Identifying the art of well-being:
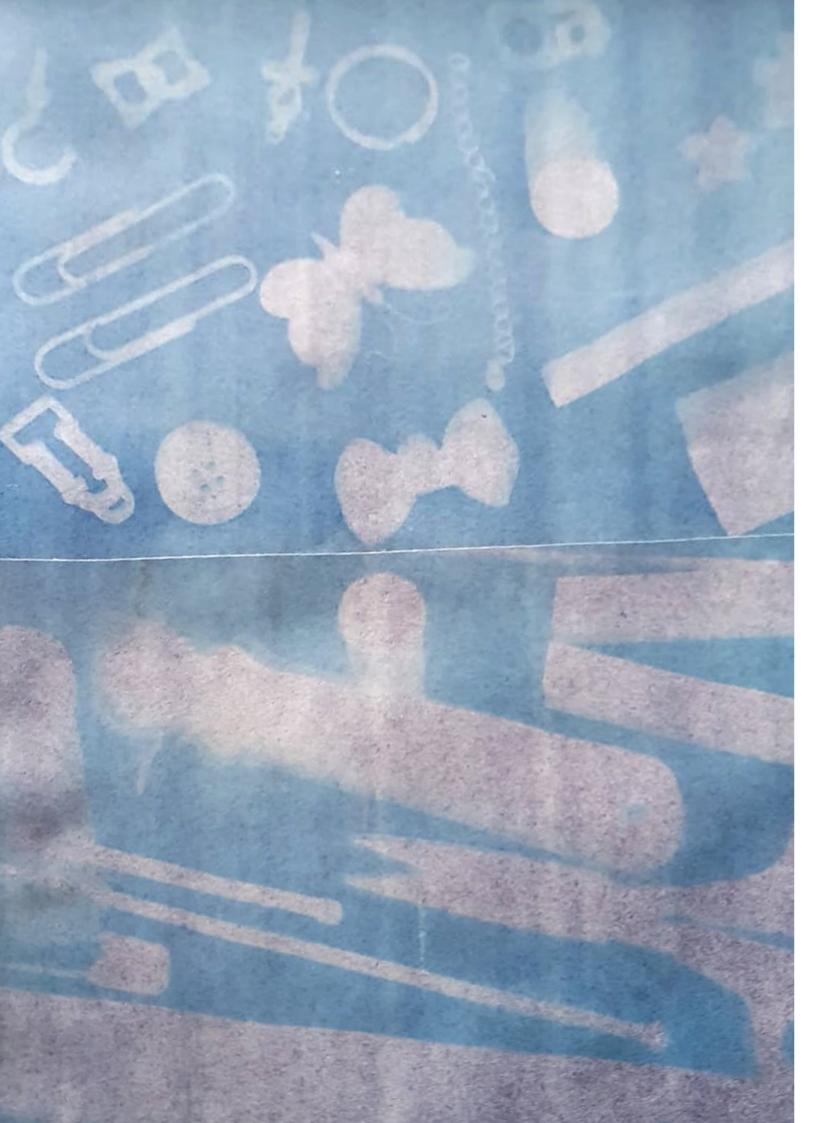
The Experiences and Impacts of Entelechy Arts' Staying Connected Programme

July 2022

entelechy arts

Queen Mary
University of London

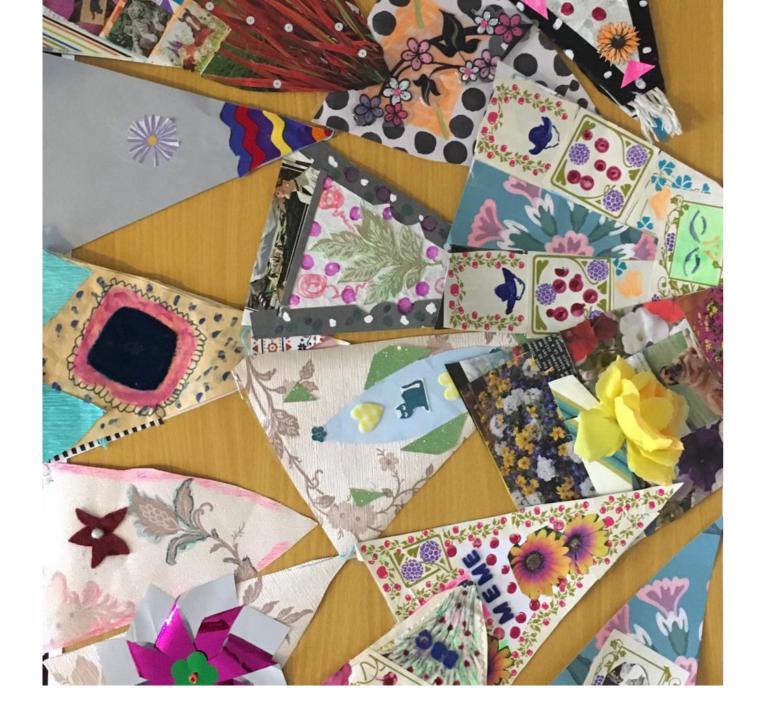UKRI Arts and Humanities Research Council

Overview

This report stems from an 18-month UK Research and Innovation - Arts and Humanities Research Council (UKRI-AHRC) funded research project conducted in collaboration between Entelechy Arts and Queen Mary University London (QMUL). The overall aim of the project was to investigate the design, delivery, and impacts of Entelechy Arts' remote creative programme, 'Staying Connected', from the perspectives of service providers and users during, and as the country transitioned out of, the restrictions related to the coronavirus pandemic.

Staying Connected included provision for members (service users) of Meet Me... a long-standing social and creative programme run for older adults in partnership with The Albany in Lewisham. In this report we focus on the experiences of Staying Connected and its impacts on service users. We conducted qualitative focus groups and a longitudinal quantitative study with older adults to understand how they engaged with the programme and to assess whether programme participation was related to psychological wellbeing over a 6-month period.

Table of Contents

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Summary of Key Findings

+ **Creative engagement was fostered through the remote programmes** – Older adults appreciated the varied activities and ways of creating – which allowed for choice and agency. They were also absorbed in the activities and re-developed or developed artistic interests from taking part.

+ **Social connections were gained through the remote programmes** - Older adults valued the interactions and shared experiences with other members and became emotionally invested in other members' well-being.

+ **Older adults appreciated the remote programmes but preferred the in-person delivery** - Although older adults welcomed the increased accessibility offered by the remote programmes, they reported a strong preference for in-person activities due to their increased contact hours and opportunities for interaction and feedback between members and staff. Some older adults said that they would welcome blended delivery to allow for their changing needs.

+ **Taking part in the remote programmes was associated with well-being** – Older adults detailed the anticipation, positive mood, and happiness associated with the cluster calls.

