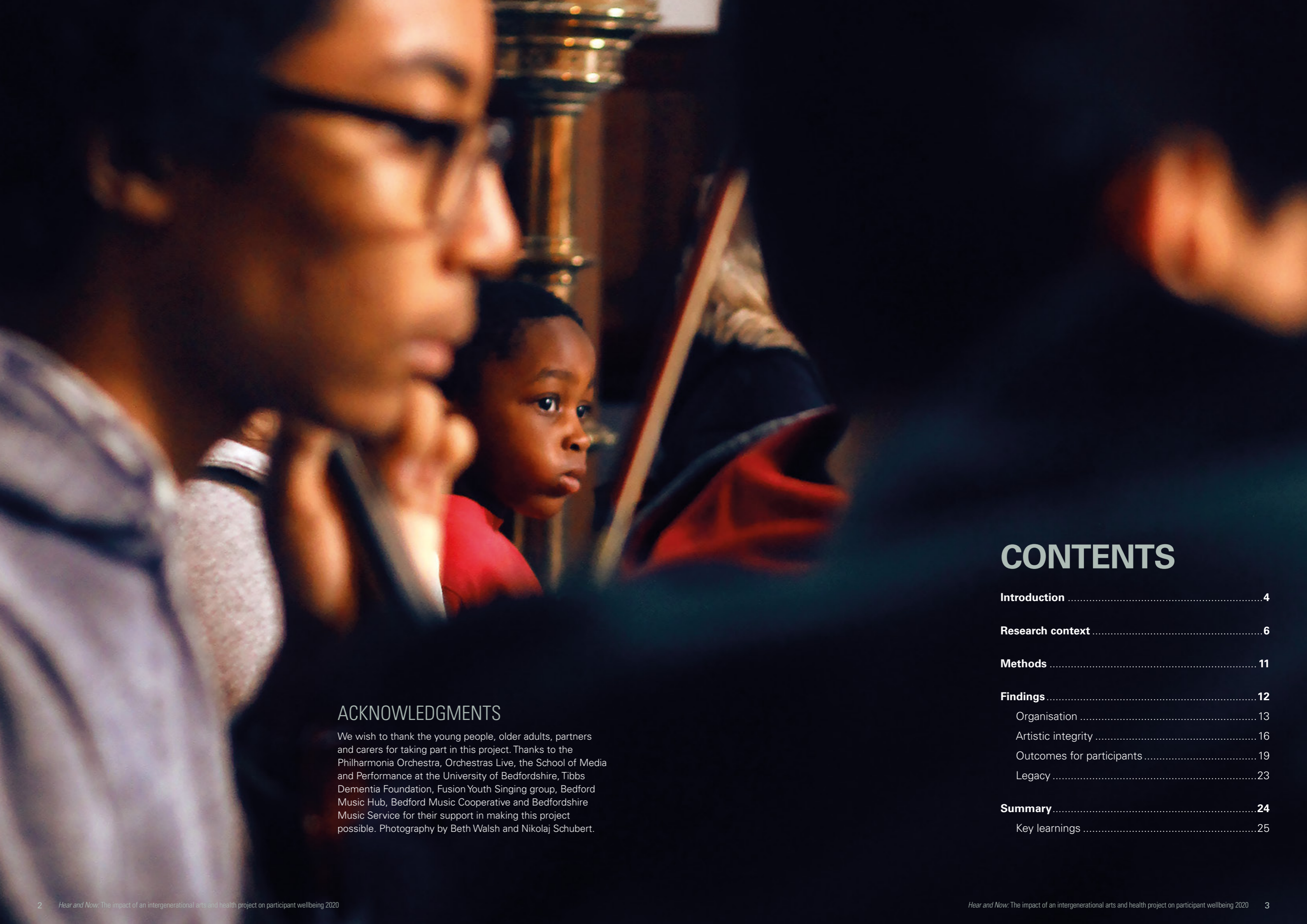




HEAR AND NOW:

THE IMPACT OF AN INTERGENERATIONAL
ARTS AND HEALTH PROJECT ON
PARTICIPANT WELLBEING

Lindsay Jenkins MSc, Rachel Farrer PhD
and Imogen Aujla PhD



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INTRODUCTION

There is growing interest in arts practices in relation to health and wellbeing, and their potential to support medicine and care in the context of public health.

The aim of this study was to understand the impact that an intergenerational arts and health project can have upon indicators of wellbeing, with a particular focus on the potential benefits that intergenerational practice can yield in relation to quality of life, affect, and social inclusion. The study considers these themes from a unique perspective, examining not only the participant end users, but also the experiences of their carers and the artists and support staff who facilitated the project. In doing so, the research highlights the holistic impact of intergenerational arts and its ability to create a sense of belonging and purpose that unites different sectors of the community.

The study is based on *Hear and Now*, an award-winning, intergenerational community arts project developed over the past ten years by the Philharmonia Orchestra and Orchestras Live in Bedford. The project takes place in the multicultural Queens Park area of Bedford, with the Tibbs Dementia Foundation's Music 4 Memory (a singing group for people living with dementia and their carers and partners) and Fusion Youth Singing (a teenage vocal/instrumental ensemble) as the core local partners, in addition to a small group of young musicians from Bedford Music Hub, Bedford Music Cooperative and Bedfordshire Music Service. An additional cohort of musicians from the Philharmonia Orchestra, North Bedfordshire Youth Chamber Orchestra and Da Capo String Ensemble joined the ensemble for the final performance. In 2019, the University of Bedfordshire collaborated on the project for the first time in order to incorporate dance, movement and film into the creative process.

