

# FACILITATORS' GUIDE

**Art Diamonds aims to help all elders throughout Gateshead explore and share their creativity.**

## WHO IS THIS GUIDE FOR?

This short guide has been written by 64 Million Artists and is designed for library staff running creative sessions in Gateshead's libraries as part of the Art Diamonds project throughout 2019. As well as information about the project, its values and aims, it contains tips for facilitating a simple creative session in a library based on the weekly challenges being sent to libraries throughout the year.

You can find the challenges and other resources here:  
<http://dothinkshare.com/gateshead-libraries-art-diamonds/>

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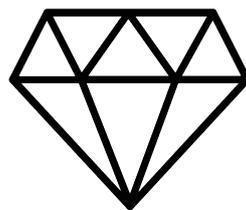


## WHAT IS ART DIAMONDS?

Art Diamonds is a three year project (2019-2021) running across Gateshead libraries with the aim of engaging elders past retirement age in creative and cultural activities. As well as simple creative sessions taking place in libraries throughout 2019, local artists will be running workshops and leading trips to cultural venues and events. Art Diamonds has been funded by The Baring Foundation, Arts Council England and Gateshead Council and is a collaboration between Gateshead Libraries, Gateshead Older People's Assembly and 64 Million Artists.

## CREATIVITY, WELLBEING & LATER LIFE

A growing body of research shows that taking part in creative and cultural activities is good for our mental health and wellbeing. And when it takes place in group settings, sharing and reflection can help us to feel connected, listened to and valued. In today's busy world, taking time to get in touch with our innate creativity puts us back in touch with our values and sense of self. Many older people find themselves socially isolated in later life - as well as digitally excluded. Research suggests that taking part in group activities, especially creative ones, improves their sense of belonging and self worth, as well as their mental health and overall wellbeing.



## VALUES & OUTCOMES

In one of our December 2018 workshops with library staff and artists, we explored what we wanted the **values** and **outcomes** to be for the Art Diamonds project. There was lots of inspiring discussion about our hopes for Gateshead communities over the next three years. The following themes emerged...maybe you can think of others?

## **I. ACCESSIBLE**

Art Diamonds is for everyone. All our challenges are designed to be as accessible as possible for people with a range of abilities. People with mobility issues or physical or mental health challenges should have equal access to the activities. How will we reach those who are particulated isolated in Gateshead and would really benefit from creativity, connection and sharing?

## **2. WELCOMING**

We'll greet everyone with a warm smile and a friendly, positive attitude. We want all participants to feel included and able to 'have a go' - including library staff! Some us feel vulnerable and a bit intimidated by the thought of being creative or 'arty'. We'll let people know they're in a safe space to enjoy themselves, have fun and make new friends. There might even be tea and cake!

## **3. FUN**

Arts Diamonds is about having a go, not being perfect and making mistakes. We'll create a non-judgmental space where everyone's contribution, no matter how small, is recognised and appreciated. The challenges invite people to think about their lives in novel ways and give them fresh perspectives. They're also about letting go and having fun!

## **4. DIVERSE**

We respect the full cultural diversity of elders throughout Gateshead and encourage the complete spectrum of individuals and communities to get involved. How will we make sure that our communications reach all communities, not just the ones with the most privilege or cultural capital?

## **5. COLLABORATIVE**

Collaboration is embedded at the heart of the Arts Diamonds project. Community elders have been involved in workshops to create the challenges and all the processes (including these notes) have involved collaborative ideas generation. Relationships and social connections are at the heart of Art Diamonds.