+ **Group identification mattered for social connection and well-being** – Higher identification with the arts programme (Meet Me...), one's community, and with one's age group were all associated with lower social isolation and higher positive mood.

+ **Arts programme identification was associated with engagement and well-being both initially and over time -** Initial ratings of arts programme (Meet Me...) identification were associated with engaging in more activities and with longer membership with Entelechy Arts. Increases in arts programme (Meet Me...) identification over 6 months was associated with an increase in well-being over this time.

Literature Review

Concerns related to the coronavirus pandemic (e.g., severe illness, multiple waves) increased the risk of social isolation for many people. Government mandated lockdowns, restrictions on social meetings, and guidelines for social distancing forcibly reduced social contact for all individuals, but was associated with increased vulnerability for older adults (Ayouni et al., 2021; Han et al., 2020; Rodrigues et al., 2022). Indeed, the increased risk of contracting the virus for older adults led to recommendations that they engage in shielding, where they were required to stay at home and avoid any contact with individuals outside of their homes including family and friends (Rodrigues, 2022). These severe restrictions led to the second concurrent pandemic of loneliness which had a disproportionately negative impact on the health and well-being of older adults (Cacioppo & Cacioppo, 2014; Hwang et al., 2020). During the pandemic the proportion of over 70s experiencing depression doubled, many older people reported that they had nobody to talk to for weeks during the COVID-19 pandemic, and by 2021 up to 43% of older adults reported feeling isolated or lonely as a direct result of shielding, even as restrictions were being lifted (Age UK, 2020; Office for National Statistics, 2020; Patient and Client Council, 2020). In light of these constraints and related negative outcomes, many community arts organisations recognised the importance of developing new programmes or redesigning existing programmes that could be delivered remotely to reduce isolation and promote health and well-being particularly amongst older adults during and after the pandemic.

Some community organisations that delivered arts activities and programmes were particularly quick in adopting a remote style of delivery which they dubbed remote creative programmes (Groot et al. 2021). Remote creative programmes often involved creative activities (e.g., crafting, singing, poetry) in a group format, using a range of technology including phone calls, videocalls, or post, to facilitate participation for people who were socially distanced. Even after the end of lockdowns, many creative programmes continued with remote delivery to minimise the risk to vulnerable clients (Agres et al., 2021). Similar to the impact of in-person creative programs (Jensen & Bonde, 2018; Kelaher et al., 2014), emerging research suggests that remote creative programmes tend to function well and improve the physical and mental health of their participants. For example, an online programme from the English National Opera taught breathing exercises used by opera singers and supported singing to improve mental health and breathlessness for people who had contracted COVID-19 (Philip, et al., 2022). However, the perceived experiences within remote creative programmes, and the impacts of these programmes on participants over time, are not well understood. Working with Entelechy Arts, we examined the experiences and long-term impact of their remote creative programme, Staying Connected, which delivered group-based art activities for older adults.

Entelechy Arts

Entelechy Arts, a recognized National Portfolio Organisation of the Arts Council of England, is renowned for producing dynamic co-created cultural programmes that bring disparate communities together such as older people at risk of isolation and living with physical and/or mental ill-health, adults with disabilities including profound and multiple learning disabilities, and individuals living in residential care. Entelechy Arts has a broad portfolio of programmes including 'Meet Me at the Albany', a creative arts club for the over 60s, in collaboration with regional arts space The Albany and the London Borough of Lewisham, to address the social needs and creative aspirations of isolated older people within the community. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, Entelechy Arts delivered the Meet Me... creative programme in a face-to-face format. In response to the pandemic, the organisation worked with their communities, partners, associate artists, staff, and volunteers to (re-)design and deliver a series of remote creative activities collectively referred to as 'Staying Connected'.

Staying Connected Remote Creative Programme

Staying Connected emerged as a remote creative programme that aimed to keep people together and engaged during the COVID-19 pandemic. In consultation with the Entelechy Arts' members, Staying Connected was developed to promote agency and shared responsibility for focus, content and output between members, staff, artists, and volunteers. Each activity was designed by a team of creative practitioners and tailored to meet the needs of its specific group of members (i.e., older adults, adults with disabilities, individuals living in residential care).

The programme evaluated by this research project had three core components: 1) weekly remote working clusters; 2) a weekly radio show, and 3) a one-off bespoke activity called 'Gnomes at Home'. Remote working clusters occurred weekly, with 4 - 6 Entelechy Arts members meeting on a group phone call (via Skype) to engage in different activities (e.g., storytelling, singing, crafting, poetry, discussion). Clusters were supplemented with deliveries of bespoke materials such as song lyrics, materials for crafting, plants, and poetry. This gave people the opportunity to be creative in each cluster. For example, people learned to write, perform and listen to poetry during the poetry working cluster, and they were also sent poems in the post. The weekly radio programme, called 'Meet Me... On The Radio', was presented by the same two older adult members of Entelechy Arts' who discussed a range of issues relevant to the community and brought the work and discussions from the phone clusters to a wider audience. The 'Gnomes at Home' activity involved the delivery of plaster cast gnomes and small succulent plants to member's place of residence. The gnomes were painted by members, providing tactile interactions with bespoke materials. Some clusters rearranged their meeting times to dovetail into visits from care workers and family members thereby providing additional support to members with complex needs in accessing the programme's phone-based services. Collectively these activities provided opportunities for engagement, social interactions, and creative skill development.

Understanding the experiences and impacts of creative programmes

Although there is growing evidence that taking part in arts activities can be important for psychological and physical health and wellbeing (e.g., Crone, et al., 2018; Daykin et al., 2018; Jensen & Bonde, 2018; Kelaher at al., 2014; Noice et al., 2015; Roe et al., 2016), there is currently very little understanding of precisely how this happens. This is an important question to answer for both practitioners and participants as it can suggest core areas to address in the design and delivery of creative programmes. A promising social psychological framework for understanding these relationships comes from the social identity approach to health (Jetten et al., 2014, 2017). According to this approach an individual's group memberships – connections based on affiliations and interests (e.g., clubs) and/or social categories (e.g., age, gender) - can act as a social cure: Through their group memberships individuals have access to shared experiences, new friends, self-definition, and supports (e.g., advice, comfort, information), that can contribute to their mental and physical health. Research using this approach has shown that different group-based interventions for older adults are associated with lower levels of depression, increased feelings of support, and fewer calls to GPs (Gleibs et al., 2011a, 2011b). More recently, this work has been applied to arts contexts where evidence suggests that identifying with important groups, including arts-based groups, is associated with improved mental health, increased life satisfaction, greater happiness, and higher levels of wellbeing (Adarves-Yorno et al., 2020; Bobowik et al. 2017; Haslam et al., 2014; Vella et al., 2021; Williams et al., 2018, 2020). In addition to highlighting the benefits of groups-based activities for promoting positive outcomes, this approach also provides a strong theoretical and empirical basis for evaluating a range of interventions. Given Entelechy Arts' use of remote clusters, we drew on the social identity approach to health to guide our assessment of the Staying Connected Programme.

