ROYAL CENTRAL SCHOOL OF SPEECH & DRAMA
UNIVERSITY OF LONDON

University of Exeter

NHS
Imperial College Healthcare
NHS Trust

Innovating Knowledge Exchange:

STUDENT INVOLVEMENT IN DELIVERING BETTER PATIENT EXPERIENCE IN THE NHS

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Executive summary

Innovating Knowledge Exchange: Student Involvement in Delivering Better Patient Experience in the NHS is a project jointly funded by Research England and the Office for Students. The COVID-19 pandemic has only increased the urgency and need for creative projects focused on the wellbeing of older adults living with dementia.

It is vital to provide cognitively stimulating practice that views participants as active citizens and artists to celebrate their identities in creative forms. The Innovating Knowledge Exchange project aims to provide this practice. This project was developed collaboratively by Dr Nicola Abraham from the Royal Central School of Speech and Drama and the Dementia Care Team within Imperial College Healthcare NHS Trust.

There are currently six different projects being delivered by the Innovating Knowledge Exchange team. All projects offer dementia-friendly, person-centred interactive digital applied theatre and film-based workshops that are tailored to the needs, interests, artistic vision and active citizenship of each person worked with. The result of all projects is a bespoke digital artefact and physical copy, such as a DVD, that participants can keep to commemorate the stories they have shared in workshops, and to share and connect with family and friends.

In order to facilitate knowledge exchange, applied theatre students from the Royal Central School of Speech and Drama are involved as co-creators in the set-up, design, implementation, and evaluation of the project. Involvement in this project has benefitted students, enabling them to gain skills and experience, and ultimately develop careers, in arts and health. The project has also upskilled NHS staff in arts and technology use, allowing them to improve the experience of patients undergoing acute and long-term hospital stays.

A total of 270 patients and care home residents within Imperial College Healthcare NHS Trust and care providers One Housing have collaborated with the Innovating Knowledge Exchange team on this project. Forty-seven BA and MA Applied Theatre Students at the Royal Central School of Speech and Drama took part in one or more of the 140 placements offered in the project. In addition to the project team, students have contributed to the facilitation of sessions, and to the evaluation of this project via qualitative interviews and questionnaires. An additional set of placements were also offered to students aged between 11 – 19 from secondary schools and an FE college in Leicester to work online with patients and care home residents across a number of the intergenerational projects. Each location received training and guidance to support collaboration with people living with dementia as co-artists. In total 420 students from across North London and Leicester have taken part in intergenerational projects. Evaluation of this project (that took place Oct. 2021-Sept. 2022) has focused on the impact of the project on student and staff skills, student employability, and patient and care home resident experience and wellbeing.

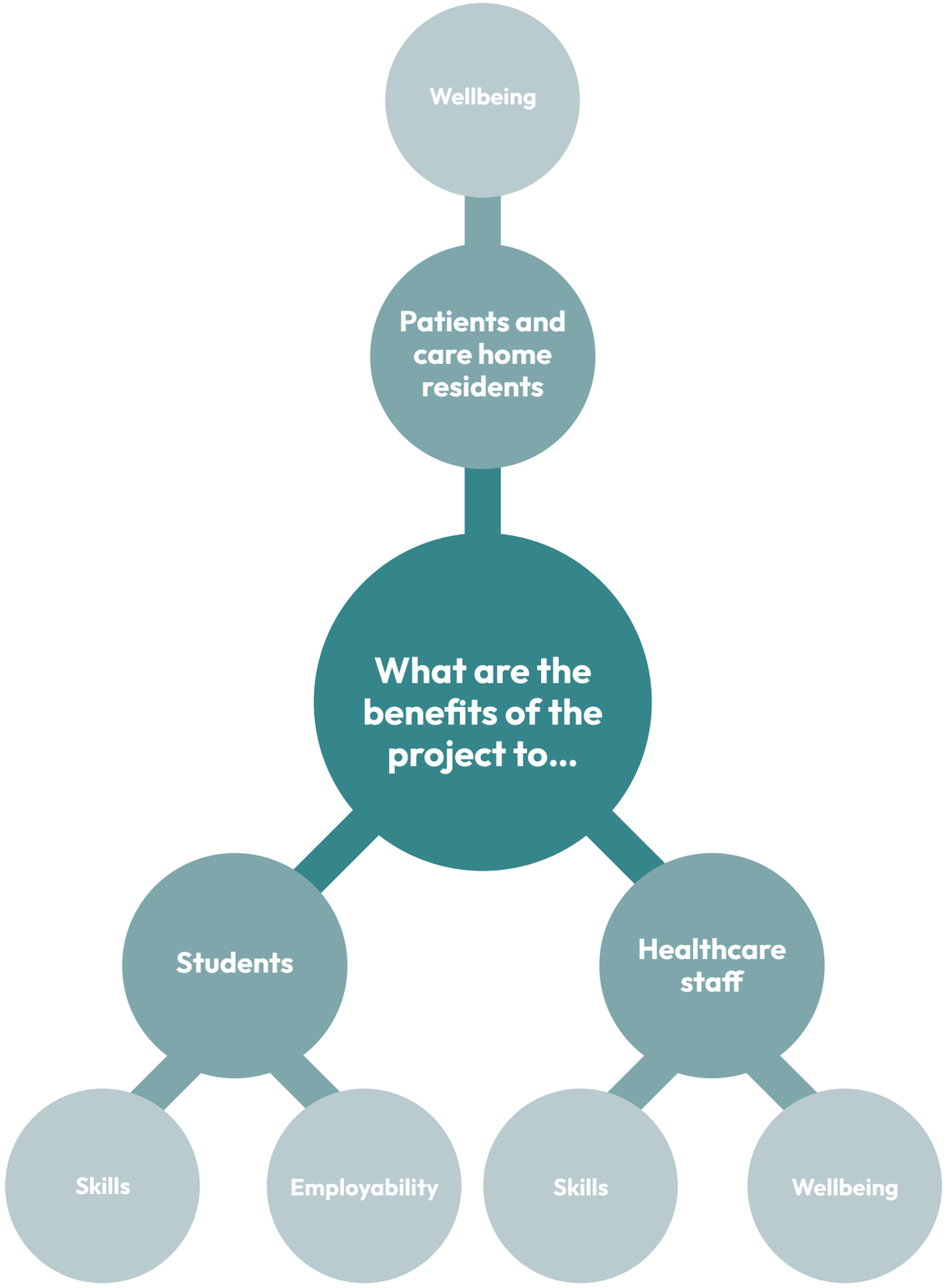
Research questions

The project aimed to assess the benefits of the project for applied theatre students, patients and care home residents, and healthcare staff. More specifically our evaluation asked:

1. **What is the benefit of the project to applied theatre students in terms of their experience, resulting skills, and employability within the field of arts and health?**

2. **What are the benefits of the project in terms of patient and care home resident experience and wellbeing?**

3. **What are the benefits of the project in terms of healthcare staff skills and wellbeing?**



Summary of key findings

The key findings from this project were as follows:

