopefully positive) difference to someone's life. In short, MSC focuses on finding out what has changed for individuals – and which of those changes stands out the most.

MSC has three main parts:

1. **Story collection** – stories are collected through interview conversations or by other methods such as through song or other art forms. These stories are anonymous and must be approved by the storyteller.
2. **Story reflection and selection** – the stories are discussed by a group of people who were not the storytellers and are interested in learning about what the stories say about the impact of the project.
3. **Using the learning** – the outcome of the discussion is written up into a report and this is shared or published. This makes use of the learning by helping funders and organisations better understand the benefits and drawbacks of the project. It helps to inform decisions about how to design projects and which projects to fund in the future.

We (IBA) chose the MSC approach for Art Making at Home because:

- Telling a story about part of your life – and hearing or reading those stories - is an understandable, accessible way of taking part
- It is an empowering approach, because it is the person telling their own story who decides what stands out most for them
- There are many creative ways that stories can be told and shared – in evaluating a creative project, this felt particularly appropriate
- People find that stories stay with them. We all remember stories that resonate with us – this means we can easily talk about projects, long after their conclusion, and with people who were not involved at the time

- You do not need to know any of the quantitative side of the project to meaningfully discuss the stories.

We introduced MSC to participants, by inviting them to take part in an additional, final (ninth) Zoom session at the usual time and day of the Making Art at Home workshop. Prior to this, towards the end of Session 4, one of IBA's associate researchers, introduced herself to the group on Zoom and explained a little about what would be involved. This included invitations to take part in an MSC interview by another IBA researcher shortly following the end of the pilot. To encourage interest in taking part and to ensure potential participants were fully informed, we produced and distributed a simple flyer explaining the evaluation and methodology.

Out of the 10 participants who took part in the 8 sessions, 7 attended the final ninth evaluation session. In the ninth session, two IBA researchers, Lorna and Shelly, explained more about how the participants could engage and share their MSC stories. Together, Lorna and Shelly presented the MSC technique to the group, and Lorna used an example of a creative project she had previously been involved in as a participant to explore some of the ways in which stories of change could be found and told based on her own experience of storytelling through alternative media (detail of the example Lorna used can be found in Appendix A). We offered participants the opportunity to share their most significant change stories in a range of formats and media to offer the greatest opportunity for creative and inclusive participation.

We invited up to 6 volunteers to be interviewed by a member of our research team, either on the telephone or by Zoom. We gained informed consent to carry out interviews. The interviews were planned to take no more than 45 minutes. During the interview, participants were asked what the most significant change had been for them as a result of being involved in the project.

Participants were not limited to contributing to the evaluation via interviews, however. We also invited participants to express a story of change through any artistic medium they wished, for example through poetry, photography, a painting or a sketch, etc.

We did not limit our evaluation to participants. Facilitators were also invited to participate in providing an MSC story. We also requested general feedback, open to all, for process evaluation purposes. We have appended these comments (Appendix B); and included them in our panel discussion. Data from the ninth session was also included in the analysis.

Participants were provided with the choice to remain anonymous and, where the researcher had written up the story following the interview on behalf of participants, story tellers were invited to name their own story, approve it and provide permission for it to be shared.

Following the data collection phase, we organised and facilitated a panel discussion event with key members of the Age & Opportunity strategic team and the IBA researcher who conducted the interviews. At the panel, MSC stories, process data and general feedback were discussed to draw out key messages and learning to inform recommendations for potential future delivery of similar initiatives (see Section 4.2 for recommendations).

3 Evaluation Results

We received 5 MSC stories, four were written stories of which three were told during the interview and written up by the researcher, one was written up by the participant and one story was told pictorially. One interview took place with the artist facilitator and a full interview transcript was produced alongside an MSC story. The additional artist interview transcript provided in-depth detail providing useful process data and learning. General feedback data was supplied by 3 participants. The ninth session also provided qualitative data useful to the evaluation. The panel discussion informed our overall analysis and the panel's key reflections are presented under each MSC story. Our remaining results and analysis are presented in the following sections.