Project Overview

To understand the experiences with, and impacts of the Staying Connected Programme for service users we conducted two studies. Study 1 asked three small groups of older adults (n=10) to discuss the activities that they engaged in and the perceived social and well-being impacts from taking part. Study 2 individually assessed 12 older adults twice over a six-month period to investigate whether initial evaluations of how they saw themselves, evaluated their activities, and rated their well-being might change as a result of taking part in the programme.

Study 1 –
Unpacking the Experience of Staying Connected

Methodology

What we did

We convened three focus groups from three of the Staying Connected clusters: choir, crafts, and discussion. The choir cluster had 4 participants, the crafting cluster had 3 participants, and the discussion cluster had 3 participants (see Figure 1 for the activity participation of focus group members). The 10 focus group members were 76 years old on average, 50% were White British, and all were female. We used a qualitative approach, where questions were asked and discussed within the focus groups. This helped us to gain insights into how the Staying Connected activities were experienced and the perceived impacts of taking part on social connections and psychological well-being (see Table 1 for questions).

Focus group discussions coincided with the regular timing and composition of the remote clusters. Focus groups were conducted using videocall software (Skype) which was used to make a group telephone call without any visual component because some members did not have access to smart phones cameras. Two members of staff facilitated the technical aspects of each focus group (i.e., calling participants, taking notes of who was speaking). People were encouraged to speak freely, and each person was prompted in response to each question to ensure everyone had an opportunity to contribute to each question. Focus group respondents did not take part in the longitudinal study.

Number of Participants in Stayiong Connected Activities

Figure 1. Activity participation of focus group members. Total numbers are greater than 10 as participants could take part in more than one activity if desired

What we asked

Table 1 Focus Group Questions

1. **Can you describe the activities that you do with Entelechy Arts?**
2. **Do you have a general interest in the arts or creative activities?**
3. **Can you tell me about any social impacts from taking part in the phone-calls / gnomes / listening to the radio during the pandemic?**
4. **Can you tell me about any health or wellbeing impacts you felt from taking part in the phone-calls / gnomes / listening to the radio?**
5. **Do you prefer doing activities in-person or over the phone?**

Data Analysis

Responses were analysed using thematic synthesis (Braun et al., 2019) where each sentence in the focus group transcripts was coded in terms of its content (i.e., ideas, concepts, thoughts). Similar content was grouped together to form the basis of descriptive themes, and data was re-coded where necessary to fit the structure of the themes. Finally, the descriptive themes were analysed and synthesised into 4 main themes which are outlined below.

Findings

Four themes were developed that focussed on (1) Creative Engagement, (2) Social Connection, (3) The Benefits and Challenges of Remote Creative Programmes, and (4) Impact of the Programme on Wellbeing. Each theme is outlined in detail below. As can be seen in Figure 2, these themes roughly map onto the fun of the programme, the friendships gained, and the resulting feelings.
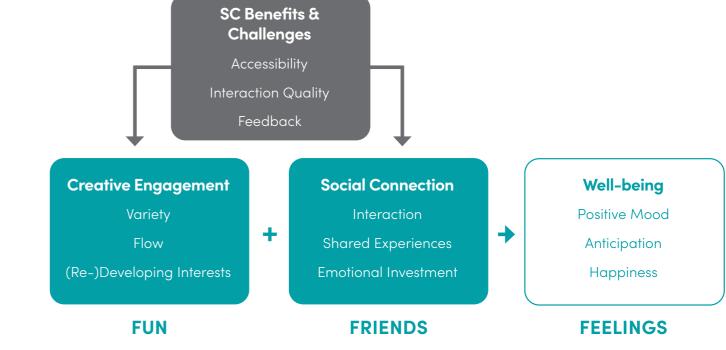

Figure 2. Qualitative themes and representative descriptors reflecting participants reported experience and perceived impacts of Staying Connected.

1. Creative Engagement

The key elements of creative engagement described by older adults highlighted the importance of interest, emotional expression, creative thinking, and absorption in the activities. These elements of creative engagement may have been achieved because variety, flexibility, and dynamism were a hallmark of the Staying Connected activities. Older adults were free to opt in or out of these activities as they wished and they could also take part in several different ways. For some members, the variety of activities available through the programme made the programme more interesting. For example, one member highlighted how they enjoyed the wide range of topics that were covered in the discussion group.

"I look forward to the phone call because we cover some very nice, interesting things, films, musicals, and gardening, travel, it's nice, varied, and it's very nice to hear other people's views on what we've been talking about" (Member 17).

This variety allowed other members to choose to focus on the activity (or activities) that they found interesting:

"Well, I was interested in not a lot of art [sic], it's more the choir, very interested in choir, get to like the choir a lot more than the art [sic], I do a little bit of things but the choir is more what I am interested in". (Member 11).

In a related vein, being able to make art the way that they wanted to, gave older adults an opportunity to express their thoughts and feelings. Some older adults reported that they found the creative process itself to be absorbing and relaxing. For example one older adult described how they could lose track of time when making art, akin to a psychological state of flow.

"It passes the time and it's a way of expressing your feelings, and it helps you to relax as well. You can lose yourself in artwork, can't you? You look up at the clock and an hour has gone by and you've got something to show at the end of it." (Member 16).

The process involved in making art during the crafting remote cluster was associated with active engagement, where members made decisions and thought creatively about their work. Some older adults reported that making art helped to keep their brain working and that they felt cognitively stimulated when engaging in creative processes:

"Well, it makes you use your brain again because when you're doing that, you're thinking and you're then thinking about how you'd like it to look. So, it gets you thinking and using your brain, which is very important to do." (Member 14).

Older adults welcomed the opportunity to re-connect with their creative interests, because they found it difficult to maintain a creative practice on their own. For these members, the time and materials provided by the program offered an opportunity to discover new creative interests or to re-discover past interests. For instance, one member noted:

"I look forward to the phone call because we cover some very nice, interesting things, films, musicals, and gardening, travel, it's nice, varied, and it's very nice to hear other people's views on what we've been talking about" (Member 17).

Older adults also discussed the immersive nature of taking part in Staying Connected creative activities. Respondents temporarily 'forgot' about their personal difficulties (for example, battling cancer, money worries, and hospital stays) as the activities re-focused their attention and provided the opportunity for new experiences to occur. For example, Member 9 relayed how singing in the choir took their mind off of the pandemic and allowed for connection.