- **Applied theatre students developed a more informed, person-centred understanding of dementia following their placement**
- **Students developed skills in empathy, communication and inclusive practice**
- **A number of students went on to careers in arts and health, and many more expressed motivation to do so, following their placement**
- **Healthcare and caring staff reported a greater understanding of the value of digital arts interventions following their involvement in the intervention**
- **Participants engaged positively with activities which was observed by the project team. These moments of joy and connection were judged to be important at a time when, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, many participants were socially isolated and low in mood**
- **Healthcare and caring staff reported that the intervention boosted morale amongst themselves and their colleagues and fostered a greater sense of community in their workplace**

Development of student skills and employability

Applied theatre graduates are ideally placed to effectively deliver arts-based social prescribing interventions, but may lack the knowledge or confidence to pursue employment in this field. One aim of the Innovating Knowledge Exchange project was therefore to equip applied theatre students with the skills to deliver arts-based interventions to clinical populations, especially older adults living with dementia, and to increase their motivation to enter this field. Applied theatre students developed crucial knowledge and skills relevant to the field of arts and health during this project. First and foremost, the experience of working with people living with dementia allowed students to develop a more nuanced understanding of this complex condition, moving beyond negative stereotypes to an altogether more holistic, person-centred understanding. Students also developed skills in effective communication and empathy, particularly in recognising and prioritising the participant's perspective. Ultimately this meant that students were able to implement individualised, accessible practice successfully. Skill development was facilitated by the horizontal team structure employed in this project. In practice this meant that all team members' opinions and judgements were equally valued, and each held responsibility to facilitate sessions. This non-judgmental structure empowered students to make decisions, adapt practice, and reflect and act on feedback as necessary, without fear of failure or rejection. Overall, therefore, the project succeeded in its aim to equip applied theatre students with the skills required to effectively implement inclusive arts-based practice in healthcare and caring contexts. In addition, a number of project graduates have gone on to careers in the field of arts and health, including work as activity coordinators in NHS trusts and arts and health specialists in theatre companies. This provides strong indication of the value of the Innovating Knowledge Exchange project in developing a skilled and employable workforce, able to deliver arts-based interventions in healthcare and caring settings.

Impact on patient experience and wellbeing

One of the key aims of the Innovating Knowledge Exchange project is to promote positive wellbeing amongst its participants, allowing them to actively celebrate their identity in creative forms and experience moments of connection and joy. The conditions of the COVID-19 pandemic have only worsened wellbeing amongst older adults, including those living with dementia. Policies designed to protect this high-risk group have increased loneliness (van Tilburg, Steinmetz, Stolte, van der Roest, & de Vries, 2020), exacerbated physical and psychological conditions (Santini & Koyanagi, 2021), and increased sedentary behaviour (Maher & Conroy, 2017). Interventions to mitigate these effects are therefore crucial. The beneficial effects of the Innovating Knowledge Exchange project on participant wellbeing have been clear – participants were observed participating and engaging positively with activities, and debriefs reported how much the sessions improved their mood. Project team members reported that the intervention had a clear impact on participants' engagement, with laughter, conversation and smiling as key features of the sessions. The intervention was particularly valued in its ability to spark moments of sociability and connection during lockdown, a time when such occurrences were rare. Although it was not necessarily expected that participants would derive long-term benefits from the intervention, there was suggestion that the intervention did have a longer-term impact on wellbeing – for example, one participant framed the certificates they received from taking part in the sessions, and others were still talking about the intervention after it had concluded. Overall, the project met its aim to promote positive wellbeing amongst older adults - sparking creative moments of joy at what was otherwise a difficult, isolating time.

Development of staff skills and impact on wellbeing

An additional aim of the Innovating Knowledge Exchange project was to upskill NHS and care home staff in the delivery of digital arts interventions, and to improve understanding and practice around dementia. Following involvement in the project, staff reported a positive change in their attitudes towards digital arts interventions, and a greater understanding of their potential to facilitate social connection and creativity. One particular project, CR38TUR3 (pronounced 'creature') was designed to challenge staff on unconscious biases which may affect their clinical practice. Feedback from staff who took part in these sessions was extremely positive, and the broad nature of the skills developed during sessions – including empathy and reflexivity - indicates that the impact of sessions on patient care could be substantial.

Another aim of the project was to foster greater wellbeing amongst staff. The COVID-19 pandemic has placed unprecedented demand on healthcare and caring staff, and interventions to mitigate this demand and improve wellbeing amongst this group are critical. Staff reported that the Innovating Knowledge Exchange project was successful in this regard - the ability of the intervention to engage participants, particularly those living with dementia, in a meaningful activity was reported to lessen the demand on nursing staff. Staff also reported their own enjoyment of the sessions, and that the intervention felt like 'a glimmer of light' at a tremendously difficult time. The nature of the intervention, in sharing stories and working together creatively, also fostered a greater sense of community between participants and staff. Overall, then, the project fulfilled its aims: equipping staff with the skills and confidence to deliver digital arts interventions, and improving morale and a sense of community within their working environment.

Contribution of the project to the fields of applied theatre, healthcare, and education

The Innovating Knowledge Exchange project has had substantial intellectual and cultural impact across the fields of applied theatre, health, and education. Within applied theatre, the theoretical rationale of the project has been disseminated via peer reviewed publications, podcasts, blogs, and national and international conferences within the field. Within healthcare, the project has previously been recognised with national awards for its innovation, including winning the Outstanding Arts and Creativity in Dementia Care award at the 2019 National Dementia Care Awards. Wider dissemination within the field of healthcare has been achieved via peer-reviewed publications in such journals as the Lancet, and national and international conferences, including the International Psychogeriatric Association Conference. A number of rapid outputs from this project have also had immediate impact in informing implementation of dementia-friendly, inclusive arts and health practice during the pandemic. Members of the project team have published articles, blogs, abstracts, presented papers, talks, taken part as panellists and facilitated knowledge exchange workshops at a range of arts and health conferences and public events to disseminate key learning from the project. Finally, the project has been recognised within education, winning a number of national awards in this field, including a Silver Pearson National Teaching Award for Impact and Partnership. Overall, it is clear that the Innovating Knowledge Exchange project has achieved both breadth and depth of impact, reaching both specialist and non-specialist audiences, across a range of fields.

Introduction

Innovating Knowledge Exchange is an interdisciplinary project - spanning applied theatre, health and education - which provides applied theatre interventions designed specifically to support older adults living with dementia.

Cognitively stimulating, bespoke creative workshops are offered both in hospital and care home settings, with the aim of improving participant wellbeing. Delivery of the project involves collaboration between healthcare staff, academics and students in applied theatre, the latter of whom are trained in facilitation of the sessions by the project team. Roughly six projects are run per academic term, offering numerous undergraduate and postgraduate student placements.

In practice, projects work one-to-one with people living with dementia across acute hospital settings – including medicine for the elderly and acute dialysis wards – and residential care homes/assistive living settings. As a result of the pandemic, all projects have been adapted to run digitally via zoom, whilst ensuring practice remains person-centred and sensitive to individual needs. Workshops are facilitated by a team of applied theatre students - usually three to five facilitators online on a tablet - and two in-person project team members to provide additional support. All workshops are responsive to the physical and emotional wellbeing of the patient, and thus the duration of sessions can vary from an average of 20 minutes to significantly longer or shorter.