3.1 Demographics

The Making Art at Home participant group profile was mainly female, aged over 50 and with no apparent sensory or additional needs. One man joined for the 1st session and decided not to continue.

3.2 MSC stories

All 5 MSC stories are presented below:

1. Bella's Story: *"It's like a circle"*

I had trained as an artist when I was young, when you care less about what everyone else thinks and you just do things because you want to and because you like doing it. I think somehow the training handicapped me, it's as if you are not allowed to produce anything unless it's great art, work with a message. As you get older building a career takes over you go to work, busy yourself with life and you forget that you used to like doing art. Well since I finished work last year, and through lock down, I busied myself with the housework and the garden, but then you start to think about what else you could do. When I do some of my own work I feel differently about things that I have achieved something.

I felt like Tom gave me the permission to do art for the sake of it, it didn't matter what I produced, it's the process that counts and I enjoy it, that's the big change. Before I would put off doing anything creative. My studio is next to the house, so I had every excuse to avoid going in there. I thought there was no point because I would need to be in there for hours – a whole day! Well, I hadn't got time for all that and if you don't start you can't fail. That's what I thought – but I was kidding myself.

To do the course, I had to bring my drawing materials into the house, and they stayed there. I found that I could fill a sketch book in an hour here and there. The art kit in the house is a permanent change and I've been drawing ever since. I've been amazed by how much you can do with watercolour pencils – that's been really interesting! I've also been meeting a friend who is a creative and we've been putting an afternoon aside to do things. I've tried to stick to that even if my friend can't make it, at least it's something and now I have a scheme of things that I'm working on to do with walking on the beach.

I'm hoping not to slip back into not doing my own work, I'm hoping to make room in my life for art again. It gives me something back. If I'm doing my own artwork, I feel I'm living up to the training I had and the talent I once knew I had. I feel I've actually rediscovered something, and it gives me a sense of achievement. I enjoy the physical effort of doing things – I had forgotten that I enjoyed that so much and that was why I did it as a kid. Tom taught me that you just have to do it, just get on with it. Doing it is the valuable thing, not the outcome. I'm going to play about with things and see what comes of it. Tom reminded me of that, and it's helped me to remember that that is how I felt when I was 16 or 17. It's like a circle really.

Key reflections on Bella's story from the panel discussion:

- This story of how Bella had re-discovered art was gripping. She describes changes that went on inside her mind and practical changes that she made – constructive strategies about when, where and how to do art – which enabled her to bring art back into her life.
- You might think that someone who had received some professional/ educational training, and who identifies as 'an artist' might get the least from these sessions, but we hear from Bella (and the other stories) how procrastination and the restrictive nature of labels can serve to hold people back.
- Ageism and a changing sense of self across the life course can form additional barriers which Bella overcame through participation.
- It seems that Bella felt pressure to produce 'art, with a message'; realising that she could be creative purely because she enjoyed it, and this was liberating. Once she is freed in this way, she begins to focus - very deliberately (and artistically) - on a theme, such as a walk on the beach. She met a friend and went to the beach to focus creatively on it, as a direct result of the online sessions.
- A theme from this evaluation and from others undertaken by IBA on arts interventions with older people (including during the pandemic) is that, where arts enable a person to remember a former self and/or happier times, it appears to improve mental wellbeing.

