

# Dominic Campbell, Artistic Director, Creative Ageing International.

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DOMINIC CAMPBELL, cultural producer, excited by the positive effects on society of longer lives. Co-founded [Creative Ageing International](#) (CAI) employing celebration as strategy for transformational change. Pandemic initiatives include [Ageing Voice](#) connecting across community, healthcare and civic agencies to reduce isolation and facilitate ‘un-lockdown’, and a nationwide localised arts programme for Irish Hospice Foundation to process loss through making meaning. An inaugural fellow of [Global Brain Health Institute Atlantic Fellowship](#), a Next Avenue Key Influencer on ageing, and board member of Africa’s Arts in Medicine Fellowship. Previously he led [Ireland’s St Patrick’s Festival](#) attracting a quarter of the population to live events, broadcasting to 23 million diaspora. Applying this to contemporary ageing, produced [Bealtaine Festival](#), 20% of Ireland’s 65+ year olds re-imagined ageing at 3,500 events annually. Creative Ageing International is bringing this learning across borders.

## ‘Celebration as strategy – Hope and creative ageing’.

It is delightful to be joining this company. At Creative Ageing International, we celebrate ageing and using creativity to create change in the general direction of fairness. Why do we celebrate ageing? Because we think a longer life is a great indication of a successful society. It is certainly an indicator of a successful healthcare system; in fact, I think it is the best that we have. As people live longer, what they are beginning to do is impact and change those healthcare systems. They are doing this partly because of the people that they are, but also because of the conditions that they can present to healthcare systems. In a normal year I might be thinking about the alignment relation between ageing populations, life expectancy, and incidents of Alzheimer’s and dementia.

In this year I have cause to pause. I am thinking differently about what makes a healthcare system. I am thinking that perhaps the highest form of knowledge is empathy, ‘for it requires us to suspend our egos and live in another’s

Historically unprecedented

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world’, as Plato said. Because like everybody else, connected by the internet, we are in the world’s most amazing comparative study. We are comparing the nature of our lockdown with each other. We are

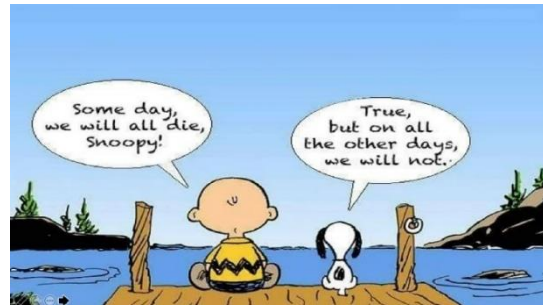
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looking at how it affects me to be stuck in one or two rooms for several months, what is it doing to my mental health, and measuring this impact on our bodies. We are catching a glimpse of what might happen to people when their lives are disrupted by a diagnosis or by a pre-diagnosis state, or by living in the care system that we create, where we are no longer in charge of the narratives of our own life. But what we also know, is that the pandemic does not impact us all in the same way. Ageism interrelates with the diseases of old age, and at least at the start of the pandemic, older people were most negatively impacted.

This gives us an opportunity to consider the role of creativity in health in new ways. It also gives us an opportunity to think about placing care at the centre of a democracy, or nearer to the centre of a democracy.

When I start to think about that, I start to look to philosophy. I think of Plato, who is helpful, but not as helpful as Schultz. In this image, Charlie Brown says, 'Someday we will die, Snoopy!' Snoopy says, 'True, but the others day we will not.' I want you to think about the nature of the



healthcare and care systems that we build on all those days that we don't die. As Richard Smith said, writing in the British Medical Journal Editorial in 2002, [\*Spend \(slightly\) less on health and more on the arts\*](#) (2002), he made the case that perhaps 0.05% of the money spent on health might be better spent on the arts. He said that 'If health is about adaption, understanding and acceptance, then the arts may be more potent than anything that medicine has to offer.' If we look at our own experience though the pandemic, I think we can see this.

At the beginning of the pandemic, there was great deal of art and amplification, whether it was [Kerala police force](#) or [dancers in South Africa](#) performing a dance to encourage people to wash their hands. Whether it was street artists in Bangladesh using traditional art form to communicate the importance of good practice during COVID19, or, what began to happen very soon, playfulness. Playfulness as a tool for of resilience. Adapting. Whether that was in America with street dancers all dancing at a safe distance, or whether it was the guy in [Southeast England](#) putting his teddy bears in domestic situations in his garden every day for his own entertainment and for the entertainment of his neighbours. But it was also managing and controlling a narrative. He was creating a narrative the he could control. This scaled fast.

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In Ireland, the Irish postal service created a book for young people to illustrate that was sent for free to tens of thousands of young adults, encouraging them to draw and explore their place in the changed world. Art organisations like Luminare in Scotland, quickly began to put content online that people with or without diagnosis could access. The growth of beauty became a critical part of this. As Valeria Luiselli, who just won the Dublin Literary Awards, said, 'If our spirits have found renewal, if we have found strength to carry on, if we have maintained a sense of enthusiasm for life, it is thanks to the worlds that books have given us. Each time, we found solace in the companions that live in our bookshelves.'