The project is interdisciplinary in nature, drawing on expertise across applied theatre, healthcare, and education. This project is jointly funded by Research England and the Office for Students, and was run in partnership with a number of external organisations. Educational partners for intergenerational projects included Whitefield School, ICS School, and Leicester College. Healthcare partners included Imperial College Healthcare NHS Trust, One Housing, and My Improvement Network.

Knowledge exchange between each of the disciplines involved in this project is fundamental to its success. During their placement, applied theatre students gain skills in empathy, communication, and digital delivery of accessible creative practice. All students also receive tier 2 dementia training with a dementia care specialist prior to commencing their placement through online training resources. Qualitative interviews conducted following their placement indicate the development of a more comprehensive, nuanced, and person-centred understanding of dementia amongst students, and a greater willingness to explore arts and health as a potential career. Indeed, 79% of applied theatre students who undertook a placement reported they would now consider a career in socially prescribed activities. Healthcare and care home staff involved in the project are also upskilled in digital interventions and the delivery of accessible creative practice in acute and/or residential care settings. A full description of each of the six individual projects is provided as follows:

Summaries of the individual projects - from Abraham (2021)

Intergen

Intergenerational connection is at the heart of this project. We strive to bring young people and older adults together through digital video connections to live classrooms to take part in creative storytelling with patients living with dementia in acute hospital wards. The project encourages collaborative connections and challenges preconceptions of dementia and ageing.

Hear Me Out

Is a weekly podcast for NHS staff, patients and their families to celebrate alternative narratives of the people within the pandemic beyond news stats and headlines to remember the humanity of those who work and are in the care of frontline workers.

Life in Lyrics

Draws upon patient memories or current interests in music. We invite patients to share stories associated with music they enjoy, which we then integrate into lyrics to form an original song for each patient in their favourite style of music.

Wonder VR

Involves creating bespoke virtual reality 360 films. This project offers one-to-one storytelling with patients to learn about places they miss whilst they are in hospital, places they aspire to be, or fantastical ideas of places patients would like to explore. Ideas from the workshops are then translated into bespoke VR360 immersive experiences for patients.

Your Story Your Way

Involves a workshop for a patient that celebrates the diversity of their life experiences then asks the patients how they would like their stories represented. Patients can challenge facilitators to make any artefact.

Auchi Street

Works through bed-side practice for patients on dialysis via live digital video platforms. This project seeks to draw out and say ‘yes’ to all patient ideas to write a collaborative narrative for a film that is then co-created, directed and stars patients and professional actors.

Aim of the present report

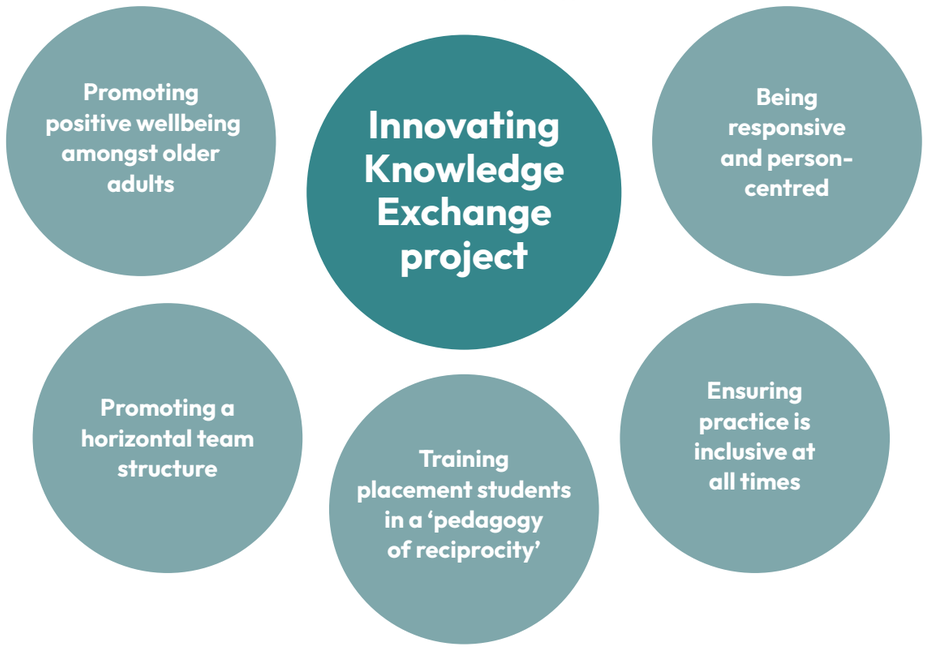
This report seeks to provide an overall account of the Innovating Knowledge Exchange project, and its impact, in relation to the aims outlined above. We want this report to be accessible to a wide range of audiences, including those living with dementia.

This report will draw on the words and experiences of students and project team members who took part in the research for this project – in these cases, names have been changed to protect their anonymity.

Project rationale

The key principles of the Innovating Knowledge Exchange project are described below. In the following section we discuss the rationale for this project, expanding on each of these principles. Each subproject is designed to:

- Promote positive wellbeing amongst older adults, particularly those living with dementia
- Be responsive and person-centred
- Train placement students in the project's version of the 'pedagogy of reciprocity'
- Promote a horizontal rather than hierarchical team structure
- Be adaptive in design to meet the access needs of participants, ensuring practice is inclusive at all times



Positive wellbeing amongst older adults

The first principle of the Innovating Knowledge Exchange project is to promote positive wellbeing amongst older adults, particularly those living with dementia. The circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic have only highlighted the urgent need to reverse practice which has thus far dehumanized, ignored and neglected the wellbeing of older adults (Abraham, 2021). During the first wave of the virus in the UK, older adults were identified as a particularly high-risk group in terms of severity of illness (Lekamwasam & Lekamwasam, 2020; McKinlay, Fancourt, & Burton, 2021). This vulnerability was reflected in high fatality rates amongst this group, particularly those in residential care settings (McKinlay et al., 2021; Schultze et al., 2022), and amongst those with significant additional illnesses, including dementia (Mahmoud et al., 2021). As a result, strict measures were introduced to limit the spread of the virus amongst this population, including orders to shield, and restricted visiting in care homes and hospitals. These policies have necessarily impacted the wellbeing of older adults: increasing fear of death or serious illness (Velayudhan, Aarsland, & Ballard, 2020), promoting loneliness and associated psychiatric and physical conditions (Santini & Koyanagi, 2021; van Tilburg et al., 2020); and increasing sedentary behaviour (Maher & Conroy, 2017). Restrictions on family visits and the requirement for PPE use amongst staff may have also caused particular confusion and distress amongst people with dementia (Velayudhan et al., 2020).