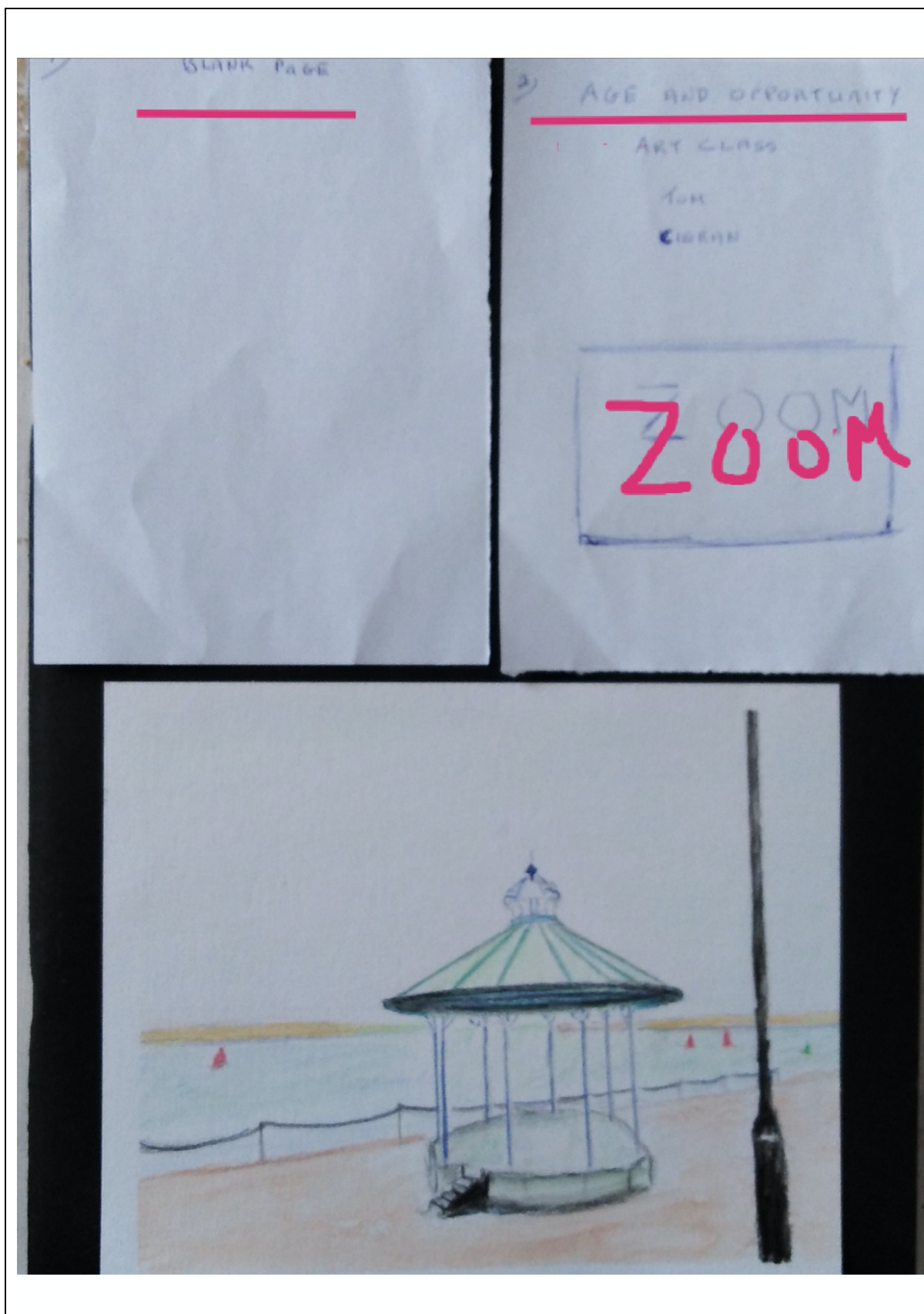
2. Maria's Story: "Return to Art"

Maria produced a visual story, which is shown overleaf.

Key reflections on Maria's story from the panel discussion:

- It is a beautiful picture, the bandstand at Dun Laoghaire pier. It evokes days out and fun times.

- I like the way she starts with a blank page and labels it as such: it is a simple but effective way of showing that there was an artistic void for her before the sessions and now, look.
- I like the way she has taken a highlighter to her own story and emphasised the key words in the journey: the lettering is bright pink and feels playful and joyful.
- You can tell the picture has been drawn on really good quality cartridge paper – I wonder if that was included in the pack that was sent out?
- From a technical point of view, she has written the pink lettering over the top of the picture, presumably using a tablet which may be a skill she has developed along with the increased confidence with technology, it feels significant that she has highlighted 'Zoom' as a key enabler in the journey.