## **We hope that...**

- ... individuals feel reconnected to their creativity and feel more creatively confident
- ... libraries are used more and that creativity flourishes in them
- ... self-sustaining groups continue to engage in creative activities
- ... participants' wellbeing and mental health is improved
- ... library staff feel involved and creatively energised
- ... Art Diamonds is held up as a beacon of creative ageing at a national level
- ... Art Diamonds engages people in other cultural offers throughout Gateshead
- ... more men are engaging in creative activities
- ... Art Diamonds grows, spreads and flourishes beyond Gateshead libraries
- ... the model can be replicated with other communities
- ... intergenerational relationships are nurtured
- ... diverse communities connect and collaborate more
- ... people explore their local places and activities
- ... Gateshead libraries become hubs of creativity for all

## **TOP TIPS FOR FACILITATING A CREATIVE SESSION**

At 64 Million Artists we love facilitating creative sessions throughout the UK. Here are our top tips to help you run your own creative challenge sessions in libraries. Whether you're leading a group of two or twenty people, these principles apply...

### **BE CLEAR ABOUT THE BOUNDARIES OF THE SESSION**

Creativity flourishes with freedom but also needs structure. Be clear about the start and end times of your session and try to stick to them. People like to know if there will be a loo break and what time they will finish. They are far more likely to open up, take risks and explore their thoughts and feelings if they know long a particular task will take. Be flexible to accommodate late comers, but also respect the time of those who have turned up promptly. Some people might have to leave early. Find out at the start what time people are intending to leave so that it doesn't come as a surprise or disappointment.

**Do say:** "We're going to spend the next hour and a half together exploring our creativity with this week's challenge. We'll aim to finish at 11.30am."

**Avoid:** starting without saying whether or not you're going to have a short break or what time you're planning to finish

## VALUE EVERYONE'S CONTRIBUTION

As facilitators our job is to create an atmosphere in which everyone has a voice - not just the most vocal. Some of us are quieter than others or more shy in groups, others can't wait to share their opinions on every topic! Let all voices be heard and encourage everyone to participate. It's not necessarily plain sailing - use your judgement. Brian may not want to talk or share a lot... that's fine. Our aim, whenever we run workshops, is to communicate that everyone's voice is valued and appreciated. Doris might open up once she's given a gentle prompt.

**Do say:** "Sally, would you like to share what you came up with?"

**Do:** provide sticky name badges so it's easy to remember everyone's name

**Avoid:** letting one or two voices dominate, or saying "Come on! Don't be shy!"

## BE FRIENDLY, WARM AND POSITIVE

People feel vulnerable being creative because they don't want to look silly or be judged - particularly elders. Many of us have age-old niggles about not being perfect or good enough. The facilitator has an important role therefore in creating a safe space. By being friendly, warm and positive you create an atmosphere in which people feel they can trust, take a risk and have a go without making a fool of themselves. Don't underestimate how much power you have as a facilitator. The rest of the group will take your lead as an example of how to be and interact.

**Do say:** "I love the detail you've put into that."

**Avoid:** any statements that are critical, discouraging or patronising

## MODEL 'HAVING AND GO' AND 'NOT BEING PERFECT'

One of the best things you can do, when running a creative session, is to have a go yourself! By modeling the activity (and not being perfect) you give others permission to take a risk and not worry about 'getting it right'. Take part in the activity yourself or, if you're feeling really brave, do one in advance as an example. It doesn't have to be good - quite the opposite in fact. Remember, as a facilitator, you are also a participant.

**Do say:** "I love the detail you've put into that."

**Avoid:** any statements that are critical, discouraging or patronising

## BE AWARE OF ABILITIES AND SPECIAL NEEDS

We all have different skills, abilities and challenges. Keep open-minded about people's comfort levels around reading, writing and drawing, for example. Harry might not be able to read and feel embarrassed about saying so. And we shouldn't assume that everyone loves story telling, reminiscence or drawing. Allow people to respond to the challenge in their own unique way and make it clear that however they respond is fine.

Many elders struggle with cognitive impairment and might be experiencing different degrees of dementia. It might take Sheila longer to complete a challenge because she experiences muddled thoughts, for instance. If Barbara doesn't immediately respond to a question, wait a few seconds before jumping in to rescue her. She might just need a bit more time.