Hear and Now aims to encourage social cohesion, teamwork, improved morale and increased confidence amongst its participants. Through open workshops, involving facilitated discussions on stereotypes, lived experiences, and shared language between different generations and cultures, combined with creative music and movement workshops, participants provide both the inspiration for, and directly contribute to, the music, lyrics, and movement in the final performance. The artistic starting point for the 2019 project was the theme of 'celebration,' from which was born the concert's title: *Hear and Now: Suits and Balloons*. Some well-known pieces were explored: the Waltz from *The Godfather*, the theme from *A Fistful of Dollars* and the song *My Old Man's a Dustman* (prompted by a participant from Music 4 Memory and often sung at weekly sessions). These pieces formed the foundation for musical and physical responses. Over four weekends, the groups of participants worked with artistic director Tim Steiner and performance artist Amalia Garcia, alongside professional musicians and dancers, to create a full-length multidisciplinary performance that was shared at the University of Bedfordshire Theatre on Sunday 17 November 2019 to an audience of 250 people.

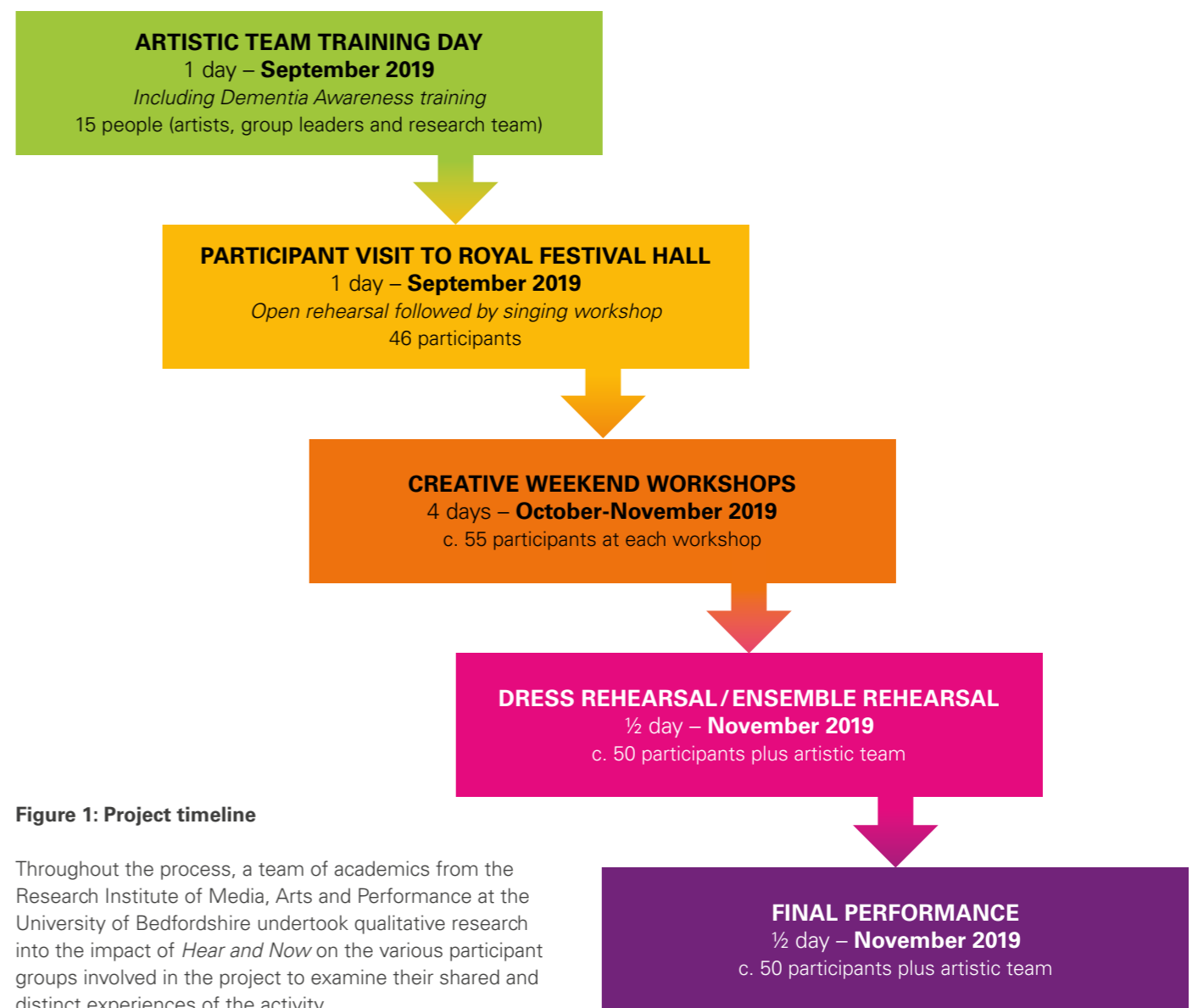


Figure 1: Project timeline

Throughout the process, a team of academics from the Research Institute of Media, Arts and Performance at the University of Bedfordshire undertook qualitative research into the impact of *Hear and Now* on the various participant groups involved in the project to examine their shared and distinct experiences of the activity.

RESEARCH CONTEXT

Intergenerational practice aims to bring together people of different generations in 'purposeful, mutually beneficial activities, which promote greater understanding and respect' between them and encompasses activities situated in educational, community and healthcare contexts.¹

Academic research and evaluative reports have evidenced the benefits of intergenerational projects, which include enhanced social capital,² reduced loneliness,³ increased confidence and self-esteem,⁴ as well as improved mutual understanding of and attitudes towards others.^{5,6} With these numerous benefits in mind, the continuation and development of organised intergenerational opportunities are of particular importance at a time when opportunities for different age groups to interact are less common in general social and family contexts.⁷ Arts-based projects have increasingly become the setting for intergenerational activity; one of the key aims of the *Hear and Now* project is to provide an opportunity for this greatly important, but otherwise fairly uncommon, social exchange. Where previous studies have considered the intergenerational exchanges that take place between the participant groups, this study also examines the role that the artists and carers play within the 'intergenerational communities' that were created.¹