In the context of the above, it was vital to offer interventions that sought to prioritise wellbeing for older adults, particularly those communities impacted by ongoing shielding and isolation. The Innovating Knowledge Exchange project sought to do just this, providing opportunities for safe social interaction and creative engagement amongst older adults in hospitals and care homes. The project prioritises short-lived 'moments of joy' over longer-term effects, an outcome which is often overlooked or undervalued within participatory theatre work, and perhaps healthcare more generally (Abraham, Hudspith, & Clarke, 2021). A striking example of the ability of the project to promote joy and connection is provided by the project team's work with a hospital inpatient named 'Phil'. When the project team met him, Phil had just lost his wife after they had both been admitted to hospital with COVID. He was navigating his grief, and own ill-health, isolated in a side room. He was also unable to have visits from his family, who were extremely worried about him. The project team were able to connect him with his family again via the recording of a podcast, in which both Phil and his daughters shared stories of their family. Being able to hear each other's voices at such a difficult time was hugely comforting, and inspired a lot of laughter during sessions. The project team were also present on the day of Phil's wife's funeral and allowed him the space and time to share memories of their life and adventures together. This case study clearly demonstrates the ability of the project to evoke joy and connection, even in the hardest of circumstances.

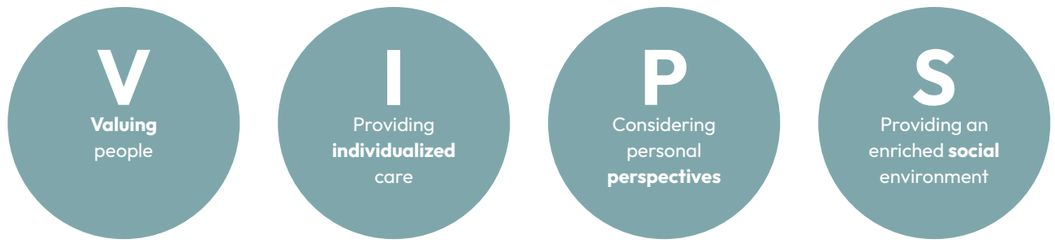
Person-centred care and the pedagogy of reciprocity

The second principle of the Innovating Knowledge Exchange project is in ensuring all practice is person-centred. Ensuring that the participant is at the heart of the project follows notions of personhood defined by Tom Kitwood's (1997) influential work advocating for person-centred care, wherein the identity and individual needs of patients inform their care requirements (Abraham, 2021; Kitwood & Kitwood, 1997). In practice, each intervention within the project is tailored to the access needs of each participant, and all workshops are necessarily bespoke in nature to follow the ideas suggested in the session. The VIPS framework (Brooker & Latham, 2015) offers an essential definition of person-centred care, providing key values which have been incorporated into the project's approach. The VIPS framework is as follows:

- **V (Valuing people):** A value base that asserts the absolute value of all human lives, regardless of age or cognitive ability
- **I (Individualised care):** An individualised approach, recognising uniqueness
- **P (Personal perspectives):** Understanding the world from the perspective of the person
- **S (Social environment):** Providing a social environment that supports psychological needs

An example of person-centred practice in the project can be seen in the case of a hospital inpatient, 'Hassan'. When the project team met him, Hassan was undergoing dialysis regularly on the ward. Some weeks Hassan was very unwell, and the team were advised that he was not well enough to take part in his planned session. While the project team were careful to ensure he was aware of this change of plan, Hassan would struggle to recall these conversations at the next session. The team therefore had to work hard to build back his trust and ensure he felt comfortable continuing to work on the film making project. One way the team did this was to ensure that, despite the missed sessions, Hassan was involved in all decision-making about the narratives and characters developed in his sessions, such that he had full autonomy throughout the project. Another method was in leaving summary idea sheets for Hassan when he needed to miss a workshop, so it was clear he had not been forgotten about or left out. It is clear that the VIPS framework was fulfilled in this case: Hassan was valued as an individual with autonomy, the team were able to recognise the uniqueness of his situation as a patient on dialysis, understand his perspective (for example, feeling left out if he had to miss a session) and thus support his psychological needs.

This concept of person-centred care fits within a wider approach to practice within the project, termed a 'pedagogy of reciprocity'. This has a number of components, including valuing participants as experts and upsetting traditional power hierarchies ('co-intentionality' (Freire, 2020)); challenging and moving beyond negative stereotypes and constructs of identity in older adults to enable active creative engagement and play (a 'relational ethic of care'); and ensuring those facilitating sessions work reflexively, recognising their own discomfort and challenging their own biases when working with older adults (Abraham, 2021).



Working within a horizontal team structure

The Innovating Knowledge Exchange project functions via a horizontal team structure. This means that all team members' opinions and judgements are equally valued, and each person holds equal responsibility to make decisions, adapt practice as necessary, and reflect and act on feedback (IKE, 2022). This principle applies to the whole team involved in the intervention, including students, healthcare and caring staff, applied theatre staff, and patients and care home residents themselves. There are a number of benefits to this approach – students report feeling valued as equal members of the team, and more willing to take creative risks as a result. Working in this way also places emphasis on the development of ideas and excitement, rather than risk of failure. One student illustrates these benefits clearly, describing the project's horizontal approach as providing a 'very safe and supportive structure around you, to enable people to ask questions, but also to be able to thrive'. Finally, this approach defines patients and care home residents as creative artists in their own right, and as a group whose contributions are equally valued to those they are working with. As one student describes, the horizontal structure is a model 'built on kindness and respect'.

Adaptive, inclusive design

The sections above demonstrate the ability of the project to adapt to meet the access needs of participants, ensuring practice is inclusive. However, nowhere is this principle more evident than in the project's need to adapt to the circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic. While the Innovating Knowledge Exchange project was originally designed to be run in-person, visiting restrictions in hospital wards and care homes meant this was no longer possible. A number of adaptations were thus made, ensuring the key principles underpinning the project were retained:

- All sessions of the project were successfully adapted to run on Zoom, such that student involvement occurred remotely, rather than in person.
- Dementia care staff worked with students and Dr Nicola Abraham (PI) to run sessions for a greater number of the ward-based projects than was originally planned in-person.
- A number of projects were successfully moved from an acute ward context into a care home context with One Housing. This change was necessary since in January 2021 the Dementia Care Team at Imperial College Healthcare NHS Trust were redeployed to frontline duties to manage the surge in COVID-19 cases. While some ward-based projects continued (for example, Hear Me Out), this meant that the majority of projects could no longer take place in an acute ward context.

The project team also actively responded to the particular circumstances of the pandemic, developing a number of additional projects to address challenges faced by patients and staff. These included 'Hear Me Out', a podcast-based project specifically designed to connect patients and their families whilst hospital visiting was heavily restricted, as described in the example of Phil's story.

Findings and discussion

This section of the report offers a discussion of the key qualitative data generated during this project. A summary of the key findings derived from this data is provided in the executive summary.

Understanding of dementia amongst applied theatre students

One of the key aims of the project was to develop students' knowledge of dementia. Dementia is a highly stigmatised condition (Nguyen & Li, 2020) and this stigma contributes to poorer mental and physical outcomes for this group (Burgener, Buckwalter, Perkhounkova, & Liu, 2015). Arts-based interventions which involve direct contact with people living with dementia have proven effective in reducing stigma and improving attitudes towards, and knowledge of, this condition (Daley et al., 2020). The project's success in fulfilling this aim can be evaluated via semi-structured interviews and questionnaires completed by applied theatre students prior to and following their placement.