3. Sally's Story: *"Sticking at things"*

I don't think I've experienced any changes really, not personally anyhow. I've always had a lot of trouble keeping at it, I'm great procrastinator, that's the issue really. Tom and Ciarán were very encouraging, so it was that I suppose – I was completely absorbed in what I was doing. I've always enjoyed portraiture but haven't kept to it. Tom taught us how to draw a face – by dividing up the face – I've never been shown that. I'll use that now, perhaps I'll start doing portraits of my family and friends. It's doing something consistently - that's the thing.

Doing the sessions has made me a bit better with technology, getting on Zoom and that. I've signed up with a local organisation to learn more about that now. I've also signed up for a lot of community arts things – painting a mural with children for a charity, art therapy class, community arts with young people, so I'm looking forward to that – but I've always done these types of things anyway so it's not really a change. But the thing now with covid is not to look too long into the future! In all of this, the classes have been a social outlet for those long days.

Key reflections on Sally's story from the panel discussion:

- It is interesting that Sally says – a couple of times – that she did not experience any changes, but then she mentions several impacts from the course. It makes me reflect on what we mean by 'change' and 'impact'.... but overall, I think it's fair to say that the course has been a catalyst for her, even though she was clearly quite engaged in community arts and other activities prior to lockdown and these sessions.
- The regularity and structure seem to have really helped her overcome her procrastination and get into the habit of regular creative practice.
- The fact that Sally was absorbed in the moment and that the sessions helped to shorten and provide a social outlet during the long days of lockdown feels significant.
- She has learned and developed some new skills, both in relation to arts (portraiture) and technology (use of Zoom).

4. Noreen's Story: *"First Experience of Art"*

I never did anything in art before. I always shied away when I heard the word "art".

I knew I was quite bad at drawing all the time. I was not even familiar with Zoom up to when this class commenced.

I was quite slow but I learned a lot. It gave me the confidence to try something different. Both Tom and Ciarán were most helpful and patiently guided us along each week.

Even though none of us knew one another there was always a conversation going on between all of us and Tom and Ciarán.

The tracing from one picture to plain paper was what I found most difficult but I think it will be the one I will most use in the future. I watched it being done but others who did are before were able to do it with him.

I see it as having made new friends through the class and I now have the confidence to join art classes as I feel I have enough experience (small as it might be) to tackle greater challenges in the field of art.

Key reflections on the Noreen's story from the panel discussion:

- It feels very significant that Noreen has, through the sessions, grown in confidence – artistically, technically and socially – to the point where she can join face-to-face art classes in the future, having never done art before and having 'shied away' from it.
- Noreen has moved from not doing anything creative to doing something and enjoying it and expressing a strong intention to continue.
- Making friends from the class is a substantial impact, and quite a surprising one, given the online nature of the sessions.
- The fact that she and so many others find the idea of art off-putting, or intimidating is a result of a poor educational system.
- For people who are less confident and have less experience at the outset, doing a class online like this can be a gentle introduction: there is some protection on Zoom, you are in control over whether others see your work; and face-to-face sessions can be more of a commitment in terms of transport, time, etc.
- It is interesting that the thing Noreen found the most difficult was the thing that she was planning to continue doing the most: that says something about the value of offering a taster of a variety of techniques, some which take people outside of their comfort zone and challenge them.

5. Artist, Tom Meskell's Story: "*Learning to use a remote control*"

I'd never facilitated any online arts programmes before the pandemic– it's been a real journey - I've been doing workshops for over 20 years, and it was always face to face. It was a steep learning curve because I'm not a film maker or an editor, so I had to learn all of that as well as learn how to use Zoom. Age & Opportunity were the first organisation to approach me about doing online instructional videos using things around the house to be creative, which acted as a springboard for not only more work with Age & Opportunity but with many other organisations.