In addition to a lack of opportunities to engage in intergenerational activity, many people also face barriers to accessing high quality arts, with certain demographic groups the most affected. The Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport's *Taking Part Focus on: Arts* report⁸ revealed that adults aged 75 and over had engaged less than all other age groups, and a poll of older people aged 65 and over commissioned by Arts Council England⁹ indicated that well over a third found it more difficult to take part in arts and cultural activity now than when they were younger. Age UK identified specific barriers that centred around 'location, transport, poor health (mental or physical), poor social networks and low income'.¹⁰ At the same time, young people

from economically disadvantaged backgrounds also face barriers to gaining arts and cultural experiences. Arts Council-commissioned reports have found that children and young people's access to these experiences are affected not only by economic background, but a perceived lack of opportunities, and a reluctance to engage that stems from feelings of anxiety about taking part and low self-confidence.^{11,12} In light of the barriers that exist to both arts engagement and intergenerational activity, *Hear and Now* aims to bring together a diverse group of people to create and perform, some of whom may otherwise find it difficult to access high quality cross-artform opportunities of this kind. Given the relatively unique nature of *Hear and Now*, research exploring the outcomes of such participation was warranted.

The link between arts activity and health is well-established and, over the last century, much research has supported the positive impact of arts engagement on physiological, psychological and social wellbeing, addressing issues such as falls prevention,¹³ social isolation,^{14,15} wellbeing,^{15,16} and particular medical diseases such as Parkinson's disease and dementia.^{17,18} One of the key partners in *Hear and Now* is Tibbs Dementia Foundation, who run a range of recreational classes for people with dementia and their carers in order to develop a lifestyle for them that 'values the unique skills and life experiences of everyone'.¹⁹ Existing studies that examine the outcomes of arts participation upon people with dementia often focus on the impact it has on the impairments or medical problems that ensue from the disease. However, broader benefits have also been reported such as improvements in communication, autobiographical memory, and social inclusivity.²⁰ As such, the current study does not focus specifically on outcomes related to dementia nor solely on the participants with dementia themselves, but instead considers the role of the project in relation to the intergenerational community created by *Hear and Now* and how this affected the wellbeing of all those involved.

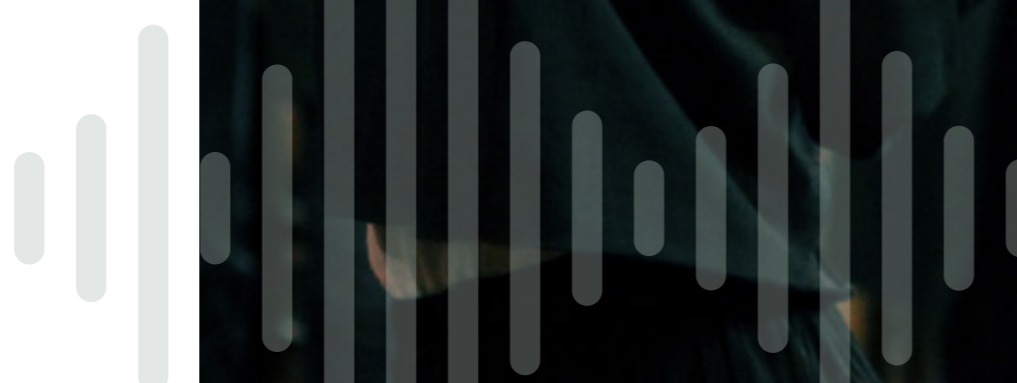


There are numerous definitions of wellbeing and therefore many ways of measuring it, but this project is based on the PERMA model of wellbeing, which was developed by one of the founders of Positive Psychology, Martin Seligman.²¹ The PERMA model for conceptualising wellbeing has been used to set out five key measurable elements believed to enable individuals to flourish:

- **Positive Emotion:** this relates to how people think and feel – for example, experiencing happiness, joy, optimism and life satisfaction.
- **Engagement:** a state of absorption in, and focus on, a task. This might include achieving a state of ‘flow’ (for example, losing sense of time and self-consciousness), and feeling excited about and interested in an activity.
- **Positive Relationships:** the feeling of having authentic and positive social connections, and perceiving the support of others.
- **Meaning:** having a sense of belonging and contributing to something (a cause, perhaps) bigger than oneself. This might stem from altruistic behaviour or living with a sense of purpose, for example.
- **Achievement/Accomplishment:** this relates to progressing towards and fulfilling goals, and developing a sense of pride in perceived successes.

Research suggests that this multi-dimensional conceptualisation of wellbeing is applicable across a range of contexts including the arts. For example, the model has been employed as an effective framework to measure the wellbeing of classical musicians,²² as a means to understand older people’s motivation to take part in singing activity,²³ and for clarifying the impact of musical activities on wellbeing in schools.²⁴

Whilst there is evidence of the overall benefits of participation in the arts and intergenerational activity, past studies have tended to focus solely on users and not those delivering such activity. Intergenerational arts practice can provide opportunities to develop mutual understanding between generations, build relationships, and improve confidence and enjoyment,⁷ which support aspects of psychological and social wellbeing. Importantly, these opportunities are not unique to those participating in projects; individuals involved in the delivery of such projects may also experience a number of benefits. As such, this research focused on all participants, including the professional artists and the partners and carers of the people living with a diagnosis of dementia. In doing so, it forges a new direction for understanding the relationship between arts and health and its ability to create mutually beneficial positive exchanges.





METHODS

In order to gather information about the experiences of those participating in the project, the research team used two methods of data collection.

From the start of the project, observations of several workshops and rehearsals were undertaken by one of the researchers in order to gain an overall sense of the project's process and facilitation, observe the nature of engagement of and interaction between participants, and to give a contextual underpinning for the second part of the data collection: the focus groups. The focus groups took place both mid-way and at the end of the process. The mid-point focus groups allowed questions to be piloted and were an additional opportunity for the core participants (the older adults and younger people) to reflect on their experiences. This also allowed the researchers to capture responses from some of the older adults living with a diagnosis of dementia who may have found it difficult to reflect back on the whole process by the end of the project.