Prior to their placement, students' self-reported knowledge of dementia was limited, with many having had little contact with people living with dementia beyond members of their family. Students typically described people with dementia in terms of their deficits, with forgetfulness most frequently mentioned. Reported experiences of dementia often emphasised negative emotions such as sadness and frustration, and challenging behaviours such as aggression. Some students reported concern from others when they found out they were taking part in the placement, with the suggestion that working with people living with dementia might make them 'sad or upset'. The following quote illustrates one student's initial understanding of dementia:

'The extent of my understanding was limited to it being a thing where people 'forget' things. My view was quite narrow, some of it coming from society's stereotype that people living with dementia are a burden on society.'

Following completion of their placement, students demonstrated a significant shift in their understanding of dementia. Many students reported a new understanding that people with dementia were not a homogenous group and should not be defined or labelled by their condition. Students were less likely to mention the deficits associated with dementia, and keener to stress the strengths and abilities of those with this condition. Particularly, students stressed the importance of providing the appropriate context and environment for these abilities to be expressed:

'I now think that someone living with dementia is first and foremost a person, not their diagnosis! They are great fun to work with and have countless stories and memories waiting to be told if someone is willing to simply sit and listen.'

Overall, then, the project was successful in this regard, allowing applied theatre students to develop a more nuanced understanding of dementia: in many cases, shifting from a negative, highly medicalised view of this condition to a more positive, holistic understanding.

Skills in empathy, communication and accessible practice

Beyond an improved understanding of dementia, students also developed broader skills relevant to effective practice within the field of arts and health. One aspect of the project which students mentioned as critical to their skill development was the horizontal team structure, which meant students felt empowered to make decisions within the sessions, whilst also feeling less concerned about the possibility of failure.

One area of skills developed by students was in compassion and empathy. These are critical components of good practice, both within a healthcare setting and as a core component of participatory theatre (Abraham et al., 2021). Students reported that their experience in the intervention helped them to work more empathetically and sensitively, recognising and prioritising the perspective of the participant, even in cases where this was not immediately understandable or logical from their perspective. One facet of empathy that students described as particularly valuable to develop was managing their own response to a participant's negative emotions. Students learnt to validate and honour the subjective experience and emotions of each participant, rather than trying to alter or failing to acknowledge their feelings. This is consistent with a person-centred approach to care of people with dementia, ensuring that the perspective of the individual themselves is always centred (Fazio, Pace, Flinner, & Kallmyer, 2018). As one student describes:

'I've learned to [let the participants] have the time to feel the emotion that they're feeling because I know that I wouldn't like if people were trying to rush me out of an emotion I'm not finished dealing with... I think that's a really difficult skill that you only get in practice.'

Another skill developed by students was effective communication, and particularly the ability to respond flexibly to the individual communicative needs of each participant. Students stressed the importance of providing participants with the time and space to communicate their thoughts, and mentioned a variety of strategies to ensure participants could understand and fully engage in the sessions, as one student explains:

'From my placement I've learnt the best way to communicate with someone living with dementia in a much more accessible way. This includes repeating things they've said back to them to ensure you've heard correctly, talking clearly, making sure your instructions are concise and easy to understand. I've also learnt about dementia accessible fonts and colours to use in my workshop resources which is something I hadn't considered before.'

Following their placement, students showed an improved understanding of accessible practice, and had developed skills in flexibility and adaptability to implement this practice successfully. They also had absorbed the values of the project's pedagogy of reciprocity – for example, in valuing the artistic contributions of participants and treating them as creative experts in their own right. Students' development in these areas is exemplified in the below quote:

'[I] think now, that to be accessible is to also be adaptable to the people you are working with. That it is a collaboration between facilitator and participant and that both parties are able to benefit from the collaboration. Accessibility is different to every person so there needs to be flexibility, which translates beyond this one project.'

Overall, therefore, the project has succeeded in its aim to equip applied theatre students with the skills required to effectively implement accessible arts-based practice in healthcare and caring contexts. The project's use of a horizontal structure facilitated development of these skills.

Ongoing involvement of students in the field of arts and health

While the intervention had a positive effect on students' attitudes towards people with dementia, and skills in this area, this might not necessarily translate into motivation to enter the field of arts and health. This is important since applied theatre graduates are ideally placed to effectively deliver arts-based social prescribing interventions, but may lack the knowledge or confidence to pursue employment in this field. An additional aim of the Innovating Knowledge Exchange project was therefore to increase applied theatre students' motivation to enter the field of arts and health. This aim appears to have been fulfilled by the project: when surveyed following their placement, 79% (n=33) of applied theatre students said they would now consider a career in socially prescribed activities. The project appears to have provided students with a better understanding of the role of arts in healthcare, as captured by the following two quotes:

'I would absolutely love a career in socially prescribed activities. I have always wanted a job that combined healthcare and the arts or some form of creativity and this process has definitely helped me to understand a way in which this could manifest.'

'I have learnt so much more about the value of work that resists the categorisation of explicitly being therapeutic or creatively expressive and would like to work in a capacity where patients and participants are valued as artists in their own right, whilst appreciating the positive impacts that this artistic work can have on health and well-being.'

This enthusiasm has also translated into employment within the field of arts and health. A number of applied theatre students who have completed a placement with the Innovating Knowledge Exchange project have gone on to professional careers in this field. Two project graduates are now working as activity coordinators, one in a care home and another in an NHS Trust. The latter graduate continues to collaborate with the Innovating Knowledge Exchange team in their role, and is currently hosting placement students on two projects with patients in their trust – Hear Me Out and Wonder VR.

In addition, two project graduates have gone on to start their own company, drawing on skills learnt during their placement. The company aims to deliver digital applied theatre experiences to people in hospitals and care homes. The ethos of this company is in creating moments of joy and empowerment for participants, and mitigating the isolation associated with the COVID-19 pandemic. This company has had specialist creative development input and support from the project team's Digital Theatre Consultant, and bespoke business development guidance and training from the team's Arts Specialist Development Consultant. This specialist input should help the business to plan, prepare and succeed in the future. Finally, one project graduate is working as an Arts in Health specialist within the Outreach and Wellness department of The Naples Players theatre company (Florida, USA). The Wellness Outreach programmes in this organisation aim to provide health and wellness benefits to the community via the arts. The success of these graduates in the field of arts and health provides strong indication of the value of the Innovating Knowledge Exchange project in developing a skilled and capable workforce, able to deliver arts-based interventions in healthcare settings.

Impact on patient wellbeing

The Innovating Knowledge Exchange project ultimately aims to promote positive wellbeing amongst its participants by allowing them to actively celebrate their identity in creative forms. The impact of the project in this regard can be judged with feedback from those who observed the process. In the project Life in Lyrics which took place in One Housing, participants worked with applied theatre students to write their own bespoke song.