"So where I've connected it makes us forget about Covid, wherever Covid is, when we are together singing in the choir we forget about Covid, when we act in our drama we forget about Covid, it's very good and encourages, as Member 10 said, you keep it up, oh it's very good, oh it's, we are really connected." (Member 9).

2. Social Connection

Older adults highlighted that the social component of the programme helped to facilitate social interaction, helped to make them feel remembered rather than forgotten, and helped to broaden their social group. Respondents remarked that regular contact with other members via Staying Connected, and meaningful conversations based on personal interests, helped foster a sense of connection. As described by one member, participating in the phone clusters almost felt like they had been out socialising with someone.

> *"It just makes everything seem like as if you've been out almost and with someone."*
> *(Member 7).*

Opportunities for social interaction were particularly welcomed during lockdown, when older adults were mostly confined to their homes, and was especially valued by individuals who had nobody else to talk to during this time.
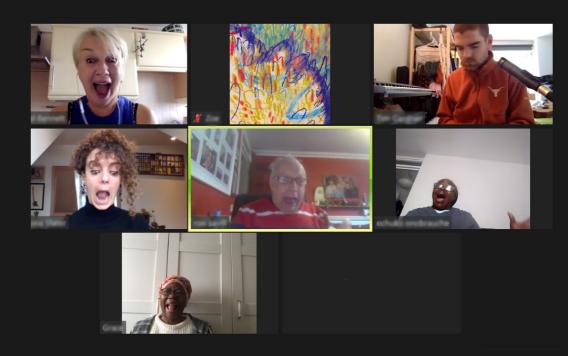
Critically, regular contact with Staying Connected helped older adults to feel emotionally invested in a wider group. Some members reported that learning more about each other helped to make their own world a little bit wider, as they focused less on their own lives and more on the lives of others. Members also reported thinking about fellow members throughout the week:

> *"I found myself thinking about the things that we'd spoke about, there was a gentleman [...] telling us about how he planted his bulbs ready for the spring and stuff like that. And I found myself thinking, oh I hope his bulbs take all right and I hope they come up nice, [he'd] taken a lot of trouble in telling us how he'd done the soil and everything and put them in. And you find yourself thinking about other people's lives more and not just your own." (Member 7).*

Lastly, for one member who was living alone, the remote investment in others led to a direct broadening of their social life once restrictions ended. Through participation in the Staying Connected programme, they expanded their social circle and made plans for future meet-ups outside of the Staying Connected programme.

> *"And then out of this has come spending time at the Theatre every Tuesday for four weeks and joining the films club as well. And there's also a lady called [X] who's invited me to a coffee morning at her house which is opening up my life a bit more." (Member 16).*

3. Staying Connected Benefits and Challenges

Taking part in a remote creative programme was discussed primarily in terms of the associated challenges. Indeed this was a theme that overarched the descriptions of creative engagement and social connection. Older adults highlighted the limited in-person contact, which they felt changed the nature of social interactions and restricted the development of new creative skills. Respondents also expressed a strong preference for in-person activities because they missed seeing each other and having face to face interactions. They also noted that it was more difficult to share moments and experiences as a group over the phone. For example, Member 9 described how seeing and interacting with other group members facilitated a sense of 'togetherness' and enjoyment that could not be achieved by only hearing the voices of other members over the phone.

> *"Well, doing it on the phone you only hear the voice of the people that are around you but doing it face to face you see everybody so you can tell, you can see everybody that's there, you can see everybody laughing together, playing together, saying things together, discussing together. So this, that's why it's, times is very good when we do it face to face."*
> *(Member 9).*

Remote interactions also limited the amount of feedback that creative practitioners could provide, with older adults receiving less constructive feedback about their work because no-one could see what they were doing. This made it more difficult to learn new techniques and activities. Member 10 described how they found it easier to follow along with activities and improve when they could see what other people were doing.

> *"Anything you do live together you see the improvement, anywhere where you are wrong you can change it, [...], you can tell me, OK stretch my hand up, you don't see me, when I'm stretching my hand or not stretching my [hand so] you don't know. So if I'm there, if we are together face to face you'll be able to know whether I'm doing it right because if they said turn right you may be turning left. So if you are doing face to face you will know that everybody is turning the same way, [...] so that is why face to face something is good." (Member 10).*

Although the majority of older adults enjoyed Staying Connected, they almost unanimously expressed a preference for in-person activities. It was clear that older adults felt that the remote creative programme was a much more limited option, and it did not compare with the full in-person programme.

> *'When it's just an hour a week, you, it's not replacing the four hours that you used to have in the Theatre but there again, that's better than nothing." (Member 14).*

Increased accessibility was highlighted as the only potential benefit of the remote format compared to in-person activities. Accessibility was particularly important for people with limited mobility or limited access to transport. Member 17 highlighted that they really appreciated the enhanced accessibility of the remote programme, because they would not be able to attend in person.

> *"And I would like to be with people there I admit but I have to have somebody with me to go out, seeing as there's nobody around to do that I don't get out so I really look forward to my phone call." (Member 17).*

4. Perceived Impact of Staying Connected on Wellbeing

Older adults reported that participating in Staying Connected helped to boost their mood. Positive feelings such as excitement, gratitude, and relaxation were reported by several older adults, and these feelings persisted after the group activities. One older adult mentioned how they felt energized after the phone call and continued to think about things that had been brought up on the phone call.

> *"I feel energised because after the phone you mull things over and you think, oh I wish I'd remembered that, especially when it's films and musicals." (Member 17).*

This routine of the remote programme also had a positive impact on the older adults because it gave them something to look forward to. Respondents noted that when this routine was disrupted (e.g., due to illness or hospitalisation) older adults reported feeling disappointed. Waiting for the next activity created a real sense of anticipation and excitement for some members, highlighted here by Member 11 who would get up early to prepare for the call:

> *"Yes, so the beginning I used to prepare myself, make sure I get up early got everything out, the phone near to me, have my breakfast and waiting, I used to be very excited. Because it's marvellous what they could have done to set up that choir on the phone, I think it's something great." (Member 11).*

Participation in Staying Connected helped older adults to escape from the difficulties they were facing during lockdown, which was particularly trying for respondents who lived on their own. Some members reported a feeling a sense of sadness and loneliness when it was time to say goodbye to everyone on the group call because they did not like being on their own all the time. One older adult explains that they felt happier during the phone call, but that they could feel their heart sink as the call came to a close:

> *"It's wonderful when you're with people on the phone and then when they all start saying goodbye, your heart sinks a bit. You think, I'm going to be on my own again in a minute, and it's a bit of a downer but it's worth it because for the hour that you're with people, then you're feeling buoyed up and you're feeling happier" (Member 16).*

Study 2 –
Assessing the Impact of Staying Connected Over Time

Methodology

What we did

We conducted a longitudinal study where participants answered questionnaires at two timepoints separated by 6 months. A total of 16 older adults took part in the survey at Time 1 (May – June 2021). Twelve older adults completed the survey at Time 2 (November–December 2021; see Table 2 for demographic details of participants at both timepoints). Two respondents were new members who had never attended a creative programme before. On average respondents reported engaging in at least 2 different activities and 50% reported weekly attendance at both Time 1 and Time 2 (see Figure 3 for details of the activities the participants took part in).