The focus groups at the end of the process involved each group participating in *Hear and Now*: older adults, carers and partners, young people, and artists. A total of seven focus groups were held:

Group	When	Mean age	Male	Female	Total
Young people (1 of 2)	Mid-way	11.5	2	2	4
Young people (2 of 2)	End-point	13.4	3	2	5
Older adults (1 of 3)	Mid-way	82.3	1	2	3
Older adults (2 of 3)	End-point	83.5	2	2	4
Older adults (3 of 3)	End-point	86.5	1	1	2
Partners and carers	End-point	67.3	–	4	4
Artists/facilitators	End-point	45	3	4	7

For the purposes of this report, 'older adults' refers to people living with a diagnosis of dementia or cognitive impairment. Partners and carers were also present to support some of the older adults (two in the first focus group and one each in the second and third), but are not included in the numbers above. The researcher was also joined by an additional facilitator, who supported the discussions with the older adults.

Two participants were present in more than one focus group, which meant that 27 people participated overall (17 female and 10 male). In order to improve accessibility for those living with a diagnosis of dementia, we opted to hold smaller, shorter sessions, which provided a more appropriate environment in which to facilitate conversation.

Participants (or a parent/guardian/carer on their behalf, where appropriate) completed a consent form prior to their participation in the focus groups. Participants were assured of the anonymity of their answers, invited to speak freely, and informed that they could withdraw from the research at any time. Observing and taking part in several of the workshops and rehearsals, the researcher was able to establish a relationship of trust and familiarity with participants, which was important in the focus groups for providing a relaxed and friendly environment.

The focus groups were conducted using a semi-structured approach, which meant that the set of questions employed were largely the same for each group but that there was flexibility for conversation to move into interesting or unexpected areas as they arose. Participants were asked questions about their previous engagement with music and dance, thoughts about the intergenerational element of the project, and other aspects of their experiences that related to the five areas of wellbeing described above.

Once the observations and focus groups were complete, and recordings transcribed, responses were content analysed by organising and coding the data into key themes, first for each group and then overall across all groups. The results of this analysis are discussed in the following sections. Where quotes are provided, the four groups are referenced as follows:

- young people: **YP**
- older adults: **OA**
- partners and carers: **PC**
- professional artists/facilitators: **AF**



ORGANISATION

Hear and Now was primarily organised by the Philharmonia Orchestra and Orchestras Live. They were responsible for bringing together the partners, participants and professional artists, in addition to coordinating logistical and technical aspects of the project's workshop sessions and culminating concert. Tibbs Dementia Foundation's Music 4 Memory and Fusion Youth Singing are pre-existing groups who already meet locally on a regular basis, and have been involved as core partners of the project since it began in 2009. Participants are recruited to *Hear and Now* directly through these groups and associated leaders. A small cohort of young musicians from Bedford Music Hub, Bedford Music Cooperative and Bedfordshire Music Service were recruited directly by the Philharmonia with support of Music Service Managers.

For the first workshop, all participants were invited to the Royal Festival Hall in London to see the Philharmonia in rehearsal, followed by initial discussion and consultation about the project. As the *Hear and Now* project is in its tenth year, some of the musicians, participants and those who organised the groups had experienced it before in different guises, and some were new to it altogether. The project timeline and rehearsal structure were informed by the schedules and availability of the various partners involved, and the available funds. Fewer more intensive rehearsals were the most effective way of bringing the groups together to collaborate, within which the participant groups were sometimes split to have focused sessions. The workshop sessions, rehearsal and performance days were facilitated and directed by the lead artists Tim Steiner and Amalia Garcia, with support from four Philharmonia musicians and three professional dancers. Based on feedback from the participants and group leaders, they aimed to create an artistic and creative environment that was also relaxed, engaging and supportive for the various groups involved.

FINDINGS

The aim of this research project was to develop an understanding of participants' experiences of engaging in a creative, intergenerational project, and to investigate whether taking part impacted on aspects of subjective wellbeing. Taking into consideration the responses of all four participant groups, several clear themes emerged relating to the organisation, artistic integrity, outcomes and legacy of the project. These are set out in the following pages.

ACCESS AND BARRIERS

Participants across all groups involved in the project, including the professional artists, were asked about their motivation to take part in *Hear and Now*. Responses were mixed, with reasons including encouragement from a healthcare professional to take part in mentally stimulating activity, learning new approaches to collaborating and making music, and the draw of visiting London's Royal Festival Hall for the project's launch. For some, positive experiences of previous *Hear and Now* projects were given as a reason to return and one participant cited a desire to become more fully involved in the project in order to experience its communal element, which he had only peripherally experienced before.

For many, the project represented an opportunity to access a type of arts experience seldom available to them, as well as exposure to intergenerational practice. In particular, several participants recognised the value of the opportunity to work alongside high-profile and experienced professional artists:

"It's such a privilege to be able to work with talented musicians" (PC)

Some of the artistic team had previous experience of collaborating with other professionals across different artforms, however most of the older and younger participants had not engaged in this type of project before (aside from previous experiences of *Hear and Now*). For most, including those who had attended the project in past years, the opportunity to work with professional dancers in particular was new. This cross-artform collaboration was an important aspect in the development of the *Hear and Now* project for its tenth year, with one returning artist explaining that "working in such close collaboration with the dancers [...] that's something I've never done before, so to actually be experimenting in that way was quite interesting, it was a new thing for me" (AF).