One of the things that became apparent to me was that when doing videos only, you are not really getting any feedback like you would if people were in the room, so I couldn't get a sense of what people wanted or needed. I'm used to responding to people while they are in the room and adjusting what I'm doing to suit, moving creatively with them to where they want to go, and I couldn't get a sense of that in the same way. So, we came up with the idea of being more proactive and interactive by putting together a kit of art materials to go with specific videos – a kit that would suit the videos - and we proposed 8

online sessions using Zoom with 17 participants. We then proposed to send out 80 more kits with recorded video instructions. When we secured funding the initial planning was to Zoom 8 classes and record me working for others to use. I felt very nervous and unsure of myself doing the classes just in Zoom so I started recording a 10-20 min instructional.

I was used to doing in contact workshops - there was nothing experimental there – it was stuff I've done a thousand times – but it's very different doing it online. Initially I thought I'd make the videos, play them to the participants and answer questions later. As we were delivering the course and going with the flow, we felt like the best thing to do was just to keep that line of communication open because it seemed to me that what the people got out of it was the human contact and a bit of fun and as it turned out, it was a very nice social event for an hour every Monday morning – for them and for us as well.

I'll be really interested to see what difference there is between the 8 sessions that were delivered through Zoom and the 80 that won't use Zoom. It's a perfect experiment because both will have exactly the same kits and instruction, so I'm looking forward to the feedback from that.

One of the big differences for me is that the people aren't beside each other in a Zoom session. So normally in a group, people have a great positive effect on each other through encouraging each other and feeling confident which helps with their own confidence, you know there's all this kind of nice feedback that happens within a group, you can see people trying. But online, for the most part you can see people's faces, but unless people hold things up (but we didn't want to put anyone on the spot or anything by asking them to hold things up), it's difficult to get a sense of what they are doing or to pick up on that feedback. You miss out on things like someone glancing at what someone else is doing or seeing that someone else is really engaging. It creates a vibe in a workshop when people can see each other and interact with each other, so it's all the little micro things that will happen in a face-to-face workshop that are not the same online.

So, the significant change is my expectations about what is possible online. I expected it to be like a workshop, but it wasn't. Now my expectations are a lot more tempered about how much I can do and just in the dynamic that's dictated by the Zoom format - like I have an expectation about what is possible to do. Actually, it took time to readjust my expectations because initially I felt disappointed and anxious that I wasn't able to deliver the quality I was used to. But now having had time to get used to the limitations of the technology, I've been able to adapt and am much better at it. For instance, learning all the basic things with Zoom but also things like where to position the camera, how to edit the film as well as thinking about what's possible to do on Zoom.

The good part of doing it during covid is that at least everyone has been in the same boat! We've all been given a bit of a free pass because we are all doing our best – before covid you would never produce something so early on in the learning journey, you'd have to get it perfect, which increases the cost a lot. It's enabled us to try and test new things without fear of criticism and it was great to have brilliant support from Age & Opportunity when they detected my anxiety about potentially doing a bad job! It just takes time to get used to it, I suppose, and to practice. I redid some of the videos which I feel a lot better about.

Having done the work with Age & Opportunity, it's paid dividends in terms of getting other work off the back of it and through sharing experience and influence with other artists, arts organisations and even suppliers! It definitely kept us afloat when there were so many things being cancelled during the strict lockdown period. There is the added bonus of having resources and a legacy from the work because it is about the work – having it known about and influencing others. You get more bang for your buck because, yes, initially you are benefitting 8 people, but from the same amount of spent energy, you can benefit say another 60 people.

You can reuse the resource to help other artists and arts organisations hit the ground running, such as those connected to the Azure project or through Local Authority Arts Officers. Even our arts supplier relationship has developed, which now enables people to source the materials used in the videos, long after we've finished. Plus, I can source everything I need very easily now, which saves bags of time for an artist. It's a seed sowing exercise and it inspires. Another benefit to me as an artist was to renew my use of creative journals and notebooks which are part of the art making at home course and by my encouraging of the participants to use a journal, it's become part of my own routine again.