The questionnaires were administered by QMUL researchers over the phone (via Skype). Respondents provided ratings of programme satisfaction and engagement, delivery preferences (in-person, remote), group identification, and aspects of wellbeing. This allowed us to evaluate the impact of Staying Connected on older adults both during, and as the UK transitioned out of, restrictions associated with the COVID-19 pandemic.

Table 2
Demographics for Longitudinal Study

	Time 1 N = 16	Time 2 N = 12
White British	68.9%	58.3%
Black, Asian, or Minority Ethnic	31.1%	33.3%
Female	68.8%	58.3%
Average Age	79.1 years (SD=8.4)	78.7 years (SD=9.7)
Proportion that were ongoing members	62.5%	75%
Average Membership Duration of Entelechy Arts	4.8 years (SD=6.9)	5.25 years (SD=7.2)

N is the number of participants in each group, SD stands for standard deviation. Participants that reported that they had been a member of Entelechy Arts before the pandemic were classed as ongoing term members. One member has been with the organization for a very long time leading to the large SD in membership duration.
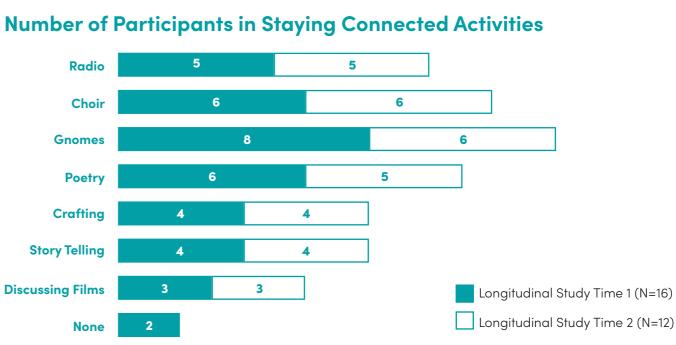
Number of Participants in Staying Connected Activities

Figure 3. Activity participation for older adults in longitudinal study.

What we measured

At each time point, participants were asked to rate how strongly they identified with different groups (i.e., age, arts programme, community), as well as their general wellbeing, vitality, satisfaction with life, resilience, happiness, positive affect, social isolation, and loneliness (see Table 3 for details of the measures used).

Social Identity

Meet Me Identity	Single item Social Identity Measure (SISI, Postmes et al., 2012)	1 "strongly disagree" to 5 "strongly agree"	1
Community Identity	Single item Social Identity Measure (SISI, Postmes et al., 2012)	1 "strongly disagree" to 5 "strongly agree"	1
Age Identity	Single item Social Identity Measure (SISI, Postmes et al., 2012)	1 "strongly disagree" to 5 "strongly agree"	1

Wellbeing

Social Isolation	Friendship Scale (Hawthorn, 2006)	1 "not at all" to 5 "almost always"	6
Positive Affect	Positive and Negative Experience (SPANE; Diener et al., 2009)	1 "Very rarely or never" to 5 "very often or always"	6
Negative Affect	Positive and Negative Experience (SPANE; Diener et al., 2009)	1 "Very rarely or never" to 5 "very often or always"	6
General Wellbeing	Warwick Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (Tennant et al., 2007)	1 "None of the time" to 5 "all of the time"	14
Life Satisfaction	Satisfaction with Life Scale (Diener et al 1985)	1 "Strongly disagree" to 5 "strongly agree"	5
Happiness	Subjective Happiness Scale (Lyubomirsky & Lepper, 1999)	1 "Not a very happy person" to 5 "A very happy person" 1 "Less Happy" to 5 "More happy" 1 "Not at all" to 5 "A great deal"	4
Subjective Vitality	Subjective Vitality Scale (Ryan & Frederick, 1997).	1 "strongly disagree" to 5 "strongly agree"	7

Notes: Measures of illbeing (Resilience, Loneliness, Anxiety, Depression Somatic Symptoms of Stress) were also recorded as part of the longitudinal study but are not reported here for parsimony. The term 'Meet Me' was used to describe the identity related to Entelechy Arts.

Data Analysis

Data were analysed and summarised using descriptive and inferential statistics as appropriate (i.e., frequencies, averages, correlations, linear modelling). As some participants did not respond to the follow-up phone call at 6 months (n = 4) there were slightly more data for initial observations (Time 1) than when assessing change over time (comparing responses from Time 1 to Time 2)

Findings
Examining Initial Relationships (Time 1)

Four themes were developed that focussed on (1) Creative Engagement, (2) Social Connection, (3) The Benefits and Challenges of Remote Creative Programmes, and (4) Impact of the Programme on Wellbeing. Each theme is outlined in detail below. As can be seen in Figure 2, these themes roughly map onto the fun of the programme, the friendships gained, and the resulting feelings.

Satisfaction, Engagement, and Preferences

Overall, 88% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they were satisfied with the Staying Connected Programme, and 81% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they felt engaged in the Staying Connected activities.

When asked about their programme delivery format, 93% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they preferred in-person activities. Sixty-three percent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they would like hybrid activities (i.e., a mix of in-person and remote activities), and 25% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they preferred remote activities (see Table 4)

Table 4
Demographics for Longitudinal Study

	Agreed or Strongly Agreed	Neutral	Disagreed or Strongly Disagreed
	% (# of ppl)	% (# of ppl)	% (# of ppl)
Satisfied with Staying Connected	88 (14)	6 (1)	13 (2)
Engaged with Activities	81 (13)	6 (1)	6 (1)
Prefer In-Person Activities	93 (15)	6 (1)	0 (0)
Would like blended arts activities	63 (10)	19 (3)	19 (3)
Prefer Remote Arts Activities	25 (4)	19 (3)	56 (9)

Correlations

To understand how our key variables were related to each other, we computed bivariate correlations. This allowed us to see if measures of identification (age, arts programme, community) were related to measures of engagement and wellbeing (see Table 5 for these relationships).

Identification and Engagement

We examined whether each of the three measures of identification were related to engagement with Staying Connected (Number of Activities) and long-term membership with Entelechy Arts (Duration of Membership in years).