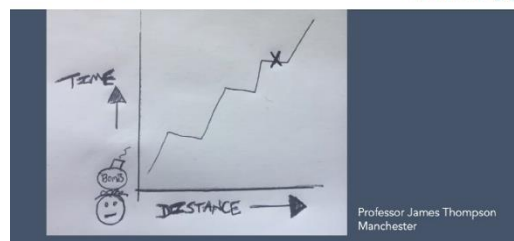
Now we are in the new phase. We are perhaps in the phase of memorialisation in some places. This photograph is of small origami figures made by staff and volunteer in Ripon Cathedral, each fold invested in the meaning and the thought of someone whose been negatively affected by the pandemic. Hung from the ceiling of the cathedral, beauty plays a part, regardless of circumstances. This is a photo of a man in a bombed house in Aleppo, playing music on a wind-up gramophone, seeking solace even in the most difficult of circumstances. If you study the relationship between creativity and conflict, it offers a roadmap for us to think about, when we think about the journey through neurodegeneration.



Professor James Thompson in Manchester mapped this out. James founded [In Place of War](#). He looked at how creativity is made depending on time and distance from crisis. During the depth of the pandemic, or when the bomb is falling, or at the point of diagnosis, creativity shrinks under fear. But the next, day, week or decades times, or in the next room, down the street, in the next village, in the next country border in the continent, art is made. In the

The X/Y graph of Creativity and Conflict

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beginning, it is about connection or about escapism. Over time it becomes about renewing your story. At some point in the future there is always the story of Romeo and Juliet, when the two parts of the conflict are reunited.

How this might this work in an individual journey of neural degeneration? In my world a patient pathway

### Participant Pathways

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works like this: someone who is fearful, depressed and anxious might join something like the choir, they probably get referred by their family. They meet other people there who are living with a diagnosis. Stigma is reduced. They sing with that group of people. They join in, they learn new things, they perhaps sing in a public place in concert, they have wider social circuit, they have meaning, identity and purpose.

Arts do this endlessly and plentifully. In Leeds at the moment, the Performance Ensemble are collecting stories from adults every year for possibly the next decade. Stories from older adults, because Performance Ensemble is a company of older adults, and some of those older adults are perfectly healthy, some have conditions, some of them are living with diagnosis. What the collection of thousands of stories does is that it helps people navigate their own lives. Sometimes those are difficult places we have to navigate, sometimes they are beyond language, but art helps us to make meaning. Sometimes those meanings are about transition.

[Celia Pimm](#) mends things, she makes and invites people to bring things they would like to keep and maintain, and she asks questions: What



is it you would like to keep. What is it you value and why? Sometimes she works with medical trainees, asking them the same question: What is it you can fix or can't fix and have to live with? It is a great question to ask medics, because how do we live with gradual deterioration? How do we put the emphasis on living? We build care systems around that



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challenge. We take away risk. We take away the risk that accompanies learning. If we take away risk, we take away elements of learning and neuroplasticity. Ultimately, we take away joy. We are not doing care; we are doing control.

Can we use creativity as a system of care? The care systems that we live and operate in are the dreams of other people. They are the dreams of Nightingale and Bevan. We need a process of getting from where we are now, to somewhere more effective. We can see that.

Art can be a scaffold for change. A mechanic for transition. That is why we use celebration as a strategy. Creativity to create the system of care. Because normally when we think about solutions for systems care, we think about technocratic solutions, but technocratic solutions without



heart are not particularly useful. The photograph of the man hung from the trapeze, a 70-year-old man, is from Entelechy in the Albany in Southeast London.

Can we build a care system to propagate joy? This is what I do. I work through festivals - the [Bealtaine Festival](#) in Ireland, I've mentored [Luminate](#) in Scotland, [Gwanwyn Festival](#) in Wales - and what they do is connect different types of agencies, health care agencies, care agencies, public health agencies and behavioural health agencies, with arts and cultural organisations. In Ireland, Bealtaine Festival would connect with about 20% of the population over 65. What that multiplicity of stories told from many places does, is start to change narrative.