Others recognised the value of the project as centring around the rare chance for younger and older people to gain exposure to intergenerational interaction and championed the “enormous, unspeakable value in that” (AF) for both age groups. The uniqueness of this opportunity was echoed by a younger participant who reflected that, “I don’t think I would really talk to anyone who is significantly older than me or, like, really be in an interactive environment if it’s not, like, family” (YP). This aspect of the project was of particular importance because it helped to bridge social gaps in everyday relationships.

The overall experience allowed for assumptions about other people and their own abilities to be challenged during the project. One of the carers shared her observations about another older participant who, in her own words, had been anxious that she would “obviously” not be able to take part in the dancing:

“She lights up when she’s being danced around and really engages with you if you look at her, and it is so nice” (PC)

Many of the adult participants felt that seeing the older participants engaged and taking part with enthusiasm would be a valuable learning experience for the younger participants, and might help to shift their perspective: “I think it perhaps gives them a different view of older people” (PC).

There was also a shift for a member of the artistic team who reflected on the process of learning from more experienced facilitators to be more relaxed about working with the older participants; to maintain appropriate sensitivity whilst empowering them to be who they are. They felt it “was such an important thing to learn [...] you empower them by saying, ‘It is okay, how you are’” (AF).

These challenges to assumptions worked the other way too. A carer reflected on an exchange they had had with a younger member and explained, “we were talking about music and to my amazement his favourite music was kind of from our era” (PC). With this and the above experiences considered, it was clear that the opportunities for participants to learn from one another and, in doing so, make meaningful connections were abundant in this project. This led to the breaking down of barriers, not only in social terms but for individuals in relation to their confidence to engage in the project’s activities.



STRUCTURE OF THE DAY

Participants were asked to comment on their overall experience of the project so far and responses were predominantly very positive, with participants describing their enjoyment of having worked with others and across artforms. These aspects are addressed in more detail in the Outcomes section.

On some of the rehearsal days, the arrival and finishing times for each group were staggered in order for specific sections of material to be developed further. Whilst this meant that not every group was present for every workshop session, the ‘cast’ worked together as a whole for a substantial portion of the process. These collective sessions were of importance to the collaborative nature of the project, which is discussed in more detail later on in the report. On the whole, participants found the workshop days to be well designed:

“I’m amazed how brilliantly organised the whole thing is” (OA)

For a few participants, however, the length of the days was tiring, in particular for those living with a diagnosis of dementia (as reported by their partners). This feeling also extended to the intensive nature of the rehearsal schedule, with one of the adults suggesting that “one [rehearsal] a week would be fine” (PC). It was noted that many people living with dementia also experience other health challenges, such as Parkinson’s disease, and that this can also lead to becoming fatigued quickly.

Some of the younger participants also felt that the long days were a challenge, particularly during instances where there was some waiting around, and indicated a preference for the project to be spread out over shorter sessions. In a few instances, concerns around the behaviour and level of engagement of some of the younger people were voiced, but these issues were not universally perceived. Indeed, some older participants were particularly impressed with the younger participants’ conduct, stating, “the thing that strikes me from the previous workshops we’ve had is how incredibly patient and well behaved they are” (OA). Members of the artistic team recognised their role in finding ways to involve those who were less engaged than others and acknowledged, “we could do something to make it a better experience for them” (AF).

ARTISTIC INTEGRITY

Underpinning the creative process of *Hear and Now* was an ethos of artistic integrity, and there was a clear sense from the artists that the project was to be viewed foremost as an artistic endeavour that drew upon the rich potential and experiences of all its contributors:

“It’s not a youth project, it’s not a dementia project, it’s not an orchestra project. It’s a project for a group of people altogether, most of whom live in a certain area, making some work together, and that’s really a brilliant way to go about making work” (AF)

EVERYONE BEING ARTISTS

The overall artistic focus of the project was fundamental to decision-making during rehearsals and workshops. Importantly however, the unique combination of participants was also central to the artists’ process, as one of the team explained: “they’re all artistic decisions, but the thing about artistic decisions is, good artistic decisions take into account the potential of the people that you have in the room” (AF). Linked to this was the consideration of all participants in this project as artists. There was an intention for participants to be involved in the artistic process and for them to have ownership of it. This idea was illustrated by the responsibility of facilitators of the project who explored artistic possibilities inspired by the offerings of participants, such as a particular skill, past experience or, in some cases, an in-the-moment ‘mistake’ that was treated as a creative opportunity. The artists’ approach was flexible, and characterised by a focus on “working with the energy in the room, the flow of ideas, the flow of energies, the skills, the potential, and working with that as an artistic process” (AF).

This flexible and open approach to making work was welcomed by other participants, with one stating, “by and large stuff can go wrong or not be quite perfect, but that’s okay, that’s quite liberating actually” (AF). It seemed that whilst there was a degree of artistic rigour and quality brought by the artistic team of experienced practitioners, the participants were told not to worry if they forgot what they needed to do, or what was coming next, and were encouraged to find humour in any mistakes made. There was structure, without rigidity. This seemed to allow participants to enjoy the experience as it came: “You don’t have to be good at it, do you? You can just enjoy it” (OA).

Also integral to, and a by-product of, the process, was the opportunity to develop new skills across a range of areas and this extended to the professional artists themselves, who were able to explore new ways of collaborative working and be challenged creatively: “it’s so refreshing when most of the time, beyond fairly small bounds for us, you’re not the one being creative” (AF). This was especially true this year with the addition of the dance element, which offered another new learning experience for all groups and another artistic role for all participants to explore. One younger participant with musical experience talked about his enjoyment of

learning to work with an unfamiliar artform: “I think it’s really interesting collaborating with the dancers, because obviously I’ve never done anything like this before. I think it’s really cool actually. I really enjoy it” (YP).

Furthermore, a merging between groups was noted, even for those who had previously studied a single artform, as one artist described: “for me now you’re not just musicians, you’re dancers as well, now they’ve merged” (AF). This was reflected in all participants’ contribution to the final piece with performers taking on multiple and sometimes simultaneous roles of dancer, singer, musician, drummer, soloist and so on.