Meet Me identification was positively related to the number of reported activities and the duration of membership. Age identification was positively related to the duration of membership only. Community identification was unrelated to the number of activities or duration of membership

Identification and Well-being

We examined whether each of the three measures of identification were related to well-being, life satisfaction, vitality, social isolation, positive and negative mood, and happiness.

Identifying with other Meet Me members was positively associated with feeling connected to other people, a positive mood, and experiencing wellbeing.

Identifying with one's community was positively associated with feeling connected to other people, a positive mood, and experiencing well-being, life satisfaction and happiness.

Identifying with one's age group was positively associated with feeling connected to other people, a positive mood and experiencing life satisfaction.

Table 5
(Measures of Wellbeing) and covariates (Participation with Entelechy Arts and Staying Connected) at Time 1.

	Meet Me Identity r	Community Identity r	Age Group Identity r
Engagement with Entelechy Arts and Staying Connected			
Duration of Membership with Entelechy Arts (rho)	.50*	.48	.48
Number of Activities	.52*	.31	.31
General Wellbeing			
Wellbeing	.55*	.54*	.54*
Life Satisfaction	.39	.64**	.64**
Subjective Vitality	.39	.44	.44
Social Isolation	–.60*	–.58*	–.58*
Affect – Positive	.65**	.76**	.76**
Affect – Negative	–.25	–.41	–.41
Happiness	.47	.59*	.59*

Notes. Higher absolute numbers indicate stronger relationships. Positive numbers indicate positive relationship and negative numbers indicate negative relationships. Social isolation was measured on the friendship scale and reverse scored so that higher numbers indicate more social isolation and less friendship. Pearson's r was used to compare variables that had a normal distribution. Spearman's rho was used to compute the correlations for variables that did not have a normal distribution. * Significant at alpha < .05. ** Significant at alpha < .01.

Assessing changes over time (Time 1 to Time 2)

being over time, accounting for engagement (duration of membership, number of activities).

Meet Me Identification

For older adults whose Meet Me identification increased over six months, well-being also increased over this time. However, for older adults whose Meet Me identification decreased over six months, well-being decreased over this time (see Figure 4).

For older adults whose Meet Me identification increased over six months subjective vitality remained stable over this time. However, for older adults whose Meet Me identification decreased over six months, subjective vitality decreased over this time (see Figure 5).

Community identification

For older adults whose community identification increased over six months, happiness remained stable over this time. However, for older adults whose community identification decreased over six months, happiness decreased over this time (see Figure 6). These findings suggest that strengthening community identity over time might be one way to maintain happiness and positive affect over time.

For older adults whose community identification increased over six months, positive affect remained stable over this time. However, for older adults whose community identification decreased over six months, positive decreased over this time (see Figure 7).
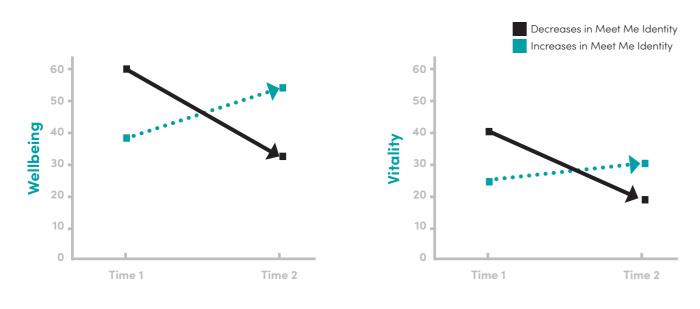

Figure 4. Interaction between measures of Meet Me Identity (Within Effects) and wellbeing over time. Decreases in Meet Me Identity were related to decreases in wellbeing.
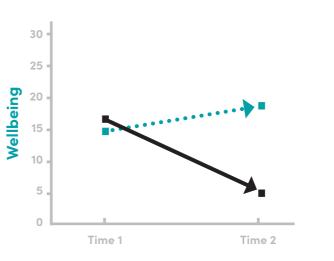
Figure 5. Interaction between measures of Meet Me Identity (Within Effects) and vitality over time. Decreases in Meet Me Identity were related to decreases in vitality.

For older adults whose community identification increased over six months, positive affect remained stable over this time. However, for older adults whose community identification decreased over six months, positive decreased over this time (see Figure 7).

Figure 7. Interaction between changes in Community Identity (Within Effects) and positive affect over time. Decreases in community identity over time were related to decreases in positive affect.

Together, these findings suggest that strengthening the Meet Me identity over time might be one way to increase well-being and maintain subjective vitality over time. Given that the Meet Me identity was associated engagement in a greater number of activities and with longer duration of membership with Entelechy Arts, taking in their programmes over time may help to strengthen this identity.

Together, these findings suggest that strengthening community identity over time might be one way to maintain happiness and positive affect over time.
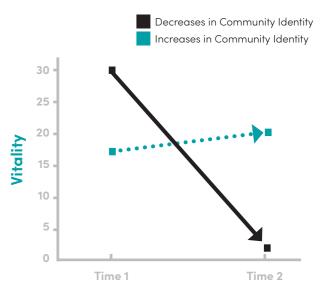
Age Identification

For older adults whose age identification increased over six months, well-being decreased over this time. However, for older adults whose age identification decreased over six months, well-being increased over this time (see Figure 8).

For older adults whose age identification increased over six months, negative affect increased over this time. However, for older adults whose age identification decreased over six months, negative affect decreased over this time (see Figures 9).

Figure 8. Interaction between changes in age identity (within effects) and general wellbeing. Decreases in Age Identity over time were positively related to increases in Wellbeing
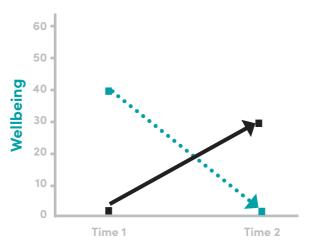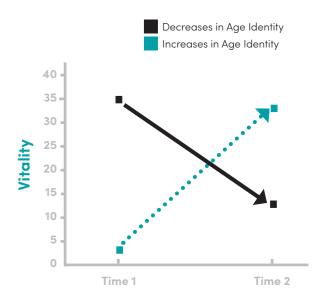
Figure 9. Interaction between changes in age identity (within effects) and negative affect. Decreases in Age Identity over time were positively related to decreases in negative affect.

Together, these findings suggest that strengthening community identity over time might be one way to maintain happiness and positive affect over time.

Summary, Interpretation and Implications

Across focus groups and a longitudinal survey of members we gained important insights into the experiences and impacts of Entelechy Arts' Staying Connected Programmes. First, qualitative data indicated that, despite some of the challenges of remote programme delivery, older adults valued the opportunities for creative engagement and social connection offered by Staying Connected and attributed their involvement to well-being. Second, quantitative data supported our qualitative findings and demonstrated how the social connections related to and/or influenced by taking part in Staying Connected – namely individuals' identification with other members of the programme, their community, and their age group – were related to engagement, isolation, and well-being and had an impact on their well-being over time.

