Rolling out a RADIQL model for Dementia Care

What is capturing the attention of commissioners faced with the challenge of delivering far-reaching and sustained change on declining budgets? Increasingly, it is innovative arts-based approaches which have evidence of impact and are able to cut it where alternative approaches have failed. One area where the evidence base of arts interventions has grown strongly is in the field of dementia care.

One of the trailblazers is Age Exchange’s RADIQL programme, which supports dementia patients through arts-based reminiscence activity (RADIQL stands for Reminiscence Arts and Dementia Impact on Quality of Life). It uses a variety of creative art forms and memory that connect people to their present. Examples include music, drama and dance, handling objects, smell and touch. Things as evocative for all of us as the scent of perfume on your mother’s clothes.

But more than warm words and anecdotes from grateful participants and carers, Age Exchange has scaled up its pilot, and commissioned independent evaluation including a cost-effective analysis which has demonstrated a positive impact and replicability of the methodology.

Delivered across 12 care homes and community settings in Southwark and Lambeth, it is a collaboration between Age Exchange, Alzheimer’s Lambeth & Southwark, Guy’s and St Thomas’ NHS Foundation Trust, and South London and Maudsley NHS Foundation Trust, funded by Guy’s and St Thomas’ Charity.

Independent researchers from Royal Holloway, University of London and Simetrica found measurable increases in wellbeing and quality of life in people diagnosed with dementia. Following a weekly one hour intervention across twenty four weeks, participants’ levels of wellbeing (ME - mood & engagement) were statistically significant (p= .001), improving by 42%, and ‘positive behaviour’ by 25%.

On this basis, the cost to a care provider of improving ME by 15.3% through using Age Exchange is £1369 per person. However, as RADIQL is able to show an improvement of 42%, the additional cost implication to gain the 42% would not be transferred to a care provider. Age Exchange’s approach involved significant initial investment in staff training, meaning that successive programmes can be run at lower cost. Care homes would not need to spend
this much again, as their staff would be trained in the method. There would be a smaller costing attached to a 2-day re-fresher course.

While data is not easily available for costs of alternative interventions which can deliver the same outcomes, it is easy to understand the savings made in unnecessary interventions further down the line – such as reduced hospital admissions from urinary infections, as a result of people eating and drinking better.

Armed with this evaluation and cost-effectiveness analysis, Age Exchange has reached a critical milestone with the roll-out of a workforce training programme for the social care workforce, art practitioners and for care homes themselves.

Age Exchange is currently developing partnerships to roll-out the training, as well as the RADIQL model itself, with local authorities and care home providers. Belinda Sosinowicz reflects how it is negotiating this critical juncture for the programme:

"It's been a real challenge, as a new kid on the block in commissioning, to navigate through this world, and sort out those who think in a more traditional procurement model, from the more innovative commissioners who are certainly interested in testing new models and helping new providers to meet their criteria.

"We know that without our evaluation we wouldn't even get through the security gate with most commissioners. We understood that you have to give commissioners what they need to make the case, which most small arts-based groups can't manage."

As Belinda concludes, "We're really excited to be able to talk to commissioners on the same terms as traditional providers, backing up with hard evidence what we've instinctively known, that arts-based interventions can offer a more effective alternative to mainstream activities that are designed to improve wellbeing for older people, and one which is cost effective.”

"We're now really keen to help commissioners make the case and bring the benefits to people with dementia and their carers."

Hopefully sceptical commissioners will see the evidence from similar projects across the sector as game-changing for the arts sectors’ contribution to their own objectives.

Find out more about RADIQL on the Age Exchange website.