

VFG A4D Best Practice Conference, “Towards Social Prescribing (Arts & Heritage) for the Dementias”, Wellcome Collection, Thursday 16 May 2019

Good morning!

225,000 people in the UK will develop a dementia this year, the most feared condition – degeneration of the brain - for which there is no cure.

Thank you for coming here today,

- to drive forward social prescribing services to help preserve their wellbeing, as they embark on dementia’s long downward path,
- to enable them to be directed to arts and wellbeing programmes to override symptoms - anxiety, memory loss, confusion, character change, much more - and be encouraged to pursue their cultural interests, enjoy social interactivity with a sense of purpose in the community.

Keith Oliver, who was diagnosed at the age of 55 in 2010, writes this year in *Dear Alzheimer’s: A Diary of Living with Dementia*:

Give me music and my heart will dance ...
Give me inspiration and I will excel
Give me teaching and I will learn ...
Give me identity and I will shine ...
Give me occupation and I will be focused
Give me inclusion and I will belong ...

There's the evidence, now please do something with it,
Thank you!, urges Keith,

Surely if we fight for cancer drugs to preserve life for months for our loved ones, we must too establish a system for social prescribing on diagnosis of a dementia – a specific NICE Guideline - referral to arts (in the broadest terms) in order to preserve active life for a few years more.

There are pockets of fine practice as you will hear today, but this needs to grow, to become universal. How excellent it is that leaders in arts, social prescribing, health and social care, are here to debate the way forward with us.

Arts 4 Dementia was founded in 2011 to

- develop a learning and participation stream for arts venues, weekly workshops to re-energise, inspire and

empower people coping with early-stage dementias and their companions, and to

- provide a website to signpost arts opportunities for people living with a dementia nationwide – useful reference for social prescribers

We liaise with arts and dementia services to provide

- training for arts facilitators and postgraduate volunteers
- conferences and reports to showcase best arts practice for the dementias

Mindful that the often lengthy and largely loss-focussed assessment process for the dementias exacerbates fear, loss of confidence and sense of shame, our goal has been direction to arts as post-diagnostic support. Social prescribing can achieve this.

Engaging in the arts early on can ease the shock of diagnosis.

Involvement in community projects, among others undergoing similar experiences, engenders mutual encouragement.

As Matt Hancock, the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, advises “We should harness the incredible power of the arts and social activities to help people cope better with symptoms and stay connected to their communities.” He recommends social prescribing to achieve the shift to a more person-centred care as part of the NHS Long Term Plan.

Today, Chris Maddocks’s experience of diagnosis demonstrates the need for positive change. You will hear Dr Daisy Fancourt of UCL’s evidence that engaging with arts and heritage can help protect against cognitive decline and academic and arts facilitators’ evidence that it empowers participants to rise above the fog of dementia, revive and develop new creative skills.

From Professor Sebastian Crutch, you will hear how their artistic collaboration with neuroscience research is enhancing knowledge of the dementias and the implications for social prescribing.

Dr Michael Dixon, NHS England's Social Prescribing Champion, will set the ball rolling for the dementias in practice. Our patron Baroness Greengross, co-chair of the All Party Parliamentary group on Dementia is delivering the keynote speech, which will be debated by policy makers at Public Health England, NHS England, Care UK, Alzheimer's Society, the Association of Directors of Adult Social Services and Arts Council England.

The afternoon will be devoted to arts practice for early-stage dementia, the social prescribing referral process, creative and cultural befrienders, training, evaluation. The award-winning Social Prescribing Student Champion compels action, for students are our future, keen to interact with and learn from people experiencing dementia challenges - and to understand how to access their existing skills. Finally, Nigel will demonstrate how social prescribers can find local arts opportunities for all stages of dementia on the Arts 4 Dementia website.

Your delegate packs include a sheet on ArtsPAL, the volunteer creative befriender scheme we are proposing to support social prescribing for individuals with a dementia. These are early days for ArtsPAL, but there will be a section in our post-conference survey where you can express your interest as well as social prescribing developments, which we shall follow up during the year, for publication of the report.

I should like to thank the following for supporting this conference:

- The Big Lottery's Awards for All
- Music for Dementia 2020
- The Arts 4 Dementia team – please stand – our chair Tim O'Brien and fellow trustees, our CEO my brother Nigel, his assistants, Imelda and Lois, and our Conference Co-Ordinator Andrew Hulse.

And now, please welcome Alexandra Coulter, Chair of the Culture, Health and Wellbeing Alliance and Director of Arts and Health South West, to chair our morning sessions.