Although members noted and appreciated the increased accessibility afforded by the remote programme, they overwhelmingly indicated a preference for in-person creative programmes. Members found the remote format to be limiting as it restricted the nature and quality of the interactions (e.g., not being able to put a face to the name, not able to see others laughing and playing, less time was spend on calls than in-person) and constrained creative skill development (e.g., members were unable to see what other people were doing, members could not get direct instruction or feedback from practitioners to improve work). Some members also found it more difficult to access the remote activities (e.g., connecting to a skype call, finding the radio station). For these reasons several older adults reported that they would prefer to come together and interact face to face as soon as it was safe to do so. However, some other members mentioned that the remote programmes allowed them to participate when they might not have otherwise been able to do so. For instance, a lack of reliable transportation, mobility issues, or a deterioration in health, can make it difficult to attend in person. Other members too indicated that they would like to have a blended delivery option where they could choose how to attend. This suggests that organisations may need to consider the access concerns of their members and reflect on the possibility and feasibility of fully replicating in-person programmes in remote formats or developing hybrid options that can provide their members with the best of both worlds.

Creative engagement was an integral part of the Staying Connected programme. Members appreciated the wide variety of activities which provided multiple avenues for agency – they could choose the activities that they wanted to do, make their own creative decisions and develop and experience their own creative processes. Members also valued the cognitive stimulation and personal development afforded by the activities – they were able to build creative skills, engage in active thinking, and (re-)discover artistic interests. These elements may help members to be seen and to participate in activities on their own terms – an important feature of Entelechy Arts' programmes (Matarasso, 2018; Mills, 2021). These features might also allow for engagement in activities that are more meaningful for participants thereby sustaining high levels of interest and involvement with the programme. This could contribute to the anticipation, positive mood, and happiness described by participants, as enhanced agency and sustained engagement in arts activities have been linked to improved mental well-being amongst older adults (e.g., Park et al., 2014; Williams et al., 2020. Overall it seems that the wide variety of activities helped people to stimulate different types of creative engagement.

Older adults also welcomed the opportunity to have meaningful interactions with a wider group and looked forward to having regular meet-ups every week. Members appreciated the shared experiences of the group interactions – they were able to talk to each other and do new things together – which can help to shore up the psychological and practical resources from groups that contribute to well-being (Jetten et al., 2014). Some members also reported that taking part in Staying Connected helped to make their own world a little bit wider through focussing less on their own lives and taking the perspectives of other people, suggesting that these group interactions are also a potential avenue for self-expansion, where engaging in new, exciting, or interesting activities and/or taking on the characteristics and perspectives of other people changes how individuals see themselves and understand their world (Aron & Aron, 1997; Ketay, Beck & Welker, 2020; Hughes et al., 2020). Other members noted that their remote interactions were translating into planned real-world interactions once the lockdown restrictions had eased. Given that social connections are an important source of well-being (e.g., House et al., 1988; Moore & March, 2022), it makes sense that older adults also reported feelings of positive mood, energy, and happiness from their interactions. It is also clear that creative arts programmes are an important source connection.

Indeed, participation in Staying Connected provided a range of possible group memberships including Meet Me member, Community member, and Older adult, with which respondents could identify, or see themselves as connected to other group members. In line with work demonstrating that identification with group memberships in general is associated with well-being (e.g., Jetten et al., 2014; Williams et al., 2018, 2020), we found that higher initial ratings of group identification - whether Meet Me, Community, or Age - were associated with lower ratings of social isolation and higher ratings of positive affect. However, we also observed that these initial ratings of identification were differentially associated with other measures of engagement and well-being. For engagement, higher ratings of Meet Me identification were associated with engaging in a greater number of activities and longer duration of membership with Entelechy Arts and higher ratings of age identification were associated with longer duration of memberships only. This corresponds with previous accounts that active engagement with arts activities are important for developing arts-based group identities (Williams, et. al., 2020). Community identification was unrelated to either index of engagement. For well-being, higher ratings of Meet me identification were positively related to higher ratings of general well-being, higher ratings of community identification were related to higher ratings of general well-being, life satisfaction, and happiness, and higher ratings of age identification were related to life satisfaction. Critically we observed that changes in group identification mattered over time. Over six months, strengthening identification with other members of Meet Me and community, and weakening identification with other members of one's age group, was associated with maintaining or increasing different aspects of well-being over this time. Taken together, these findings suggest that whilst group identification might generally be associated with feeling connected and good, the type of group one identifies with might matter for promoting engagement and general well-being. This corresponds with previous findings that demonstrate that identifying with arts-based groups can help to improve mental health (Williams, 2018). These patterns might reflect what these identities mean, both in the context of the arts activities and for the individual more generally (e.g., whether one's age group is perceived positively or negatively can shape its influence on well-being; Dionigi, 2015; Levy & Myers, 2004; Wurm et al., 2017), and suggest that it may be particularly important to cultivate and strengthen some group memberships over others to promote engagement and well-being over time.

Considerations and Recommendations

The findings highlighted that both the creative and social components of arts programmes should be addressed to facilitate participant engagement and to positively impact their well-being. Three key considerations for arts organisations (and the wider arts sector) to promote these benefits may include ensuring programme variety, cultivating group memberships, and allowing time.

Ensuring Programme Variety

Members of the Staying Connected programmes had access to a range of creative activities that tapped into different areas of artistic practice such as singing, crafting, and creative writing. Importantly members could choose to engage in as many or as few activities as they wanted to, and they could also choose how they wished to engage within each of these activities. Developing a creative programme that allows for this type of flexibility may foster an environment where agency is implicitly valued, and produce a positive knock-on effect of sustaining interest and engagement amongst members (since they can choose what they do and how they do it), as well as contributing to their cognitive stimulation and well-being. An additional part of variety may also be linked to how programmes are delivered. Although there appears to be overwhelming support for in-person delivery, hybrid delivery, where individuals can choose to access activities either in-person or remotely, might further enhance feelings of agency and allow for sustained interest and engagement even when circumstances change (e.g., mobility, transportation, illness).

Consideration 1: Variety may indeed be the spice of life. Rather, than trying to identify the one type of arts activity or mode of delivery that promotes interest, engagement, and well-being, it may be that choice in what one does, and how one does it, is the key for unlocking the benefits of arts activities for all individuals.

Recommendation 1: Where possible, a diverse collection of creative activities should be offered in different ways by arts programmes to allow for the agency that can promote beneficial outcomes. Where this is difficult for an individual arts organisation to realise, it might be possible to join together with other organisations within a given area to develop Creative Community Clusters so that resources and the individual programme strengths may be pooled to allow clients to access the benefits of variety (activities, ways of working) within their local communities to maximise their positive outcomes.