There has been huge learning so it's good to have a documented record of what we went through and the changes we went through in order to make it happen. That's really positive because when this stuff dies down, I fear we'll all just go back to the way we were and there will be this vague memory 'oh we used to do that, but we don't have to do it anymore'. But I can imagine live face-to-face and online becoming the normal thing. For example, you can get to know each other a bit online first so that when you meet you've already done some of the groundwork – you can hit the ground running and feel like you already know each other and have something to talk about. That would ordinarily take up a whole session which is a lot if you have to travel. Learning to use a remote control has had huge ripple effects and I hope we don't lose some of the benefits of that, but it also shows how essential it is to get together as well. Now we have the proof that there are some things that - in order to do them well - you really do need to be with people.

Key reflections on the artist's story from the panel discussion:

- It is heartening how much the artist also got out of this experience, and the legacy which has come from it for him, potentially creating longer term cost benefits from Age & Opportunity's initial investment in the project.
- The artist reported growth in confidence about what is possible online and how best to deliver this. Having experienced a sense of fear, and of stepping outside of his comfort zone to do something new, that at first was 'not perfect'. Interestingly this mirrors the experience of some of the participants. You can feel him growing and exhaling in the piece.
- Like participants, he experienced some re-discovery/ re-adoption of techniques such as the use of a reflective journal.
- Over the course of the sessions, he builds a much more nuanced sense of what you can and cannot do online and how to adapt his facilitation and engagement practice

accordingly: hopefully this will be useful as we move into a more ‘blended’ future, with a mix of online and face-to-face interaction.

- It is interesting that, whilst some of the participants found it freeing not having to compare their artwork or be compared to each other artistically, the lack of visual feedback was a challenge and added pressure for Tom as a teacher. He needed to try and find different feedback loops.
- At Age & Opportunity, we are interested in understanding the measurable outcomes for artists working with older people as a result of this and other Age & Opportunity projects. We see here some tangible outcomes for the artist - creatively, practically and economically. These include professional and social contacts, materials, ideas, improved profile, etc. It is encouraging that these outcomes happened in this project in spite of – or perhaps even because of – the necessity to deliver the sessions remotely via Zoom.

3.3 Qualitative findings from the ninth session

The ninth session in which IBA invited group members to inform the evaluation, provided additional insight to MSC stories. Group members were asked about their own reflections of the pilot and what their plans for their next artwork would be. Below we provide anonymised quotes taken from the session:

“I’ve found I’m looking at things differently – look at something now and then I put it in to my work”

“...it gave new insight into things – not being into that before – not done anything like that”

“...it’s something I can always absorb myself in. Pick it up and put it down – made me realise I’m going to take the opportunity to do as many art courses as possible. Not putting myself down, because art is so good for me.”

“going to do more art classes again – more than I thought”

“Things arriving in the post is lovely”

“I was thrown out of art class at school, they said I’d be better at history – I’ve has an inferiority complex ever since – but I know I’m good at crafts, embroidery etc. – feels good that I’ve proved that man wrong. It all takes a lot of practice – I sat down to draw a tulip, it took loads of goes, but I got there in the end – it was hard, but I did it... Looking at things differently – green, not just green, different shades and tones.”

“It rekindled my love of art”

“I liked the transferring of the picture, I’d never done anything like that before – just watched it but I didn’t do anything, takes longer to take in than to do – more inclined to look again at it rather than if I was with the person – online you can look at it again and again so you can take it in”

"Transfers of images [shows transfers of a bird and butterfly] – never done that before!"

"Transfers – very enjoyable – relaxing – contact with others made it enjoyable"

"Tom's [artist's] manner - he was very relaxed – made all the difference"

"I usually used oils but now I'd like to try acrylics"

"I went back to my local art class – outdoor setting, sketching, and drawing... just need to get back into practising it. During the pandemic I couldn't sit down to do a drawing – it's helped me to reconnect with my art – everyone involved in it has been lovely."