The success of the project in improving participant wellbeing can also be evidenced with testimony from project team members involved in the intervention. Staff were keen to share the impact of the sessions. Staff also highlighted the particular value of the intervention in sparking moments of joy and sociability during lockdown, a time when patients and care home residents were necessarily isolated. The below quote from a team member at One Housing illustrates one example of the impact of the project on participant wellbeing:

'The project [Life in Lyrics] gave the residents a chance to be creative and share their interests, and there was a lot of conversation, laughter, and smiling across the sessions. It was wonderful to see their happiness in the moment; for example, some of the residents would dance, sing, or nod along with the music we played.'

Given the nature of dementia, it was not necessarily expected that participants would derive long-term benefits from the intervention. Indeed, a key principle within the Innovating Knowledge Exchange project is in valuing and centralising moments of joy, regardless of whether these moments are short-lived (Abraham et al., 2021). However, some staff suggested that the intervention did have a longer-term impact on participants. Physical artefacts from the sessions appeared to promote these longer-term effects, as described by a staff member at One Housing:

'I was told that the residents expressed missing the projects, and were still talking about their experiences that they had during the project. We were also notified that one resident framed their certificates.'

The following case study details the journey of one particular participant from One Housing, Pearl. The case of Pearl clearly demonstrates the value of the intervention in promoting creative autonomy, confidence, and wellbeing amongst its participants. Overall, the project has met its aim to promote positive wellbeing amongst older adults - sparking creative moments of joy at what was otherwise a difficult, isolating time.

Pearl
Pearl took part in a number of projects, becoming a very committed artist across Your Story Your Way, Wonder VR, Auchi Street/Hear Me Out and many more ad-hoc projects taking place in her care home. Pearl was initially very self-deprecating and rarely recognised her own talents and ability to offer creative ideas. She would often put herself down and worry about getting things wrong.
The project team responded by providing lots of reassurance and ensuring the team celebrated her ideas, repeated back and congratulated her consistently and genuinely to boost her confidence. The team also used a lot of templates and visual aids to support Pearl which helped her to engage when word finding was challenging for her. This approach helped her to interact with the session autonomously and maintain dignity. By the second project, Pearl appeared significantly more at ease in the workshops, expressing less self-doubt and showing more confidence when sharing her ideas with other students. Her confidence increased to the point where she was able to take on a starring role in a radio drama she co-wrote.

Impact on staff wellbeing and skill development

An additional aim of the Innovating Knowledge Exchange project was to upskill NHS and residential care staff in delivery of digital arts interventions, and to improve understanding and practice around dementia. Notably, staff involved in the project reported a change in attitudes toward digital activities and their ability to offer social connection, and the value of person-centred practice in delivery of interventions. An example of this change in attitudes is described by a staff member at One Housing:

'[We] learnt that being able to offer digital/virtual activities is worthwhile; the work and enjoyment that came out of the project was so positive. Whilst some people may be hesitant about using digital methods, there is a real benefit to offering opportunity for social connection and creative output'

One project of note within the intervention which specifically targeted healthcare staff skills was the CR38TUR3 methodology (pronounced 'creature'). The CR38TUR3 workshops offer an 'escape room with a conscience', placing participants in a creatively high-risk situation. These sessions are designed to challenge staff to address and understand their own unconscious biases, and how these might impact their practice and interactions with others. Within the sessions, participants can choose any course of action and will see the results of their intervention immediately, providing a powerful experience that brings to life their values and how they impact others. Development of skills such as empathy and reflexivity, and awareness of implicit biases, is likely to have broad, and important, impact on clinical practice, beyond the context of the Innovating Knowledge Exchange project.

The second aim regarding staff was to foster improved wellbeing amongst this professional group. The COVID-19 pandemic has placed unprecedented demand on healthcare and caring staff, increasing their risk of distress, burnout and related psychiatric disorders such as post-traumatic stress disorder (Petrella et al., 2021). Interventions which reduce demand on staff and help mitigate these negative consequences are therefore crucial. The project appears to have been successful in this respect. The ability of the intervention to engage participants, particularly those living with dementia, in meaningful activity was reported to lessen the demand on nursing staff, who would otherwise be spending much of their time calming these patients. A number of staff also commented that the intervention fostered a stronger sense of community between staff and patients/residents, as a staff member at One Housing, describes:

'I think this project had a great collaborative impact as so many people at [One Housing] got involved. The staff and residents got to work together during the filming process and I think it created a lovely sense of community amongst them all'.

An additional project which targeted staff wellbeing specifically was 'Madlibs'. This intervention was implemented at Charing Cross hospital and aimed to provide healthcare staff with a quick creative interaction, designed to provide a moment of amusement during their working day. In this intervention, staff complete a short online form via a QR code, and their answers within this form are transformed into a bespoke, comedic script. Two actors then perform the script with virtual backgrounds, filters, sound effects and intro themes and upload to a shareable YouTube playlist for staff within 24 hours.

Further reflections on the benefits of the project are provided below by one of the project partners, Jo James, Consultant Nurse in Dementia and Delirium from Imperial College Healthcare NHS Trust. In this, Jo describes the overall impact of the intervention on staff wellbeing and skills, challenges encountered and overcome, and the value of arts interventions in dementia care in an acute hospital setting. Overall, then, the project fulfilled its aims regarding staff skills and wellbeing: equipping staff with the skills and confidence to deliver digital arts interventions, and improving morale and a sense of community within their working environment.

'The Innovating Knowledge Exchange project started alongside the pandemic and a period of extraordinary stress and pressure for staff working in the acute setting. The project not only focussed on the wellbeing of patients in very grim circumstances, it also looked at the staff. They were made to laugh, were involved in co-designing songs, a pantomime for senior staff and other interventions. It felt like a little glimmer of light at a very dark time and was very important for the staff who needed to believe that there was still some fun to be had at work.

The Innovating Knowledge Exchange team role model excellent communication and listening skills in the clinical setting. They also support training through running CR38TUR3 workshops in our study days. To date, over 130 clinical staff have done CR38TUR3 and the feedback is outstanding, with 100% stating that they would recommend it to other staff. The creature makes the staff think in a different way and challenges unconscious bias.

The main challenge for us was that the project started right in the middle of the first wave of the pandemic. Everything had to be transferred onto a digital platform and there was no real evidence to support delivering digital projects for people living with dementia. It required a completely new model of practice.

This project has highlighted the value of arts interventions in hospital and re-imagined patients with dementia as creators. That has impacted on how they are perceived by others and reduced some of the stigma associated with having dementia. It also creates joy and laughter in joyless places. It is absolutely vital that this project is disseminated to other acute settings.'