VARIETY

For members of the artistic team, this project, with its much more involved and flexible creative process, presented great contrast to their regular, more regimented working day. Whilst this brought challenge, it was warmly welcomed and offered opportunity to build new skills in this area:

“It’s much more involving than the day job, it’s exhausting because you have to use your brain, radar, instinct and other things, technique [...] It is a massive challenge, but I love doing it” (AF)

This enjoyment of variety was echoed by a younger participant, who felt their participation in *Hear and Now* had “been fun because it’s really different to what we normally do” (YP).





The nature of the project meant that the participants were regularly interacting with people from different backgrounds, of all ages, with varying skills and talents. The lead artists facilitated the project in a way that supported and encouraged this interaction, celebrating the individuality of the group members and their collective identity. The group were encouraged to reflect on their own skills, experiences and opinions, which fed into and shaped the performance. They were given some set songs and movement phrases to learn together, but also encouraged to improvise and create their own sounds and movements. As a result, the performance that was created was fluid and flexible, dependent on what happened in the moment.

CHALLENGES OF THE CREATIVE PROCESS

Although the various participant groups spoke positively about the high artistic integrity of the project, working in this way did create some perceived challenges. Conversations with both younger participants, and partners and carers revealed that they had felt uncertain about how the workshop activities would come together to create a final performance. However, some of the returning participants went on to acknowledge that this tends to happen each year: “We know it’s going to be good, because it always is” (PC).

This matter was also raised by the artistic team, who agreed that each year there is a sense of apprehension about how everything will come together: “We just have to keep reminding people: this is how we felt before, this is part of the process” (AF). Whilst the artists understood that this could cause some hesitation amongst participants, taking

an organic approach to structuring the performance was perceived as integral to the project from an artistic perspective, in part because setting the material in stone early on curbs the creative potential of the work, as well as participants’ development. As one of the artistic facilitators explained: “If you fix it before, it’s not about them anymore, it’s about what you put on them [...] It’s new because we made it with each other” (AF). The very involvement of the participants in the creative process was perceived as being of great importance, which necessitated an inherently organic approach to devising that sometimes contributed to this feeling of uncertainty.

That said, the act of collaboration itself was new for some of the people with previous arts experiences and provided both positive and challenging experiences: “I’ve never collaborated before [...] so this has been the biggest challenge of my life [...] it’s made me listen in a different way” (AF). Overall, these challenges appeared to be outweighed by the rewards and enjoyment of the project as a whole.

OUTCOMES FOR PARTICIPANTS

POSITIVE EMOTIONS

A particular focus of the research was the emotional experiences of those involved. When talking about their feelings in relation to the project, participants used words such as:

- **Happy:** for example, in reference to overall participation, feelings about performing and altruistic behaviour towards others: “It feels good because Music 4 Memory is a community to help older people remember things by music. So I feel happy helping them” (YP); “I like to make people happy because, quite frankly, I get a buzz from it” (OA).
- **Excited:** about attending the workshops, seeing professionals rehearse at the Royal Festival Hall, performing and becoming part of the project’s community: “I was really excited to get asked if I could do the whole thing” (AF).
- **Inspired:** by learning about older participants’ experiences, working with professionals and the potential of future performances and collaborations: “In terms of the professional musicians as well, it’s great working with them. It’s quite inspiring actually, because obviously they’re really good and it inspires me to work harder” (YP).
- **Proud:** of their own involvement in the project, as well as the progress made by others: “...it makes you proud of them, because you see them as the person they were before dementia, don’t you?” (PC).

Participants also described feelings that illustrated their engagement and absorption in artistic activities, such as experiencing a sense of “flow” (AF), feeling free and being focused. Referring to a moment of collaboration between musicians and dancers, one participant commented, “You can focus on, like, one person, what they’re doing, the way they move around the space, and how everyone interacts together. I really like that” (YP). Speaking from another perspective, an older dancer described being in the moment: “I just enjoy the dancing, to be quite honest. I’m not thinking about what’s really, in a way, out there” (OA). These experiences also extended more broadly to opportunities to be stimulated mentally and being able to escape:

“it takes my mind off feeling depressed, because I’ve got to concentrate on something else. It gives you a really good sense of wellbeing afterwards. You feel like you’ve achieved something” (PC)

RELATIONSHIPS AND CONNECTIONS

Feeling good about performing acts of altruism, as referenced above, as well as feeling an overall sense of belonging, also linked to a broader theme that emerged from the data, which was that of support and connection. Participants felt part of the whole project community, described positive collaborative experiences, and had both given and received support from others. They also made reference to kindness, mutual respect, feeling relaxed with each other and a sense of exchange when mixing with people from other ages or groups in the project.

Participants also observed supportive behaviour and positive exchanges between others, across groups and ages, and it was suggested that this owed in part to the set-up of the sessions: "We've always been in a circle, always been encouraged to sit in different places and with other people [...] it's never been, 'We're the dancers, you're the musicians, they're the older people, they're the younger people'" (AF).

For some, the opportunity to make and maintain connections with others was cited as of particular importance in later life, such as when a partner had been lost: "If you're communicating with other people, and connecting with them, it's really part of carrying on living instead of deteriorating, keeping that connection" (OA).

When speaking about connections made during the project, younger participants highlighted the opportunity to build trust, their enjoyment of meeting new people and, for returning participants, a feeling that

"it's good to connect as a big community every year" (YP)

Additional benefits for the younger people, perceived by the adults, included an enhanced level of understanding and a developed sense of sensitivity towards working with the older participants of the *Hear and Now* project, which they would not get the opportunity to do in their daily school settings: "There's definitely a higher sense of listening from them, I can sense that" (AF).