**Do:** allow everyone to respond in their own way and in their own time

**Avoid:** assuming that everyone can read, write or even think clearly

## ENCOURAGE FEEDBACK AND REFLECTION

Our Do, Think, Share methodology is based on the idea that self reflection and the sharing of experiences can be a hugely beneficial, helping us to feel socially connected, acknowledged and worthwhile. You'll notice, for example, that all the challenges contain prompts for reflection and sharing. After you've allowed time for the activity, make sure you introduce the reflective part of the experience. People could turn to the person next to them and spend five minutes discussing what they came up with - or, if the group's small, you could do this all together.

Gently encourage everyone to take part and share with the wider group whatever they feel comfortable with. Some participants might need gentle prompts to open up, others will need no permission to talk! In our experience, the sharing and discussion is just as rich and rewarding as the activity itself. People learn about each other, make connections and develop relationships.

**Do:** allow everyone to respond in their own way and in their own time

**Avoid:** assuming that everyone can read, write or even think clearly

## COLLECT AND SHARE PEOPLE'S WORK AND EXPERIENCES

Throughout the year, we're encouraging libraries to collect and showcase participants' work in a scrapbook in each library so that we have a record of how people were impacted by Art Diamonds. As well as a record of libraries' creativity, we hope these scrapbooks inspire elders visiting the library to have a go at the challenges themselves. We hope that libraries will feel proud of their participants' work and want to have some of it on display to inspire others. We also encourage library staff to keep a notebook to record any observations about how the activities are impacting individuals.

Feel free to share images of work, quotes, reflections or useful resources in the WhatsApp group we've set up for you: '**ArtDiamonds Library Staff**' and we'll share this work on Instagram! (**@gatesheadartdiamonds**). Please get permission from participants before you take pictures of their work, or take pictures of participants themselves. If you want more information about evaluation, the WhatsApp group, or information about evaluation, please contact Karolynne Hart and Jen Douglas and who will be happy to help.

## **ELDERS, HEALTH & DEMENTIA**

We all struggle with different moods and some of us have particular mental health challenges. As at any age, older people can experience loneliness, low mood and anxiety. This might present as difficulties with motor-skills, co-ordination or speech. Similarly with cognitive abilities. Many older people experience different levels of dementia which might present as slowness, confusion or emotions such as fear or anger. Be open to the idea that people who appear lucid or competent on the surface might be experiencing challenges underneath. They might be sensitive about this or feel some shame around their impairments and be resistant to being 'helped'. It's important that we don't too hung up on this - be sensitive, trust your judgment and meet people where they're at. Communicate to them that you appreciate their presence and you won't go wrong.

If you know or suspect that one or some of your participants have dementia, make sure you give them time and space to complete the activities and respond to questions. By waiting ten seconds for an answer before jumping in to 'rescue' them you might find that they are able to contribute something valuable to the group. Also, if you are using printed materials from the internet, for example, make sure they are printed large enough to legible and accessible to all.

## SIGNPOSTING, SAFEGUARDING & RESOURCES

It's important to remember that Art Diamonds is not an arts therapy project and whilst we have a responsibility for participants' safety and general wellbeing, we are not responsible for their physical or mental health. If you have any concerns about a particular individual's physical or mental health, speak to your colleagues to get a collective view on how best to proceed. Do not keep concerns to yourself - several heads are better than one. Your library will have information about Gateshead council services.

The best we can do is signpost participants or their carers to other sources of support - not take it upon ourselves. Remember that your wellbeing is just as important as anyone else's.

If you find yourself affected by any of the issues or experiences raised in the course of the project, please contact Chris Rolls, Karolynne Hart or Jen Douglas.

If you have any specific queries around participants' mental health, please feel free to contact Chris Rolls at [chris@64millionartists.com](mailto:chris@64millionartists.com) / 07950 299 329. We have contacts with clinical psychologists and can give you information about relevant resources or agencies.

## AND FINALLY...

...if you have any questions about this guide, thoughts or ideas that could be helpful to share, please contact Chris Rolls at [chris@64millionartists.com](mailto:chris@64millionartists.com)

**Happy creating!**

