

Why Arts-based Creative Activities?

Westside Seniors Hub

Our goals are to promote awareness of Westside seniors' issues and improve programs and services through collective action. We encourage seniors to become more engaged in their community. The Hub notes that **there is currently a dearth of opportunities in Vancouver for community-dwelling individuals experiencing the early and middle stages of dementia and their care partners to engage in meaningful arts-based activities on a regular basis.** The Hub's Partner Organizations, which are seniors'-serving public and non-profit institutions on the Westside, are committed to developing arts-based programs for this population.

People Living with Dementia and Their Care Partners

When individuals who live in our communities begin to experience cognitive difficulties, they and their family members naturally become fearful of the losses associated with a diagnosis of dementia. As there is currently no medical cure, the experience of living with dementia exerts an enormous emotional, physical and financial toll on the person living with it and their care partners.

Problems with memory for specific information and procedures present challenges for communicating and behaving in ways that are publicly perceived as social norms. Anger, anxiety, and depression are typical reactions accompanying a diagnosis. People living with dementia and their care partners encounter difficulties coping and gradually begin to withdraw from socializing and participating in public activities. The **stigma** in mainstream culture associated with impaired intellect and competence for functioning and communicating is a principal contributor to their **social isolation.**

Public perception of memory loss as 'loss of self' ignores the fact that there are many types of memory contributing to the notion of 'self'. The most common forms of dementia involve declines in memory for facts, sequences, and relationships but leave the senses and emotions intact. This means that **memory for feelings and circumstances surrounding experiences remain untouched, often with clarity just awaiting expression.**

Re-establishing Social Engagement via the Arts

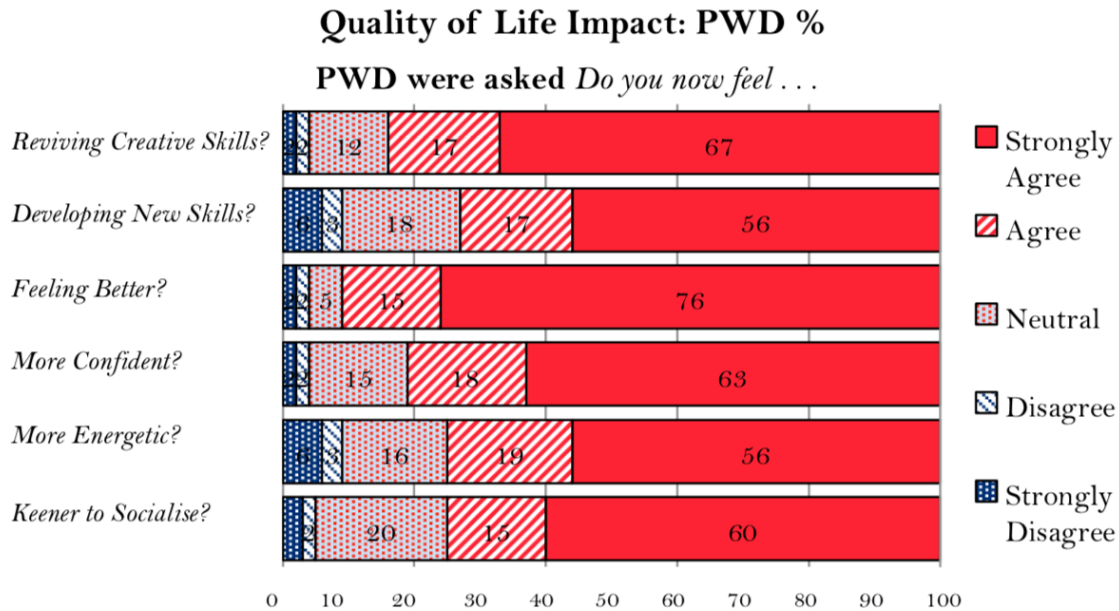
The creative arts, especially music, dance, drama, visual and media arts, do not necessarily require sequential memory or logical thinking. They tap into senses and feelings that naturally seek expression. There is spontaneity in practicing the arts that loosens inhibitions and the need for control, as is evident in the enormous range of activities that artists undertake.

From evaluation and outcomes of arts programs involving people living with dementia and their care partners, there is abundant **evidence of enormous benefits for their quality of life.** Engagement in arts activities reaches aspects of the 'self' unaffected by the condition and adds meaning to their lived experience, which can otherwise seem demeaning and hopeless. Participation in group activities is often transformative for people living with dementia as well as their care partners.

Some evidence of impacts for community-based arts activities

Reawakening the Mind was a 2012 London, UK collaboration among arts organizations, volunteers and researchers to evaluate **quality of life impacts** of 17 weekly (varying from 3-10 weeks) art & photography, dance, music, and drama projects over a period of one year. The **projects focused on involvement by groups of people living in the community**

with early-stage dementia and their care partners. One excerpt is reproduced here, but the full report includes many other measures. <https://www.museumsassociation.org/download?id=1062531>



The report summarizes the benefits of creative challenges offered by arts programs for

- ❖ people living with dementia and their care partners
- ❖ artists and facilitators at arts venues
- ❖ volunteers
- ❖ community members who encounter people experiencing dementia

A few resources for planning dementia-friendly arts activities:

Dementia Care International: Meaningful Activities for People With Dementia – “aim to improve their social and emotional wellbeing to enable them to blossom and grow”

<https://dementiacareinternational.com/category/articles/library/meaningful-activities/>

How Art Therapy Enhances the Quality of Life for Dementia Patients

<https://www.alzheimers.net/art-therapy-for-alzheimers/>

It is feasible, cost-effective and essential to foster and support arts-based activities in order to address the needs of those in Vancouver experiencing loss of cognitive abilities with age.

“Based on Reawakening the Mind’s results... artistic stimulation prolongs the ability of people with dementia to play an active part in society.” Baroness Greengross, Chair All-Party Parliamentary Group on Dementia

“The stigma and discrimination of dementia exacerbates the loneliness as so many cannot seem to get over their own fear of the disease and subsequently stop visiting us.” Kate Swaffer 2016 author living with younger-onset dementia, founder of Dementia Care International