In many cases, intergenerational exchanges were mutually beneficial. For example, not only did the young people learn from their interactions with older participants, but the older participants learnt from, and derived enjoyment from engaging with, the younger people, which one of the older participants summarised: "they gain the experience from speaking to the older people, which gives the older people pleasure" (OA).

LEARNING NEW SKILLS AND LEARNING FROM EACH OTHER

Whilst some participants enjoyed the opportunity to revisit old interests, like one of the older adults who relished the opportunity to revive her love of dancing – "It's been a great enjoyment to come and be able to do that" (OA) – an outcome across all groups was the learning of new skills. For many, this included artform-specific skills such as learning a new dance, improving instrument-specific or improvisation technique, and for others linked to a first-time experience of collaboration.

The opportunity to learn and develop also led to the building of confidence and shedding of inhibitions for many participants. This occurred at situational levels, as a young participant explained: "she [the professional artist] really guided me through it and I feel so much more confident" (YP). It also happened at a general level: "They [the facilitators] definitely build your confidence and take you out of your comfort zone" (PC).

Participants also reported examples of personal growth. In addition to development of specific skills, many participants felt they had developed more broadly:

"I've learnt such a lot through doing this" (PC)

Speaking about an older adult in her care, one participant said, "I can see the difference [...] she's forgetting all her troubles" (PC). For another older adult, this related to growth in confidence in social situations: she described how she "used to be shy and I didn't want to talk to anybody and that's changed completely" (OA), which was corroborated by her husband, who had also seen this positive change.

"They [the facilitators] definitely build your confidence and take you out of your comfort zone"



"If you're communicating with other people, and connecting with them, it's really part of carrying on living instead of deteriorating, keeping that connection"



PURPOSE

The project provided a sense a purpose for some of the participants, and was described as something to look forward to that would get them out of the house. For partners and carers, also significant was the opportunity to feel valued as people. This was of particular importance to this group because in a caring role, “we’re the persons that are often forgotten” (PC).

When talking about how they perceived their individual roles within the project, some cited their support of others as their contribution – “it’s shared responsibility” (PC) – as well as their individual artistic contribution adding to the overall mix during rehearsals. Furthering this perspective, others felt that creating something unique was less about individual contribution and more about working collaboratively:

“I really liked the collaboration between all the groups, because they’re all separate units, the orchestra, the choirs, but when they come together with, like, the dancers and everything, it creates something completely new that wouldn’t have been able to be created just in individual groups” (YP)

LEGACY

Hear and Now is already a well-established project that has grown in ambition year on year due to the positive response it has received. As the project connects with new people and organisations in each iteration, it raises the profile of the work and the various charities and groups involved and helps to establish lasting relationships which have the potential to lead to new projects and collaborations.

The project partners continue to support the Philharmonia’s strategic and long-term work to develop its concert season, broaden its audiences and further embed its cultural offer into Bedford’s communities. For co-producer Orchestras Live, Hear and Now has been a

flagship project of national significance which continues to influence and inform intergenerational work across the orchestral sector in the UK and abroad. The Hear and Now project model has been replicated and developed in the Philharmonia’s residency city of Leicester, in partnership with De Montfort University. The learning and knowledge gained from the project in Bedford over a number of years has been used by the Philharmonia and Tim Steiner to enable a whole new community to be formed in Leicester.

Hear and Now also has a lasting effect on the various people involved who leave with new friendships, experiences and ways of thinking, that help them to feel connected to each other and their local community. Members of Tibbs Dementia Foundation’s Music 4 Memory and Fusion Youth Singing frequently interact outside of the Hear and Now project, and songs from past projects are often performed by both groups in their own concerts.

In addition to the more immediate benefits and challenges experienced by participants during the project, a number of ongoing benefits were identified. Amongst these was a perceived impact on overall health, which was mentioned by the older adults and their partners and carers in particular. This related not only to the emotionally and cognitively stimulating effect of engaging artistically and socially, but some physical benefits too, such as the opportunity to expand physical range of movement and exercise vocal chords. An older adult claimed that taking part in arts activity, “keeps us away from the doctors a lot, which is a good thing” (OA). Referring to their own capacity to offer good quality care, people in caring roles also noted the potential knock-on effect of their own health being supported:

“if the people who are doing the caring are not well in themselves, then they can’t support their loved ones” (PC)

Moreover, by bringing visibility to all groups, the project also has a part to play in raising awareness of their potential. This was referenced in particular relation to the people living with a diagnosis of dementia, about whose capabilities are often stereotyped:

“I think it’ll be a catalyst as well for other projects and other organisations because, I mean, no matter how hard we bang the drum [...] there’s still that feeling that a lot of people have a stereotype vision of somebody with dementia, and you couldn’t possibly involve them in things” (PC).

So, along with this awareness-raising came the opportunity to challenge assumptions and stereotypes about people with dementia and, potentially, young people from diverse backgrounds.

There was a resounding sense that participants would like to attend the project again in future years. Where reasons were given, they included an ongoing opportunity to learn new things, the feeling of community and because their partner is “not going to miss it for anything” (PC). Beyond this, two of the younger participants were inspired to try something similar with peer musicians in their school, “because we’ve both been very inspired by the way this works” (YP). The older participants, too, were perceived as having been collectively “strengthened” by the value placed on the work they do as part of *Hear and Now*:

“The value that you place on our intergenerational work together means that we can focus on that more during our year [...] This new level of creativity, this new level of possibility and potential, means that we’re left coming out of this project thinking, “What shall we do next? Wasn’t that amazing?” (AF).



SUMMARY

KEY LEARNINGS FROM HEAR AND NOW

Overall, analyses revealed that participants' experiences of *Hear and Now* were very positive, with praise for its organisation, the final event and the supportiveness of the people involved, including the organisers.