Cultivating Group Memberships

Members of Staying Connected noted that the group interactions were a highlight of the arts activities. Not only did this help them to feel connected to others, but it also allowed them to expand their perspectives and social lives. When assessing the strength of people's identification with the different groups related to Staying Connected (i.e., arts programme, community, age), seeing one's self as a member these groups was linked to less social isolation and more life satisfaction, and as identification with these groups were strengthened (arts programme, community) or diminished (age) over time, they were associated with maintaining or increased different aspects of well-being over time. Developing arts activities that allow for group interactions may be a low cost way to maximise programme delivery (e.g., more people can be reached) whilst at the same time enhancing opportunities for connection and cultivating the conditions to improve engagement and well-being over time.

Consideration 2: Group interactions may be a useful way to leverage additional benefits for individuals involved in arts activities. Embedding sharing and discussion in artistic practice may enhance connection and promote several individual benefits.

Recommendation 2: Where possible deliver activities in groups to bolster feelings of connection and identification to promote engagement and well-being. Groups can be strengthened informally by allowing regular opportunities for interaction over time or formally by using interventions such as Groups4Health (Haslam et al., 2016) in the design phases of programmes to maximise the benefits of group memberships

Allowing Time

Findings from the cross-sectional and longitudinal studies highlighted the critical importance of time for both the development of practice and its consequent impacts. For practice, time for the activities and within the activities was something highlighted by the service users. In particular, members wanted more time for the activities. They commented that remote programme was delivered in less time than the in-person programme, which reduced how long they could engage in the arts and with others. This lack of time for the activities might have been acutely felt as members also noted that when they were engaged in the activities they enjoyed them partly because they were able to 'get lost in the moment' and 'time was forgotten'. This total immersion in the activity was appreciated both for allowing members to develop their creative skills and for allowing them to take their minds off of other issues in their lives. This also speaks to the necessity of time to enable to artistic process to unfold over moments where both service users and artists can try out new things and challenge themselves through arts practice. For impacts we can see the importance of time for capturing changes in experiences and evaluations. Without assessments over time it would be difficult to understand and properly chronicle the improvements, stability and/or declines that might be associated with arts activities.

Consideration 3: Time to allow the sustained development of programmes and to assess programmes is necessary for uncovering what works in arts interventions.

Recommendation 3: Consistent and sustained funding for arts organisations that enables long-term delivery of programmes rather than short-term or one-off programs is needed. Robust longitudinal evaluation is also needed to gain a complete picture the success and challenges of arts interventions.

Lessons Learned
Words by Entelechy Arts

The QMUL research team asked Entelechy Arts to reflect on their experience of the research project. This was their response:

On March 23rd 2020, during the first week of the UK COVID-19 lockdown, Entelechy Arts launched a seven point plan ensuring that supportive and creative contact was maintained with everyone we worked with. At the heart of the plan was our aspiration to keep on learning:

> *'At the end of the COVID-19 curve, we anticipate that Entelechy Arts be a part of a richer, stronger and more resilient relational network of creative network of associates: artists, emerging artists and members. Reflective practices have been at the heart of what we do as a company. We will continue that there is the space for doing, reflecting and recording'* **Entelechy Arts 'Our Plans to Keep Supporting' March 2020.**

The height of the COVID-19 pandemic required us to entirely transform our creative programmes, to ensure that our communities, who were some of the most vulnerable to COVID-19 and the consequences of multiple lockdowns, continued to have connection, community and creativity around them. The partnership with Queen Mary University of London represented an invaluable opportunity for us to dig deeper into this programme that was created during this unprecedented time, consider the impact, successes and learnings for future remote creative programmes, for ourselves and hopefully benefit the wider culture and arts sector.

Our key learnings and benefits were as follows:

+ **An opportunity for objective review**
+ **A process 'the Entelechy Arts way'**
+ **Radical evaluation**

An opportunity for objective review

It is a fascinating process to see your own work reflected in the words of other people, with themes, conclusions and recommendations made, coming from the voices of your community members and workforce.

The way Entelechy Arts works as a company is deeply embedded in our process – part and parcel of all of our programmes, and are perhaps methods that we take for granted, because we 'just-do-them'. Certain emergent themes from the research had been hoped for (and perhaps expected) – such as demonstrating that the programmes reduced feelings of loneliness, and in-person activity being generally preferred.

Other narratives around the complex experience that our artists went through and how best to support practitioners in remote environments (from the first report), and the strong identification that participants had with the programme as a community, or even a 'brand' (in the second report) makes for more interesting further discussion. This collaboration was an opportunity to share our work in a new language, and get support / recognition for our work and the wider sector. A great opportunity during such a frenetic time, (we've been so reactive) to have someone archiving and documenting our work and analysing how it has all come together has been invaluable, so we can get better.

There was an interesting irony in undertaking a research project about the impact of remote creative programmes, which was itself a remote process.

A process 'the Entelechy Arts way'

As a company, our work exudes 'creative care', forging a unique artistic process based in access and care provision, and a process of co-creation is at the heart of everything we do. The creation of the research programme during the height of the pandemic was a challenge in that we were working remotely with our communities, who we ordinarily would co-create so closely with. Our community members we wished to engage with this study were experiencing national lockdowns and often living alone. When building the questionnaire to be asked, we were acutely aware of the sensitivity of the questions that could be asked via the telephone interview, particularly when asking people to reflect on their own wellbeing and feelings of isolation. As such, we adapted questions accordingly, and the research team worked with the utmost sensitivity and awareness - including escalating any safeguarding concerns they had after having had conversations with participants.

Radical evaluation

We have been aware of the way we are sharing this research, who we are presenting it for and how we are bringing it to life, so it does not just exist in report form and is only accessible to 'academics'. We have also tried to bring a more sensory engagement to sharing the report, such as sending art activities in the post for attendees to our first report sharing event in November 2021, to do live during the event. There is more we can do with future research projects to be more radical and creative in how we both collect data and share the results.

We are excited by the prospect of co-created research methodologies - asking our communities how they would like to have impact measured, how a research process should happen and to work collaboratively with the research teams to develop a new language. Are we researching in the way that the people being researched want to be, or is it important to them? This was not possible for this research project due to the remote nature of working but is something we look forward to embedding in future research projects.

The outcomes from both reports have spurred on many more questions and potential new areas for research studies. These include:

+ **The impact of involvement in Entelechy Arts programmes (both in-person and remote) in giving members agency to develop their own remote support networks for other isolated individuals in their communities**

+ **The impact of blended remote and in-person activities in supporting older adults to remain connected and engaged through periods of significant change in later life: increased mobility challenges, moving into care settings etc.**

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