

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: IMPACT OF THE ARTS & DEMENTIA PROGRAMME

With the projected increase in prevalence of dementia in Singapore (82,000 people with dementia in 2018 and this number is expected to increase to 103,000 by 2030)¹, it has prompted care practitioners and researchers to explore beyond pharmacological treatments and seek other viable approaches to maintain the quality of life for people living with dementia and their caregivers.

Non-pharmacological arts-based programmes have the potential to focus on personhood, social inclusion and well-being of both the persons with dementia and their family caregivers.

This report presents the findings of an evidence-based research study evaluating the impact of the Arts & Dementia programme offered by Alzheimer's Disease Association (ADA). The programme has shown positive outcomes on persons with dementia, their family caregivers, and positive shifts in societal attitudes towards dementia.

- Higher mood and engagement in persons with dementia during the programme, demonstrating the potential of the programme in creating a safe space for self discovery, interaction and growth. It builds on social confidence, supporting its suitability for persons with dementia who have no previous experiences in the arts.
- Positive trends in the caregiving experience before and after the programme. The programme offered a temporary but meaningful respite, with longer lasting benefits such as making caregiving easier and more manageable. Caregivers were also relieved knowing that their loved ones were contented and engaged during the programme.
- Artists and volunteers who participated in the Arts & Dementia programme reported significantly more positive attitudes towards dementia than new volunteers. In providing opportunities for meaningful and positive interactions, the programme helped to create and strengthen relationships. It shifted the focus to abilities rather than deficits, fostering more positive attitudes towards dementia.

Overall, this evaluation has identified several important aspects of the Arts & Dementia programme that were crucial to its impact.

- Incorporation of reminiscence and cultural traditions helped to strengthen a sense of identity in the persons with dementia, promoting deeper engagement to the programme while providing an avenue of self-expression through art.
- Purposeful activities allowed persons with dementia to learn new skills, providing a sense of empowerment, achievement and joy at the completed artwork.

- Accessible community-based programme provided opportunities for persons with dementia to reconnect with the society, instilling a sense of social inclusion and empowerment.
- Structured and regular programme allowed for greater opportunities for artists and volunteers to build rapport, and to adapt the sessions to suit the interests and needs of the persons with dementia. It also provided time for persons with dementia to become accustomed to a new programme.
- Shared experiences allowed caregivers to witness the engagement and contentment of the persons with dementia during the programme, bringing relief and minimising any guilt that may be associated with leaving their loved ones in alternative care.
- Frequent and pleasant social interactions through meaningful co-creative activities strengthened the bond and relationship between persons with dementia, artists and volunteers. This created a supportive caring environment which fostered greater awareness and knowledge of dementia.

There are several new directions which future programmes and research could explore. Future studies with a larger number of participants over a wider range of arts-based programmes is recommended to establish the generalisability of these effects. Future studies could also incorporate a museum docent tour without an art engagement as an alternative baseline, which can specifically investigate the value and impact of an individualised arts engagement on the well-being of persons with dementia.

It would also be worthwhile for future studies to look at the effects of caregivers' involvement on the perceived caregiving experience. This could be done by comparing between caregivers involved in the programme and caregivers who were not. The qualitative aspects of caregivers' involvement in the programme could also be investigated by observing their interactions with the persons with dementia during the programme, and the impact of these interactions on the perceived caregiving experience.

Finally, future studies could apply a longitudinal methodology by collecting data at multiple time points to investigate changes in community attitudes towards dementia over time, and whether these have any immediate or long-lasting effects.

¹ Alzheimer's Disease International (2014). *Dementia in the Asia Pacific Region*. London: ADI. Retrieved from <https://www.alz.co.uk/adi/pdf/Dementia-Asia-Pacific-2014.pdf>.

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