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Inclusive Practice

While considering who to create a practical workshop for I came to the conclusion to base it upon those who are over the age of 75 (of any ability) and who may be excluded due to lack of social interactions therefore resulting in loneliness. I decided to have the minimum age of the group be 75 as “Nearly half (49%) of all people aged 75 and over live alone.

(AgeUK2015).” According to AgeUK the current quantity of those experiencing loneliness is at an alarming rate with there being “1.4m chronically lonely older people in England, and many more across the rest of the UK.” As a collective group elderly people can often be excluded and become isolated for a multitude of reasons whether that be physically by becoming weaker or developing illness or by simply having less opportunities to interact with other people due to retirement or deaths of loved ones. Not only is loneliness a horrible thing to experience but it can have negative effects on the health of those that encounter it, with shocking statistics such as “loneliness can be as harmful for our health as smoking 15 cigarettes a day. (AgeUK,2015).” With a lot of health conditions it is important and often easier to prevent rather than cure and as “People with a high degree of loneliness are twice as likely to develop Alzheimer’s as people with a low degree of loneliness. (AgeUK2015),” I felt it key to create a workshop with the hope of combating loneliness to help those who may be in need.

For the particular group that my workshop was formed for there are a variety of different charities and support groups that exist to benefit those who attend, usually by socialising them with the use of group games and activities such as bingo, coffee mornings, keep fit and craft days. Popular companies that provide this type of support include: AgeUK, Salvation Army, Everton and the community and Happy Older People. Although I agree that these organisations provide a vital service for the elderly, and often achieve the aims of my workshop including, creating a social space and benefitting the health and fitness of the attendants, I felt that there was a lack of opportunity for creativity and light-heartedness. Furthermore, a lot of currently available activities require some level of ability or skill so I attempted to extinguish this within my workshop.

With two of the most common health issues for elderly people being arthritis and dementia I wanted to create a workshop where any ability of movement was welcome, with adaptations available such as doing the movements sitting on a chair while not dulling the opportunity for those with a higher ability. I also focused on keeping the class predominantly improvised so as to not test the memory of those participating so that they did not feel any pressure or stress. Even though it was a workshop based on creativity and freedom of movement I took into consideration that each individual will have a different relationship with improvisation and so decided on the use of creating with an object, in this particular case the use of scarfs. This gives those who may find it difficult more ideas and the ability to just have fun with movement by concentrating on the object. I also tried to give the participants inspiration in the forms of different focuses such as different patterns, dynamics and directions throughout the exploration to keep them engaged and to not feel left behind.

Care homes are often a vital part of many elderly people's lives with “more than a quarter of a million (291,000) people aged 65 years and over were living in care homes in England and Wales, 3.2% of this population, (BMC, 2017).” With most of the elderly population likely to live in such homes it is key to make sure that there is a high focus on creativity, social times

and active periods. These experiences are just as important as other main aspects such as cleanliness and catering, so it would be naturally assumed that care homes would be providing such things, however according to studies this may not be the case. Recent studies have suggested that “97% of residents’ days are spent sedentary (e.g. sitting, watching television), with low levels of interaction with staff and each other. (BMC, 2017)” As previously stated the lack of those key features has a highly negative effect on physical and mental health of those experiencing it, so it is worrying to hear of such a high percentage being at risk of such outcomes, especially from an organisation specifically created to cater to the health and support of elderly people. With this level of antisocialness and lack of activity it is safe to assume that residents are likely to feel a lack of worth and a sense of having a meaningful life. Therefore, this current issue supports the need for more available creative and enjoyable activities such as the workshop I created. This opinion is similarly shared by the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence as they recommend that “older people in care homes be offered opportunities during their day to participate in meaningful activity that promotes their health and mental wellbeing. (BMC, 2017).”

Coronavirus has caused a difficult time for everybody but has been particularly hard-hitting for the elderly. The majority of older people have been advised to isolate within their own homes, which has resulted in a high amount of loneliness with some people having no social interactions during the longevity of the pandemic. According to The Lancet Public Health isolation of older adults can result in the “heightened risk of cardiovascular, autoimmune, neurocognitive, and mental health problems” with those experiencing lack of social interaction being “at greater risk of depression and anxiety. (The Lancet, 2020).”

Despite loneliness not having an age requirement with the risk of anyone feeling disconnected from society during this difficult time, those of a younger age are more likely to have accessibility to modern technology used for the purpose of having virtual contact with others such as video calls. It can be assumed that elderly people are less likely to have the

opportunity to use such technology and due to isolation cannot be taught new skills such as computer lessons, therefore have been left excluded in this modern age that has become the new norm at an excessive rate. Especially with previously existing activities and support groups now being completely virtual it may mean that those of an older age that used to keep social and busy now have had a drastic change for the worse. This makes it even more important to create more workshops for this age range as soon as safe and possible.