"I would love to try the acrylics – really nice I liked that – I liked the bubble wrap. The other day I got a bubble wrap envelope in the post and I kept the bubble wrap so I'm going to use that for something else.... I also enjoyed the flowers – making the flowers with food and things."

There were some general observations made by the group. One example being that it was good to have connection to others online while not being able to meet other people during the COVID-19 lockdown. Secondly, there were some issues with connectivity regarding WIFI and technology, however people suggested they benefited from the facilitator's support where support was possible. The facilitator was concerned over the attrition rate with 10 out of 17 people turning up for all sessions.

4 Conclusions

4.1 Thematic reflections and implications

4.1.1 Themes

The panel discussion and qualitative data identified the following overarching themes:

- There are recurring questions and reflections running through many of the stories and the general feedback comments about what we call 'art', what is 'craft', who is an 'artist', and what is 'talent' and 'excellence'. There is a general underlying issue here about the politics, culture and identity within the arts and how this might exclude people.
- The stories bring home just how a diverse group of individuals – in terms of their previous experience and attitudes towards the arts – has been able to benefit from the pilot sessions. Yet there were comments in the general feedback that some people found the pace too slow or the pitch too low at times.

- Bravery emerges as a theme in many of these stories: both in the participants' and the artist's stories. The COVID-19 Lockdown necessitated a leap into the unknown for Age & Opportunity, the artist and the participants. Because of this, people gave themselves and each other more leeway than they might normally: there seemed to be more permission to take risks and innovate. This seems to have created a safe space for sharing and possibly also a very creative and innovative one. There was a sense of 'a free pass' to experiment, and a reduction in the hierarchy between 'teacher' and 'pupils', with everyone seeking to work it out together.
- The evaluation has highlighted ripple effects for the artist as well as the participants – creatively, technically, economically and in terms of improved profile, capacity and networking. Effects on wellbeing as a result of participation and involvement must also be considered.
- The artist and the participants all spoke very highly of the support they received from staff at Age & Opportunity throughout the project.
- The evaluation has demonstrated that online methods can achieve impact and has increased understanding of what works well or better than in contact delivery, and where face-to-face is still extremely valuable and necessary.

4.1.2 Implications

We identified the following implications for Age & Opportunity:

- The evaluation has highlighted the value of this kind of work and the importance of finding cost effective ways to sustain it in the future. A legacy can be achieved by enhancing links to Age & Opportunity's other programmes and/or existing arts infrastructure.
- The findings further validate Age & Opportunity's strategy of paying artists fairly and offering them the support, the reassurance and the space to try out new ways of working with older people. With increased skills, confidence and contacts it is reasonable to suggest they will continue to network, be offered work and develop their practice in this area after Age & Opportunity funded projects have ended.
- Adopting a 'blended' strategy, which uses a mix of online and face-to-face activities, appears to be the ideal model moving forwards.
- It is so important to plan and carefully pitch and communicate activities to people so as not to put anyone off, whilst also making it very clear what people are signing up for – what is expected, and what is not expected.

4.2 Recommendations from the evaluation team

Understand the ripple effect and ensure synergy with rest of the programme

We heard examples of the 'ripple effect' from the artist, for example, through his involvement with Creative Exchanges, Azure and local authority arts officers as well as to the wider arts community. At the moment it feels as though these connections happen by accident rather than design, and there is a risk that Age & Opportunity does not become aware of some of these ripple effects and will therefore be limited in its ability to use this knowledge to evidence wider impact to funders and policy makers.

The ability to stay abreast of this knowledge will be key to finding ways of knitting these different strands of activity together more strategically – whether by linking them to the Care Hubs of Creative Excellence at regional/ local level, and/or to the Bealtaine Festival at a national level. Some of the recommendations from the Care Hubs evaluation could be relevant here, for example, the development of a 'Community of Practice' in this sector for artists and care workers involved in any strands of the programme, or an Arts Education Portal where videos could be accessed, participants could exhibit their work and ideas and practice tips could be shared via a forum.