Jo James

Consultant Nurse in Dementia and Delirium, Imperial College Healthcare NHS Trust, IKE, 2023

Additional impacts of note – the Intergen project

The Intergen project provided additional impacts of note, beyond the scope of the project's initial aims. Intergen was developed as a collaboration with two secondary schools and a college in the UK - Whitefield School, ICS School, and Leicester College – and was designed to bring young people and older adults together virtually. Students at these schools and either hospital patients or care home residents took part in creative storytelling sessions, designed to foster connection across the generational divide. British children typically report poor knowledge of dementia (Isaac, Isaac, Farina, & Tabet, 2017), and there is evidence that intergenerational programmes can improve knowledge and attitudes towards dementia in young people (Harris & Caporella, 2014). Importantly, there is also evidence for the value of intergenerational programmes in improving the wellbeing of older adults: reducing depression (Krzeczkowska et al., 2021) and loneliness (Harris & Caporella, 2014), and improving quality of life (George, 2011). The Intergen project aimed to draw on these positive effects. The project appears to have been successful in fostering positive intergenerational connections. Although some students reported initially feeling nervous, they quickly became more comfortable in the sessions and ultimately reported forming meaningful connections with the patients and care home residents that they collaborated with. As one project team member describes:

'The patients and the children seemed to really connect. The weeks that they did meet they were all really excited to see each other again, and have a catch up and put their ideas together'

Some of these connections persisted beyond the time period of the intervention, as one project team member describes:

'Months later, talking to one of the children about something else, he was asking after the person he'd been working with. He really cared about the welfare of that person because [they] had become a sort of friend, and someone worth caring about'

Intergen also had a positive impact on participant wellbeing: staff reported that care home residents were glad to have the chance to share stories with young people who were genuinely interested in their lives and experiences. Some participants also reported a sense of responsibility towards the young people they worked with, and were keen to offer advice and guidance. A member of the project team describes the particular impact of the sessions on patients in an acute dialysis unit:

'From a patient point of view [the project] was enormously important, and I think it gave the patients something to look forward to. Dialysis is a tough lifestyle and suddenly they had something to look forward to, to have a bit of fun'

Finally, the project also had a positive effect on the young peoples' attitudes towards dementia. Reflecting on the project experience in a public knowledge exchange workshop, students recalled that they initially felt that the sessions might be 'a bit boring', however their attitudes were transformed once they met and worked with the patients. Following the sessions, students reflected to their teacher, who was also presenting at the public knowledge exchange event, that they felt motivated to become more educated about dementia, and to understand the impact of the pandemic on people with this condition. At the event, their teacher also spoke about his students having a greater understanding of not only the challenges, but also the benefits of working with people living with dementia.

Overall, then, Intergen had specific positive effects on the wellbeing of participants, and the knowledge and attitudes of young people towards dementia. These positive effects were driven by the project's ability to bridge intergenerational divides via creative, fun collaboration.

Wider impact of the project

While the project has clearly had a significant individual impact on the participants, students and staff involved, it has also had wider cultural and intellectual impact within the fields of applied theatre, health, and education. Within applied theatre, the project has stimulated a number of peer reviewed publications, in such journals as the Contemporary Theatre Review and the Youth Theatre Journal. The project has also reached a wider audience via blog posts, podcasts, and articles, targeted to those with an interest or background in applied theatre. Blog posts and articles have been published by such organisations as The Culture Capital Exchange, the Ideas Alliance, and Digital Theatre+. The project's own website also hosts guest blog posts from students reflecting on their experience. In terms of more formal dissemination within the field of applied theatre, the project has been presented at a range of well-regarded national and international conferences, including the London Arts and Health Forum, the Drama in Education Conference, and the Mini International Community Arts Festival. In order to reach a less specialist audience, the project team also ran a number of well-attended public engagement events showcasing workshop demonstrations, facilitation training and digital artefacts from the project. These events were run in collaboration with applied theatre placement students, and thus provided an additional opportunity for skill development for this group.

Within healthcare, peer reviewed articles and conference paper abstracts discussing the project have been published in International Psychogeriatrics, BMJ, and Welfare e Ergonomia. The project has been disseminated via a number of national and international conferences in the field of dementia and healthcare for older adults, including the International Psychogeriatric Association Conference, Institute for Healthcare Improvement, and Dementia Congress. A number of rapid outputs from this project have also had immediate impact in terms of informing implementation of dementia-friendly, inclusive arts and health practice during a pandemic.

The project has also had significant impact in the field of education, and – as with healthcare - has been recognised nationally with a number of awards. Principal Investigator Dr Nicola Abraham won a Teaching Excellence Award at the Guardian University Awards in 2020, and the project has also been recognised in Universities UK's Top 100 National Lifesaver awards. Three members of the project team were selected as finalists for the Drama Inspiration Award at the Music and Drama Education Awards in 2022, with James Clarke – a teacher from Whitefield School and partner on the Innovating Knowledge Exchange project – winning this award. Most significantly, the project's educational impact has been recognised by two prestigious national award bodies. Firstly, the project was shortlisted as a finalist for Community Engagement Initiative of the Year at the TES Schools Awards 2022. Secondly, the collaboration between Whitefield School, Imperial College Healthcare NHS Trust and Royal Central School of Speech and Drama earned a Silver Pearson National Teaching Award for Impact and Partnership in 2022. The president of Pearson Teaching Awards, Michael Morpurgo, described the work of the project as 'life-enhancing, life-changing'.

A full list of outputs including publications, articles, blog posts, conferences and awards from this project can be found in the appendix. Overall, it is clear that the Innovating Knowledge Exchange project has achieved both breadth and depth of impact, reaching both specialist and non-specialist audiences, across a range of academic fields.

Final thoughts and future directions

Evidently, the Innovating Knowledge Exchange project has had substantial impact, both for the individuals involved in the project and within wider academic and non-academic circles.

The success of the project might be attributed to its adherence to its original core values: ensuring practice is always person-centred, inclusive and flexible, and that all team members' contributions are honoured and valued. In all cases, participant wellbeing is at the heart of each session. Unlike many other interventions, the Innovating Knowledge Exchange project is also fundamentally interdisciplinary: with expertise from the arts and participatory theatre, healthcare, and education equally valued and combined to maximise participant wellbeing and student skill development.

Future aims for the project are to maximise its application, both locally and internationally. This is already in progress: the Innovating Knowledge Exchange team have built a formal collaboration with Public Health Wales, with the ultimate aim to roll out the intervention within this organisation. The project was introduced during the Dementia Friendly Hospital Charter for Wales official launch in April 2022. Future plans include the delivery of a series of specialist masterclasses by the project team to staff within Public Health Wales. These masterclasses will cover digital facilitation, dementia-friendly creative practice, managing uncertainty when implementing creative projects in hospital settings, and overcoming barriers to the implementation of such projects.

Plans for future additional roll out include collaboration with local community services in Northern Ireland. The project team plan to provide staff with the skills to implement non-clinical, creative interventions, with the aim of improving holistic community wellbeing. This intervention will be carefully developed to ensure its ongoing sustainability. These examples demonstrate the potential reach of the Innovating Knowledge Exchange project, and its potential for further impact within arts and health.

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Appendix

Published abstracts, articles, books and blogs

Clarke, J., Hudspith, R., & Abraham, N. (2022). Intergenerational collaborative digital applied theatre practice: Empathy and connection in a time of social isolation for NHS patients undergoing dialysis and secondary school students in north London. Drama Research Volume 13, National Drama.