Festival – Innovation at Scale

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celebrating creativity as we age

Bealtaine Festival

	2006	2013
Events	52	3500+
Active Participants 65+	7000	112000 20%
Partners	36	700

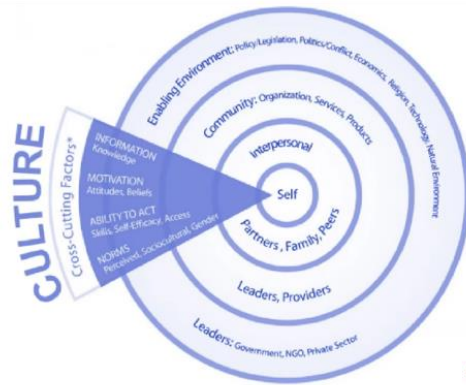
Creativity At Work

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- Show** Emotionally engaging and media friendly creative work
- Tell** Education strand brings new science and approaches  
Features academic, artistic, medical, strategic expertise  
Local with national with international
- Co-Create** Collaboratively developed prototyping of bespoke creative responses to local conditions and issues
- Capture** The development of tools to measure, evaluate and codify for scaling practice

Art is at work here. Creativity is at work here. It shows, it tells, it co-creates. It captures the data about the change. So we have taken that learning at Creative Ageing

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International, because we think it is incredibly powerful for this joining together of separate empires, this cultural revolution. Culture helps you make a path between what is happening to the self, the intrapersonal,

what is happening at a community level, and how we actively create enabling environments.

We do this through partnership. We use celebration to connect different agencies. Those agencies might be colleges and researchers. They might be corporate agencies, effective, fast and efficient in entrepreneurial intelligence, or civic because all of the solutions are ultimately place based. They will definitely be creatives, and they will be all the communities, including people pre or post diagnosis, because with all the communities comes all the answers.

## Who is responsible for Brain Health?

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When we started this work we started to ask, who is responsible for brain health? We realised that without putting care at the centre of that, we just build technocratic solutions. We just build projects without purpose.

We know that the process of this system can make people curious and inspire them. Whether you are an institution or a child, you show off what you learn.

## Celebration as Strategy for Change

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As we near the end of the pandemic, I will give you a quick example of where we are now. During the early stages of the pandemic, we were stuck in Dublin, and concerned about those adults who were living on

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their own and who were isolated. We created a website over the weekend, we borrowed cultural content from arts organisations, we contacted the non-governmental organisations (NGO). The NGOs started to download content for singing, and deliver that to people who were isolated, along with medicines and food. Food came with culture.

We then built on this with the national agency Sing Ireland, through a project, [Ageing Voices](#), that began in the Autumn with an audit of singing. We looked at health care systems of Ireland, through the lens of group singing.

## Ageing Voices

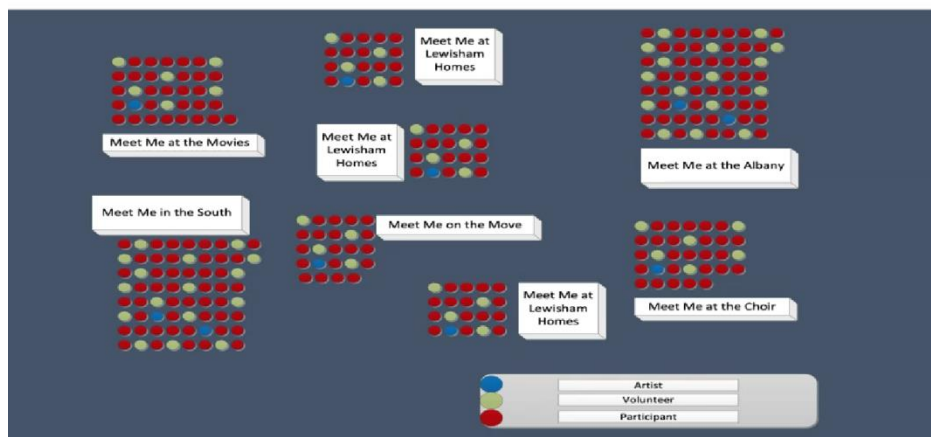
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We discovered that you can map out the spectrum of practice. Whether this is choirs in communities, that healthy and active people can join, or whether this is special interest choirs with a specific need, catering and supporting people with a diagnosis. Or singing in care institutions, possibly led by staff members who at the end of their 12-hour shift will go and sing in a choir because if it is important to them, or important for the carer, it benefits the cared for. Or, whether it is these new bridge projects where creativity is connecting with existing cultural institutions, and various delivers of care, whether it is NGOs or the formal care sector.

## Relational Clusters

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We built on this, taking some learning from the 2015 in Lewisham, where we built a series of relational clusters.

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What we are doing now is starting with the artists, connecting artists with the training of NGOs, with their local agencies and local art centres, and with the many informal and formal

## Informal + Formal support for Better Brain Health

Family  
Friends  
GP  
Slaintecare  
HSE Community Health  
Healthy Ireland programme  
Local Authority Community Team and Arts Office



Social Prescription movement  
Creative Ireland Programme  
Arts Council  
NGO's  
Bereavement Network  
Irish Hospice Foundation  
Alzheimers Society  
Understand Together

organisations that exist in Ireland, to support people as they make a journey through their own health.

We recognise that it is not the arts alone that are making this transition. The cultural revolution is not just in the creative sphere, it is also existing in the health sphere. We know that we can build back better, we know that the pandemic has given us an opportunity to really look at what is already happening. I want to leave you by asking, what is the health care system that you would like to bequeath to those who come after you? What care system would you like to leave to the next generation? If you fall in love with your older self, you make a better world for your grandchildren to age in.

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