As it has been such a difficult and often upsetting time. (“Adults experienced high anxiety levels and low happiness levels in the week immediately preceding the first national lockdown. (Public Health England, 2020)”) I decided to try to counteract these negative feelings by focusing on the aim of making my workshop as fun and light-hearted as possible, where the participants are encouraged to not take themselves or others too seriously, but just be as silly and carefree as possible. An attribute of the lesson that supported this idea was the use of music. I tried to pick upbeat songs that created a happy atmosphere and had a tempo that the body responded to unconsciously. Even though I wanted upbeat music I made sure that the songs were not offensive or too fast or loud as to suit those of an older generation.

While planning the structure of my workshop I made sure to start the session with a check-in with the intentions of creating a community atmosphere where everyone felt comfortable and safe as well as being part of a group where each individual is just as valuable as the next. Creating a group setting is rather important as “They offer fantastic social inclusion opportunities, health benefits, and psychological support – all of which are imperative for combatting the feelings and consequences of loneliness. (EMDUK, 2018).” I asked each participant to share their name, preferred pronouns, what colour they felt and a description of their appearance. I made sure to include the request for a description of their appearance as “1 in 5 people aged 75 or over are living with sight loss. (RNIB, 2014).” It was also a vital aspect to ask how they are feeling as it may be the first social interaction they have

participated in in a number of days, so I wanted to make each individual feel a sense of worth and importance.

To continue with the aim of creating a community space I included an ice breaker. Not only did this aid the increase of creating a group, but as they were asked to repeat their names with the addition of a movement that everyone would echo, it helped with remembering each individual's name. Memory loss is a common issue for older people with there being “around 850,000 people with dementia in the UK. (Alzheimer’s Society, 2020).” Similarly I made sure my workshop was predominantly improvised during the task and exploration so as to not test the memory of those participating and made sure to demonstrate throughout the session, warm up and cool down.

While planning the warm up and cool down I took into account that it does not need to be as intense and active as it would be for someone of my age so I made sure to warm them up slowly and gradually as it may be the first physical activity they have participated in all week. I made sure to target the problem areas that are common within older adults such as wrists, ankles and neck. I encouraged them to adapt to their individual needs throughout the warm up and cool down, such as walking at speeds they felt comfortable with and stretching as much as their individual bodies could. During the warm up to create a friendly and comfortable space I encouraged them to make eye contact with everybody in the room and smile at each other, this helps to form a sense of relationship between everybody in the room. To combat the sense of loneliness it is recommended to “Grab every chance to smile at others. (NHS, 2018).”

While handing out the scarfs for the exploration I asked if they wanted a specific colour as to give them a choice; if living in a care home all of the individuals decisions may be made for them so to give them a sense of control in their own lives and independence I thought it would be beneficial to offer them the opportunity to make a decision that may be their first in

a while. During the main section of the workshop I decided to put the participants into partners in order to create a social time and the opportunity to create bonds. This gave them the opportunity to have fun and explore with someone else which they may not have had the chance to 'be silly' with anyone in a while. I wanted to give them the chance to have a laugh and be free to do whatever they desired which may be rare, particularly if they have some sort of care support where they are used to the same routine daily.

Positive feedback is a vital part of the workshop as it is a chance to hear and give compliments which may be a rarity in their daily lives. It is a chance to feel valued and boost self esteem, as well as creating bonds between each other, and reflecting the idea of a safe space as no matter what they do they will be praised for it. To make sure each individual is appreciated I make sure to ask each participant for a compliment about another. During the check out I also request that not only do they share an appreciation for another person but also for themselves as to introduce some self love and a realisation of their worth. I also asked how they feel now in order to see a comparison from start to finish, whether that be an improvement or not. For the cool down I made the decision to focus on breathing, in order to get their heart rate back to normal and to bring their focus back to the room, as well as being ready for the rest of the day.

Throughout the whole workshop I tried to keep the music at a reasonable level so that they could hear me over it and so that there were not too many overlapping sounds. I tried to remember to talk slowly and clearly throughout and keep a relaxed manner as "about 71% of people aged 70+ have hearing loss. (Hearing link, 2018)."

Overall I think my workshop was rather successful and achieved the main aims that I based it upon; creating a fun experience with the opportunity to be creative. To improve, next time I would try to incorporate more group time, such as group games or working all together in order to make more close bonds. I would also like to ask for music suggestions as to have

songs specifically targeted to an older generation. After the lesson had concluded I think it would be beneficial to encourage the participants to stay and talk to each other to continue the making of friendships and bonds.

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