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Morris, E. (2022). Sharing is Caring: Thoughts on navigating facilitation in the digital space with adults living with dementia during the Covid 19 pandemic. Innovating Knowledge Exchange.

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Conferences, invited talks and podcasts

Colley, R., James, J., & Abraham, N. (11th November 2022). Good Grief: Owning Pain and Embracing Joy – a collaboration between the Dementia Care Team at Imperial College Healthcare NHS Trust and Royal Central School of Speech and Drama, Performing Pandemic Grief: The Arts of Losing, Birkbeck, London.

Hudspith, R. &, Abraham, N. (9th November 2022). The CR38TUR3 Methodology [Workshop]. National Dementia Congress, Birmingham.

Ruddock, V. & Abraham, N. (9th November 2022). Patients living with dementia as Artists: The Innovating Knowledge Exchange Project [Paper presentation]. National Dementia Congress, Birmingham.

Hudspith, R. & Abraham, N. (13th July 2022) User Experience (UX) and User Design/Interface in VR (UI), Lecture, University of South Wales, Online.

James, J. & Abraham, N. (6th April 2022). Innovation in engaging patients in hospital [Paper presentation]. Dementia Friendly Hospital Charter Launch - Improvement Cymru, Online.

James, J. & Abraham, N. (6th December 2021). Angel of Love: The Story of Film-Making in an Acute Dialysis Unit in a Time of COVID [Paper presentation]. Scientific Symposium: Person-Centred Design and Engagement Presentations, Institute for Healthcare Improvement, Online.

James, J. & Abraham, N. (2nd December 2021). Making Hospitals Better: Bespoke Digital Applied Theatre in Acute Hospitals for Patients Living with Dementia [Paper presentation]. Research Seminar Series: University of Portsmouth Music Dance, Theatre and Performance Research Group.

Hudspith, R. & Abraham, N. (18th November 2021). Care Home Residents as Artists: Digital Connections in the age of Disconnect [Paper presentation]. International Psychogeriatric Association Conference, Online.

Abraham, N. (21st July 2021). What If: What Next for our Post Lockdown Collaborations? [Panelist]. Birmingham City University/STEAMHouse, Online.

Clarke, J., Hudspith, R., & Abraham, N. (24th- 25th June 2021). Digital Intergenerational Practice: Linking schools, wellbeing and older adult NHS patients through Digital Applied Theatre [Paper presentation]. Inspiring Leadership Conference, Birmingham.

Colley, R. & Abraham, N. (17th-19th June 2021). Digital Applied Theatre Practice for Patients Living with Dementia [Paper presentation]. Storytelling for Health - Arts in Health Wales, Swansea.

James, J. & Abraham, N. (21st-22nd May 2021). Making Hospitals Better: Digital Applied Theatre Practice in acute hospital contexts for patients living with dementia in the midst of a pandemic [Paper presentation]. Drama in Education Conference, Singapore.

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Abraham, N. (4th February 2021). Knowledge Conversations: The Power of Collaborative Action [Panelist]. National Centre for Academic and Cultural Exchange, Online.

Abraham, N. (29th January 2021). Leadership Think Factory [Panelist]. The Culture Capital Exchange, Online.

Abraham, N., & Ruddock, V. (13th February 2021). Creating Joy in Hospitals in the midst of a Global Pandemic [Talk]. TEDx talk, Online.

Gilby, L., & Abraham, N. (10th-12th November 2020). Intergenerational Adventures: Arts practice designed to create connections [Paper presentation]. Dementia Congress, Online. 112 attendees.

Ruddock, V. (Speaker), James, J. (Speaker), Abraham, N. (Speaker), & Wilson, E. (Host) (2020). Applied Theatre and Dementia [Audio podcast]. TCCE Lunchtime Social, The Culture Capital Exchange. https://soundcloud.com/user-8343544415/tcce-lunchtime-social-applied-theatre-and-dementia. 76 attendees.

Public engagement activities

- Community Centre 'Community Lifelines' pilot interactive digital outreach project, (7th – 13th February 2023), with 7 community groups across age groups culminating in a festival celebrating personhood and community identity (Northern Ireland Outreach Project).
- Community Centre 'Dear Santa', (13th – 17th November 2022) Intergenerational/Life in Lyrics hybrid project, and VR training knowledge exchange outreach event, with 200 members of the community from age 2 – 103yrs (Northern Ireland Outreach Project).
- Community Outreach Project: Brighton training sessions in arts and health 15th October, 29th November 2022.
- Outreach Care Home Project, 10th June, 24th June 2022, 15 residents took part in this knowledge exchange musical project.
- CR38TUR3 methodology workshops x 21 sessions (including both in person and online iterations) for Medicine for the Elderly staff across Imperial from HCAs to Matron Level incl. one F1 doctor, 130 people have taken part).
- Delirium Training workshop: Delirium scenario workshops x 5 sessions complete by end of project extension period 28th Feb 2023, 56 people took part.
- Student Knowledge Exchange Public Events Spring Term Festival Week (22nd – 26th March 2021). This week included 15 public engagement events showcasing workshop demonstrations, facilitation training and digital artefacts with the residents of One Housing/schools. In total, 231 tickets were sold for the events in this festival. A playlist with video recordings of each of these events can be found here: https://www.youtube.com/ playlist?list=PLOqC3lP20MejxnXqNBzJmulqrSZvfTjLe.
- Student Knowledge Exchange Public Events Summer Term Festival Week (21st – 28th June 2021). This week included 14 public engagement events, including facilitation training, creative showcases, workshop demonstrations and film premieres. In total, 87 tickets were sold for the events in this festival.
- 'Angel of Love' An Auchi Film Screening (16th December 2020). Sixty-nine tickets were sold for this public engagement event. A video recording of this event can be found here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HZDXP3ZCjgg Outreach Care Home Project, 10th June, 24th June 2022, 15 residents took part in this knowledge exchange musical project.

Awards and recognition

- Dr Nicola Abraham, Teaching Excellence Award - Guardian University Awards 2020. Project title: Incorporating Augmented and Virtual Realities into Teaching Practices.
- Dr Nicola Abraham, Imperial College Healthcare NHS Trust and Royal Central School of Speech and Drama, Top 100 National Lifesaver awards – Universities UK's MadeAtUni Campaign, 2020.
- James Clarke, Drama Inspiration Award – Music and Drama Education Awards 2022.
- Dr Nicola Abraham, Finalist for Drama Inspiration Award – Music and Drama Education Awards 2022.
- Rachel Hudspith, Finalist for Drama Inspiration Award – Music and Drama Education Awards 2022.
- Intergen-Auchi Street Fusion Project, Finalist for Outstanding Drama Initiative Award – Music and Drama Education Awards 2022.
- Auchi/Intergen: Intergenerational Project with Patients on Auchi Ward. Impact and Partnership Silver Award: Pearson Education Awards 2022.
- Innovating Knowledge Exchange Intergenerational Project with Central and Imperial College Healthcare NHS Trust. Finalist for Community Engagement Initiative of the Year: TES Schools Awards 2022.

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