Evaluate the Phase 2 remote roll-out of the packs and pre-recorded videos

There is an important opportunity to seek feedback from those who receive packs and are able to access the pre-recorded videos but not participate in the live online sessions. It will be important to understand how much impact is lost, and whether there are other gains from this approach. Themes emerging from this evaluation could be tested via an online feedback survey, giving participants the opportunity to leave their contact details if willing to take part in a short follow-up interview. We were struck by how important the opportunity was to share and exhibit what participants had produced: there may be ways to do this via online exhibitions, e.g. linked to Bealtaine Festival, or to the Age & Opportunity website. The survey could also be used to gauge the appetite of participants for some form of online sharing.

Do not shy away from more technical and advanced arts education

The Making Art at Home pilot has succeeded in creating an accessible taster to older people with a wide range of previous arts experience and none. It is striking, however, that it is often the more technical and challenging skills-based sessions that people said they valued the most. IBA has been running a parallel evaluation for Arts Council England funded by the UK Department for Digital, Culture Media and Sport (DCMS) of 50 different arts and cultural interventions carried out during the COVID-19 lockdown to reduce loneliness of older and/or marginalised people. Many of these interventions have specialised on an individual art form or technical skill at a range of ability levels. The feedback from our survey of 1,444 DCMS funded programme participants suggests that many have appreciated the depth and scope of these programmes. We also found that maintaining the welcome by ensuring that sessions are fully inclusive and being clear at the outset about the level and content of the sessions, is imperative regardless of the level.

Appendix A

Storytelling – the example of Lorna’s ‘Crankie Theatre’

In the 9th session, Lorna used an example of something she’d been involved with creatively, as a participant, to explore some of the ways that stories of change could be found and told.

In January and February 2021, Lorna took part – with 11 others, and a tutor (Bronia Evers) – in a 6-week creative course, partly online (Zoom) and partly via the post, to make a crankie theatre. Crankie theatres were particularly popular in the 19th century. They involve a long, illustrated scroll (sometimes called a ‘moving panorama’ or a ‘moving backdrop’) that is wound onto two spools, and loaded into a box which has a viewing screen. The scroll is then hand-cranked (hence the name, ‘crankie’) while the story drawn on it is presented. On Lorna’s course, the box used was a large empty match box, with a screen cut out of the front of this.

We used Lorna’s crankie theatre experience because, as a creative course taking part over a few weeks online and via the post, it shared some similarities with the pilot project and meant we could demonstrate our MSC approach easily and practically.

Appendix B

General Feedback Age & Opportunity Making Art @ Home

During our 9th evaluation session, participants expressed a strong sense of appreciation for the facilitators, with considerable credit to the manner in which sessions were conducted. Participants felt welcomed and sessions had a friendly atmosphere. Despite some issues with broadband connectivity, participants commented on how well the facilitators supported and guided them around using Zoom. In the boxes below we provide additional feedback that was emailed to us following the 9th session:

Just a few lines to let you know how much I enjoyed the art sessions. This was my very first attempt at art and I found it very relaxing and enjoyable. Tom and Ciarán were very easy to listen to and it was a lovely group. However, I now know this is not where my talent lies and will go back to my other crafts of knitting and embroidery.

I would like to thank everyone involved in this project and am very grateful for the opportunity to try it out.

I did the crafts course with Ciarán and Tom which just finished. Overall, I enjoyed the course and there were some good ideas in it which I will use again. I also thought that the course improved as the weeks went by. On the negative side I found the presentation generally very slow moving, there were lots of, how to fold the paper and what materials to use endlessly repeated. Perhaps this was necessary because of the Zoom presentation but I personally found it slowed down the class. But it did get better for the last few classes.

As I said I enjoyed it, but I probably would not do it again.

I really learnt a lot from the classes. I always thought of art in terms of painting pictures. I never associated it with drawing and sketching.