The few challenges that were identified centred around the intensive nature of the project, for the older and younger participants in particular, who found it tiring, and some participants' uncertainty about the flexible nature of the creative process. The project emphasised artistic integrity and decisions were made with this in mind, but always with a view to including participants as artists and collaborators. This both necessitated and relied upon participants' development of new skills and openness to working with new creative methods.

Hear and Now offers access to a unique and high quality artistic experience, the likes of which for many have been unavailable previously. In particular, participants valued the rare opportunity to work with high-profile professional artists. With its culmination in a public performance, and boosted by the profile of its partners, the project also offered visibility for each group involved and challenged the perceptions of what each were capable of. In the light of literature referencing barriers to accessing the arts that centre around lack of confidence and a perceived lack opportunities relevant to them, this and similar projects could help to engage young people who are able to see themselves in the work. This is of particular importance in a time when inequality of access to publicly funded arts is still a substantial issue affecting many young people.²⁵

When reflecting on the impact of the project on the wellbeing of its participants, the research team considered responses through the lens of the PERMA model of wellbeing. When taking into account responses across all groups, experiences relating to all five areas of the PERMA model of wellbeing were evidenced:

- Participants reported numerous **positive emotions**, including happiness, inspiration, pride and excitement. These related to various experiences including positive interactions with others, altruism and potential future collaborations
- Many participants' interest and absorption in the activities of the project suggest they experienced a high level of **engagement** during the workshops and rehearsals. This was also supported by their excitement about taking part, as well as instances of 'flow' and experiences of 'escape' from the outside world and negative emotions
- Experiences of support, positive **relationships** and making new connections were described by all groups and were vital to the positive affective responses, value and creativity of the project
- Participants' experiences of the project held **meaning**, in that they were of value at personal and professional levels and allowed participants to feel part of a greater whole. Some found that the project gave them purpose and placed value on their personal contributions
- Participants' sense of pride in their own and others' involvement in the project, as well as in their development of skills and confidence, related to an overall sense of **achievement and accomplishment**.

This supports existing literature that intergenerational and arts activities are beneficial for the psychological health of individuals.^{3,4} The research undertaken as part of *Hear and Now* uniquely demonstrates this at a broader level by evidencing the positive impact on all groups involved in the process, including professional artists and collaborators as well as the community-based 'users'. Furthermore, the project's overall approach made it possible to maintain the integral emphasis on making work of high artistic quality, whilst simultaneously offering multifaceted benefits for all participants, no matter their skill level, background or artistic experience.

Whilst there were numerous positive outcomes for participants who took part in *Hear and Now*, the impact of the project is evidently much further-reaching. The ongoing legacy related to benefits for overall health, which is a positive outcome in and of itself, but could also help to relieve pressure on health services. The research also highlighted the importance of involving the partners and carers of people living with dementia in these kinds of projects so they can access the benefits of shared responsibility for their loved ones, and opportunity to develop and feel valued as individuals. Through intergenerational interaction and mutual learning, this project also offered opportunity for participants' perspectives of others to be shifted and assumptions to be challenged. Lack of regular interaction between older and younger generations is thought to be a key contributor to the perpetuation of ageism in the UK, which means that activities like *Hear and Now* can help to reduce negative attitudes to ageing that can start forming at a young age.²⁶

This year's project, as well as its previous iterations, have inspired similar work to continue afterwards in not only the older adults who feel bolstered in their regular arts activities during the months between *Hear and Now* instalments, but among some of the young participants too. Participants indicated a desire to attend *Hear and Now* again and placed great value on both the learning and social aspect of working collaboratively.

With its myriad benefits in mind, this research demonstrates the value and impact of work of this nature, which creates an environment where neither artistic quality nor the inclusion of participants need be compromised. The findings of this research suggest that continued support for projects like *Hear and Now* will help to address the ongoing need to balance equality of access to the arts, and provide all of those involved, whatever their background or experience, with opportunities to support their wellbeing whilst developing personally, professionally and socially.

- A focus on the overall artistic quality of the project led to positive outcomes for participant groups, artists and facilitators
- Empowering participants and giving them creative ownership over the project led to an increased sense of purpose and engagement
- Consideration of the logistics of participation increased access to high quality art and fostered collaboration between diverse participants
- The length of the rehearsal days was challenging for some participant groups
- Involving partners and carers as active participants enabled them to capitalise on all the benefits, and indirectly feed benefits back to the people they care for
- The provision of this type of activity at little to no cost to participants helped with barriers to do with economic disadvantage
- The partnership between professional and community-based organisations generated multiple benefits (i.e. increased opportunities for participation, audience development)
- Training for the artistic team, particularly when working across different artforms, enables an understanding, shared language and familiarity with creative styles and practices before working with participants
- Young people must be given the opportunity to contribute equally during the creative process. This can sometimes be neglected when working with older groups with a diagnosis of dementia, who may naturally need more support
- Working across different artforms is artistically ambitious and can present various challenges, but is vital to create new pathways into accessing and participating in the arts

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AUTHOR BIOGRAPHIES

Lindsay Jenkins Msc is a freelance researcher and dance practitioner with over 10 years' experience facilitating and supporting dance and arts programmes across the Midlands. Her research interests lie in psychological wellbeing and community dance. Lindsay is also a visiting lecturer at a number of universities, with most recent subjects including wellbeing for performing artists, dance psychology, and arts project management.

Dr Rachel Farrer is a Senior Lecturer in the School of Media and Performance at the University of Bedfordshire. Her research and teaching focuses on community arts and professional practice within the performance industry including: Arts and health, freelance working, mentorship, and youth arts engagement. Rachel has led on a number of externally funded research and community projects, publishing and presenting her work internationally.

Dr Imogen Aujla is a Senior Lecturer in Dance and Course Coordinator of the MSc Dance Science at the University of Bedfordshire. Her research interests include health and wellbeing, dance and disability, and talent development. Imogen has published over 20 articles and chapters in various journals and academic texts, and has presented her research internationally.

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